

**A
GLORIOUS
CHURCH**

G.W. North

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The text

This edition is based on the texts of Mr North's books which first appeared on the website of Lanark Christian Fellowship many years ago.

We have exercised as much care as possible in the conversion into this format, but if you are aware of any errors, could you please let us know.

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Chapter 1 — LAYING A SURE FOUNDATION

The first direct references to the Church in the New Testament were made by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. There are two of these and both of them occur in a section of Matthew's Gospel commencing at 16:13 and concluding at 18:35. This section records statements made by the Lord in certain parts of Palestine (now called Israel) which either by name or by association were connected with gentiles. In the first case the connection is obvious — Caesarea Philippi — the name of a foreign king; in the second case it is by association — Galilee: locally it was known as 'Galilee of the gentiles' (4:15). The Lord's remarks were well-considered and pointedly made. He was speaking in a country named after a Roman king and associated with gentile people.

Whenever He spoke, the Lord's statements were always carefully calculated and precisely worded; invariably throughout His life He planned and moved toward the time and place when and where He would release His information. His remarks were always perfectly timed and, although in Jewish territory and speaking to a Jewish audience, He purposely broached the idea of the Church there, so that it should be received and understood in a gentile context. This was quite deliberately done and, of itself, was a firm introduction to the truth later stated clearly by Paul and expounded with such great ability in 1 Corinthians 10:32.

Whom Say Ye that I am?

Beside this territorial suggestiveness, there were other reasons why Jesus did not reveal His intentions about the Church until then; chief among them was His relationship to

His Father and His subjection to His will. Before disclosing His purpose the Lord awaited a prior move from His Father, viz. the revelation of His Sonship. According to divine plan it was agreed that Jesus would not begin to speak of His Church until God first released to men the secret of Jesus. He knew that, in the nature of things, before men could be built into the Church they must believe and declare Him to be the Christ. Because of its importance the occasion for the first declaration of this was chosen very carefully; it was to be in connection with the great miracle of feeding the multitudes.

That day, under the apostles' direction, the grateful thousands sat down to their meal on the shores of Galilee and Jesus fed them with God's abundance from five loaves and two fishes. As may be expected they ate and

speculated about the wonderful person who fed them: 'He is Elijah' said one; 'Jeremiah' said another; 'I think it's John Baptist' someone said; 'well one of the prophets' guessed someone else. They were all wrong of course; not one of them knew. But, mistaken though they all were, their opinions mattered very much to the Lord, and a little later He asked the apostles what they had overheard about Him. He listened with care to their answers and went on to ask what they themselves thought about Him; 'whom say ye that I am?' He said. Peter answered, 'Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God.'

That was the sign Jesus was waiting for: He knew then that the time had come for Him to make His first public statement concerning the Church. Peter had received the vital revelation from the Father and had

declared it; now He could disclose His purpose, it was the heaven-sent opportunity to open to His apostles the secret of His intentions. 'Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in heaven; and I say also unto thee that thou art Peter. And upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven'. In the ears of the twelve, accustomed as they were to hearing marvellous sayings, it must have been an astonishing conversation. These men were Jews, members of the nation of Israel, who already believed themselves to be Jehovah's Church; they had most certainly not anticipated this. They had never expected to hear Jesus say He would build a Church of His own; was He really Jehovah come in

flesh to build His Church as from earth? They did not know and could not guess how soon they were to be acquainted with all the facts now so well-known to everyone, and when later He revealed them they found them unacceptable and distasteful indeed.

In this incident one of the simple secrets of Jesus' great success in the ministry is laid bare. Authority to bequeath to a man the keys of the kingdom of heaven is a great privilege; it is also a great responsibility which none of us would wish to bear. Jesus had it laid on Him though, and we may well ask how He could sustain such tremendous burdens and at the same time discharge His duties with such unfailing strength and unerring accuracy. A clue to the answer lies before us here; this conversation perfectly illustrates the way He did it. He had referred to it previously in the temple when He said,

'the Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father do, for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise'. The Lord saw that the Father had given Peter the key to new birth and inclusion into the Church, namely the revelation that Jesus is 'the Christ the Son of the living God', therefore, without hesitation, He followed His Father's example. Jesus' reasoning was simple; if His Father could give Peter the most important of all keys, the man could certainly be entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven also. The keys Jesus gave are, by comparison, of far less importance than the key revelation given to Peter by the Father, so without hesitation He immediately promised Peter the keys. At the same time He incorporated into the promise a principle He had stated earlier, viz. 'to him that hath more shall be

given'. Peter had been given the revelation, he should now be given the keys. He was absolutely certain the time had come for the promise to be made; His Father had clearly shown Him His will and had opened the way. By stating His intention to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter the Lord revealed His authority in the Church. He also administered a rebuke to the spirit of pharisaism affecting the scribes and lawyers of Israel, and attempted to correct their attitude toward Him and His kingdom and people. The spiritual and religious leaders of the people had conspired to obstruct the purposes of God among men. From the very beginning these men had consistently refused to enter the kingdom of heaven; what was worse, they had taken from others the key of knowledge; both by example and

teaching they had hindered and prevented others from entering the kingdom.

Against all the evidence, these men refused to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and had conspired to withhold from others the means of obtaining this knowledge, viz. the correct interpretation of the scriptures. They did not mind if people believed Jesus to be one of the old-time prophets come back again; they may even have fostered the idea, for it suited their purpose. One of the things they sneeringly said was 'these people that know not the law are cursed'; such was their callousness and hypocrisy. They preferred the multitudes to believe Jesus was some kind of great man sent by God, possibly a reincarnation of some prophet or leader from the past; it was safer that way, but it was and is completely untrue. The danger

lies in the subtlety of the error; it is an implied lie and to hold such views precludes the possibility of inclusion in the Church.

Jesus is not a reincarnation of anybody. He is original and unique God Almighty, the only rock on which the Church can be built.

Thou Art the Christ

To his everlasting credit this revelation and grace given to Peter was openly declared by him with all his heart. He probably did not know then that in confessing that Jesus is the Christ he was fulfilling another of God's conditions for salvation, but he was. How graciously the Lord drew His disciple on to make the vital confession so necessary to his salvation. So fundamental is this principle that Paul puts it plainly to the Romans: 'if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead thou shalt be

saved'. Just when Peter had first received the revelation we are not told; it may have been during Jesus' amazing discourse upon the bread of God and eternal life following the miracle. Whenever it was, Peter's words must have had a profound effect upon everybody who heard them then: 'Lord thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. He said it without hesitation; it was breathtakingly bold.

This was Peter's excellence above all his companions; John discloses that they all believed it, but only Peter said so.

Apparently they had all discussed it between themselves and had come to the correct conclusion, but only Peter had the courage to confess it to Jesus — that was very important. They all had to learn that Jesus never commits Himself upon general

conclusions but only upon personal convictions and direct revelation. All worthwhile opinions are the fruit of deep and prolonged thought. Mature conclusions carefully reached, based on firsthand observations, may be very correct, but correct though these may be, they are not good enough for God. Nothing in man which is of man can ever be the ground on which the Church of Jesus Christ is built, it is not the rock; God can only build on Himself and His own word. Peter was so blessed because he made everything so personal; he had God's word in him revealing the Christ to him personally. He had progressively believed the successive signs and sayings of Jesus to the point of inward conviction and confession that was open to everybody. There was nothing exclusive about it, and now God had revealed to him the secret he

needed to know. It was indeed a most wonderful thing.

We who are now so familiar with the story can scarcely comprehend the almost unimaginable immensity of Peter's confession. It was an entirely new revelation; throughout the world's history no-one else had ever said it of another.

Patriarchs, prophets, priests, kings, judges, all of them saviours to some degree, had been recognized, believed in, accepted and proclaimed, but not one had been confessed to be 'Christ the Son of God'. Conclusions, observations, opinions, convictions, attestations had been made to, or stated about, thousands of eminent people, but to none had it been said, 'Thou art the Son of God'. When Peter said it to Jesus it was the first time it had ever been confessed to any man, and it was true.

In translation Simon Peter's own name could be correctly rendered 'little listening stone'; it was certainly true of him then. He had heard something from God and by virtue of it he knew Jesus was the Christ the Son of God. Shortly he was to have this confirmed to him in a totally unexpected way, but he did not yet know that; he was to see this Jesus transfigured in glory on a mountain-top of further revelation. His conclusions were confirmed to him by the revelation, and the confession of that revelation was confirmed by the vision; what he received on the plain by the sea was sealed to him on the mountain-top by a glimpse into eternity. These are the right ways of the Lord. Man is a very little thing. He must believe what God vouchsafes every man to see and hear, or he will never receive revelation from Him. Like

Peter every man must become a little listening-stone.

The name Peter is a translation of 'petros', which is the masculine gender of its companion feminine Greek word 'petra' — rock. When the Lord said, 'thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church', it was as if He was marrying together two distinct revelations: the one confessed by Peter was as the petros — a small stone — counterpart to the one Jesus Himself was — petra — the Rock. Masculine and feminine are the two forms of Man and as Paul says 'neither is one without the other'; nevertheless they must not be confused. Jesus is the great eternal Rock of ages and upon Himself alone He builds His Church and on no other — the Church is His. The revelation Christ had was of the Church as John reveals, and every man must see that,

by His grace, the Church becomes solid rock with Him when built upon Him. Until then everybody is like Peter, a little stone who should listen to Him. Christ then, and not Peter, is the Rock. Christ is not only the foundation of the Church, He is the Founder and Builder of it as well. He builds on to Himself all those who, like Peter, receive the vital revelation of Him as the Christ; only thus can He 'marry' that heart to Himself to become one with Him in His Church.

He is the revealed Son of God and although we do not all have the identical experience as Peter, every man's heart becomes a small stone or diminutive rock and can be built on the Rock into His Church. The necessity of this is so very important to each one of us that we must all firmly grasp and understand the truth. The revelation stated by Peter was not given to him alone — they all received it.

Likewise Jesus' response to the confession was not spoken to Peter in secret; they all heard it. By his confession Peter won the distinction of first mention, but the honour of being a key man was not given to him exclusively, it was later given to each of the others also. Perhaps Thomas was the last of them to receive it, but it had to be: 'My Lord and my God', he at last gasped out in utter contrition and shame. Everyone wishing to be a member of Christ's Church must, as Peter, be a humble listener, not an incredulous Thomas, a proud doubter. It must not only come to the heart from God alone that Jesus is the Son of God, it must come from the heart.

In close context with His statement about the Church to Peter and them all, Jesus also commanded His disciples not to tell anyone He was the Christ. At first glance this may

seem most surprising, but it was very necessary. Be they ever so sincere, Jesus Christ cannot build anyone into His Church just because he or she repeats knowledge gained from another. Convincement of mind and conviction of spirit sufficient for salvation are not gained from man.

'Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Christ is born of God', he says. Confession can only be of certain knowledge, not received information, though that may be necessary at some point. The Father must draw, the Son must call and the Spirit must convince; then, and only then, can men confess Christ with certainty. Equally with Peter, all men must become diminutive rocks or stones; only this kind of person is acceptable to God and suitable material for Christ to build into His Church.

Upon THIS Rock

It is a great pity that for the better part of a millennium the Church has been divided on an issue arising from this truth, especially as it may perhaps have a simpler explanation than is generally thought. Recently, while travelling in a car with a friend and listening to a cassette, I became a little mystified at the congregation's reactions to the speaker's remarks. The preacher was a highly respected, greatly loved, elderly man of God, who had been used over the years to the salvation of many souls. During the course of his ministry on this occasion the preacher recounted an anecdote; it was about a conversation he had with a man who was explaining how he had been successful in business. The words of the rich man went something like this: 'I did well on this line, then I got on to that line and made

good, then I got on another line and did well, now I'm on this line'. The preacher paused slightly and went on to give us his response to his friend's success story. 'I'm on this line', he said. At this point, to my astonishment, it seemed the whole congregation burst out into hearty laughter. Seeing no reason for this, I said to my companion 'why did they laugh?' With a smile he explained, 'when he (the preacher) said 'I'm on this line' he raised his arm and pointed skyward'. At once all was clear, the gesture, unseen by me, explained it all. The simplicity of it was striking, to those who observed it.

Perhaps something like this happened also those years ago when Jesus spoke to Peter in the presence of His disciples. If we allow the possibility that Jesus pointed to Himself when saying, 'and upon this Rock I will build

my Church', all difficulties concerning His words immediately disappear. Be that as it may, whatever the controversy over the interpretation of Jesus' words and sad as it is that such has arisen, there can be no doubt that all the elaborate claims of Peter's supremacy made by certain people over the centuries are textually unfounded. Beside that, it is also sure he never made any such claims or sought that kind of spurious elevation above his fellow-apostles himself. Further still, very noticeably not one of his peers ever spoke of him as their superior, so perhaps it ought to be assumed by all that they did not do so because they knew it was not true.

Paul says of him that together with James and John, Peter seemed to be a pillar of the church at Jerusalem. Far from calling him the rock, he does not even say he was the pillar.

Surely to be a pillar among many more is high enough commendation for any man; why should men wish to promote Peter above his fellows against his will? It may be of some significance that Paul did not feel obligated to place him first among the three eminent men he visited at Jerusalem.

Apparently Peter neither personally sought, nor was he openly or tacitly given, prior recognition of any sort by any of his contemporaries. Evidently he was just one among many brethren — no greater and no less than any of the others. Seeing that, beyond dispute, this scripture correctly read and interpreted allows no excuse for unwarrantable elevation of Peter above his fellows in the Church, we must look elsewhere for the cause of the error.

The Keys of the Kingdom

It may be that the misunderstanding has arisen because Jesus promised and ultimately gave to Peter, and to no-one else, the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This was indeed a great privilege of a special nature. For reasons undisclosed, except those already discussed, Peter was first selected and later used by the Lord to unlock the kingdom of heaven to men. Commencing with Pentecost, Luke records that upon every occasion when God poured out the Spirit Peter was present, filling an important role in the operation. He was the key-man in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and Caesarea, though the part he played in the Judean outpouring is not clearly defined. Possibly no special mention is made of him in this connection because Jerusalem is in Judea and the original outpouring which took place there continued and spread

unbrokenly over the whole area, as was to be expected.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven were specially given to unlock the doors of that kingdom to the various ethnic groups comprehended in the Lord's statement in Acts 1:8 — Jews, Samaritans, gentiles. There are no other ethnic groups recognized by God in relation to His kingdom on earth. God has a worldwide plan for His Church. In it He intends to include people from all nations upon earth: 'the uttermost part of earth', is a comprehensive phrase embracing all the different nations of the gentile world. Paul's testimony to this is sufficient evidence of Peter's faithfulness to the commission he received: 'God hath opened the door of faith to the gentiles'; what a compliment to his fellow-apostle. Having been the earthly instrument through whom God poured out

the Spirit to these peoples Peter's main task was completed, and by the will of God he was almost immediately removed from scriptural view. God raised up another to take the leading role under Christ in the spread of the Church throughout the world and Peter's name and activities were superseded by Paul's upon the pages of the Acts of the Apostles. He was not the original key-man — Peter was chosen for that — but Paul was a key-man also, as his ministry proved, and he was instrumental in founding many churches throughout the gentile world — far more than Peter.

Whatever of spiritual meaning and intent was in Christ's gift, it is certain Peter was not the foundation rock of the Church. Prior to the outpouring and gift of the Holy Ghost to the one hundred and twenty, he was as devoid of life as all men; nothing of eternal

worth could have been built upon him; he was a complete failure. Only when and after he was built into Christ could he function solidly in the kingdom. This is all the more emphasized by the fact that the original outpouring and gift was not through him; the Lord, not he, was the key-man to that. The distribution of the keys was not done without forethought and discrimination on the Lord's part. He did not give to Peter, or to any man, the keys of hell and death; He kept those: no mere man is able to handle or use those. The Lord had to die and rise again and ascend to the throne (or to retain the figure He had to use His keys) before any could be given to Peter.

The Lord's was the primary and unique role; Peter's position and function was quite secondary to and dependent upon it; he could only assume his role as key-man in the

kingdom following the baptism in the Spirit, which grace founded him on the spiritual Rock. Perhaps it is Peter's own words that put the matter beyond controversy though: first he says, 'the Lord is gracious, to whom coming as unto a living stone ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house', and then he goes on to quote God as saying 'I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious'. Peter is saying that Jesus Christ is the chief stone, not himself. He is speaking of Him and us, not himself and us; Jesus is the chief cornerstone, not the apostle. Some may disallow this (unfortunately those that do so are not all Jews) as Peter says, but Peter did not; he not only allowed it, but proclaimed it and was built upon it in precisely the same way as everybody else.

I Will Build My Church

Jesus left none of His apostles in any doubt as to who was going to build His Church — 'I will build my Church', He said. So saying, He made clear once and for all that it is quite impossible to join the Church. No man can make himself, or any other, a member of Christ's Church; the Lord alone can do that. God has elected no man, framed no laws, instituted no ordinances, formulated no doctrines, made no promises or authorized any person or persons at any time to make a fellow human being a Church member. Jesus says, 'I build my Church', it is His and He is the builder; everything to do with the Church is His personal concern and ministry; it is a sovereign creation of God. As is said in another connection, 'we are His workmanship'. It is strikingly noticeable that Jesus did not say He was already building the Church; He was not. His statement was as

much a promise of future activity as an avowal of intention; Church-building was to be His future work following His conquest of death and hell. Jesus did not attempt to build one person into His Church while He was yet on the earth; knowing the impossibility of it, He did not attempt to do so. The Lord did not make one incorrect statement or idle promise to anyone about anything, certainly not about the Church. For this reason, to His promise that day He added the words, 'and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'.

It may have seemed strange that He linked Church-building with death and hell, but He did and by so doing gave His first followers and us the clue to His plan — IT WAS TO BE A RESURRECTION CHURCH. Christ Jesus did not suddenly become rock by becoming a man, He is and always has been the Rock of

Ages. In nature and desire, from all eternity, He had been ready for the work of Church-building, but at the time of speaking He knew that no-one else was ready to be built into it; even His specially selected and dearly-loved apostles were unfit as yet. No-one could be joined to Him and, with others, be formed into the Church except He Himself first died and rose again; not till then would He be able to do it. The Church could not be built at that time for two reasons: (1) no person was the right material; (2) He was not yet perfected.

If Jesus wanted to join men to Himself as rock upon Rock, He had to do something all-powerful to change men's substance and nature. He could call men to Himself, teach them, lead them on, empower them to serve Him, but He could not thereby build them onto Himself. Something much more

radical than that must be accomplished before He could commence building. He also knew that something radical must happen to Himself as well; He Himself was not yet either in the finished condition or the correct position to commence building. It was understood between Him and His Father from all eternity that both He Himself and all persons to be included in the Church must die and rise again. The Church is entirely spiritual; it is not built of the flesh and blood of men but of their spirits. Also it was decided that He should build it from heaven and in heaven: 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it', He said. They could never prevail against Him personally, nor could they thwart His immediate purposes in dying, and He would ensure that they would not prevail against His Church either.

Christ uncrucified, God though He be, could not build His Church, neither could men uncrucified be built into it — that is why within moments of making His pronouncement He announced His own forthcoming crucifixion. He knew that until the virtues of His Godhead and manhood could be made available to men, no man could ever be found worthy to be built on Him. He did not at that time tell them they must be crucified too, for they were not able to bear it. If He had told them they would not have understood Him and would have completely misinterpreted His saying — all too frequently in the past they had misunderstood Him. This was too important a matter to put at risk, so He withheld the vital information for the time being; He had plans to raise up Paul at a later date to explain the truth He dared not speak at that

time. It is not sufficient that men be graciously forgiven, fully pardoned and legally justified in the sight of God; they must be fully reconciled, totally regenerate and utterly sanctified also. The nature of man's life, the disposition of his spirit and the character of his soul must be radically changed. To be in the Church every person must be made entirely new. So to the cross and death He eventually went that He might become the crucified, resurrected Rock on which He would build His Church.

Christ Crucified

It requires little imagination to see that if this must be so for Him, it must needs be so for every other member of the Church as well. Being Himself 'quarried' from death, He would not dare use any other stone than that which is likewise hewn from that same quarry. Each one who would be a stone in

Christ's Church must be a crucified, resurrected person as He. This is the central demand as well as the basic provision of the gospel — we all must undergo spiritually what Jesus underwent physically. The carnal mind finds this very difficult to accept and for ever cries out with Nicodemus, 'how can these things be?' The answer could be stated in a word — 'By my Spirit' saith the Lord. In order to become living stones both Peter and Paul and every other member of the early Church had to experience the power of Christ's death and resurrection — and so must we. We cannot, with the apostles, be fellow-members of Christ's Church unless we can cry out with Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me'. The necessity of this is in nothing more plainly exhibited than in Peter himself. He had no sooner

heard Jesus speaking of His expected suffering and death and resurrection than he reacted against it, openly rebuking Him for the suggestion; 'be it far from thee Lord, this shall not be unto thee'.

Although he had been so greatly privileged, Peter reacted strongly against the idea of Jesus' crucifixion; it was obnoxious to him, wholly improper. He revolted against it utterly and would not accept it; moreover he did not believe Jesus ought to be thinking such things either. Who would want to kill such a lovely person as Jesus? Surely it was wrong to think that the elders and chief priests and scribes of the nation would want to kill Him. But Peter was utterly mistaken. His whole spiritual, mental and emotional attitude was wrong; he was being entirely human and was totally deceived.

Jesus' counter-reaction to His apostle's statement was swift and drastic, 'Get thee behind me satan; thou art an offence unto me; thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men'. He was tasting of Peter's spirit and nature and He did not like it; it must have been very bitter to His palate. Only a minute or so before He had promised this man the keys of the kingdom of heaven, blessing him and commending him above others because of his confession; now He is administering a rebuke in harshest terms as though he was His bitterest enemy.

It really was an amazing revelation of the Lord; it was so unexpected and unprecedented. To no-one else did He ever use such language; never in all His dealings with men did Jesus call another soul satan; Peter must have been shattered. He thought

he was saying the right thing; he certainly had not done anything sinful that he knew of; he had only shown concern for the Lord he loved, why then this angry retort from Jesus? What justification was there for that? To be blessed in one breath and cursed in the next must have shaken the very foundations of his being; to be called satan! Not even his worst enemies had ever called him that. He knew he was a sinner; he confessed that to Jesus in the boat on the lake the day he had made his final decision to follow Him. But satan? Was he really satan? He had never pretended to be a saint, but this!

In common with all men Peter had to learn the difference between sinfulness and evil. Peter was the representation of evil to the Lord that day. As a person Peter was delightful enough no doubt, but like us all,

by nature he was evil — how evil he did not know. The work the devil did by the serpent that tragic day in Eden was full of cunning and dreadfully thorough. So terrible was the immediate result and so swift its outworkings that soon every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts was only evil continually. Adam's first act of sin by disobedience in Eden developed directly into evil nature, and sin thereafter had become natural to every man. It is an evil state and Jesus had faced it long before leaving heaven. He later voiced it on earth, 'there is none good save one, that is God'. Peter's seemingly good sentiments arose from an evil heart; knowing not God he did not know eternal truth either. Consequently he was ignorant of what sin really is and from whence it came and how it could be

remedied; hence his attitude and remarks to Jesus.

The Lord's disclosure to the apostles that He was going to Jerusalem to die and rise again completely mystified them. He had expected it would; any one of them was capable of speaking to Him as Peter had done; they did not understand His mission even though they knew who He was. That was forgivable, but what Peter had said could have been a cause of stumbling to the Lord; it appealed so strongly to His humanity and the instinct of self-preservation. Beside that, it cut clean across all He had come to do. Humanly Jesus no more wanted the cross than Peter did, and far beyond the human suffering involved in the terrible death and what Peter thought or envisaged, Jesus shrank from all He would have to embrace and become there as God. Peter did not know how strongly he had

tempted the Lord; by his attitude and words the apostle had unwittingly assumed the role of the tempter. As surely as though He was in the wilderness Jesus heard satan speaking to Him again, for this is exactly the line the devil had adopted. At the beginning the devil had subtly appealed to His humanity and so had His apostle.

When finally Jesus went to Calvary He went there as God who became a man in order to take His manhood to the cross. Deity had to take Humanity to death and through it into resurrection before men could be built on Himself. His humanity must be shown to be the right kind of humanity before a Church could be built of it. Paul puts it nicely — 'Jesus Christ was made of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from

the dead'. Things that originate in men are unacceptable to God. Not one of man's ideas, contributions, sacrifices, gifts or talents are of any use; nothing of eternal life and everlasting durability can be built on the flesh; it is far too unstable. To speak about Christ and the cross from mere human feelings is to be an enemy of God and humanity and to side with satan; hence the Lord's sharp rebuke to Peter. It was delivered with such shattering force because he had been selected by God for such high honours.

The Spiritual Key

It is most important that we note the significance of the Lord's statement when promising Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, 'and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'. This was a stupendous honour; at that time it squarely placed privilege, responsibility and power

exclusively in Peter's hands. No-one else had openly confessed the revelation of Jesus' divine Sonship and to no-one else had the keys of the kingdom of heaven been promised. Peter's response to that election was utterly incompatible with the revelation and reward he had received. It may be that pride had risen in him; perhaps he thought that the honour given him bestowed upon him the right to be the Lord's counsellor also; we do not know, but if this was indeed so he was speedily rebuked for his presumption.

For any man to be in possession of such divine revelation and yet to speak merely humanly in the face of Jesus' testimony of death and resurrection must be satanic. It is an illuminating commentary on the extent to which the devil has penetrated human nature and permeated all our thinking.

Though all unknown to Peter, his suggestion was born of the devil's hope to frustrate God's eternal purposes. It was a deliberate attempt by satan to bring Jesus' incarnation and the whole plan of redemption to naught. The devil wanted to outwit Jesus, stop Him from storming the gates of hell — anything to prevent Him from building His Church. To make the attempt, the devil only needed man's inherent evil nature, perplexed mind and ready tongue. Despite his revelation, Peter neither had, nor could he then have had, any real knowledge of spiritual truth, for whatever his blessing, the mind of the man was still at enmity with God.

There was no apparent sin in Peter's remark; the evil lay hidden deep in that nature and disposition, inherent in us all, to which Jesus' words and attitude are foreign; its natural

response was to refute God's word and administer rebuke to the Christ of God. Is there anything in the whole Bible which more plainly reveals the need for the cross than this very incident? If anything was needed to convince all unbiased men of Peter's total unsuitability and complete inadequacy to be the foundation rock of the Church it is this. All unknown to him he was evil. He was not totally depraved or secretly rebellious or openly sinful — he was just evil, a man in possession of words of truth, trying to interpret them according to his own ideas, being manipulated by satan. Christ cannot build on satan, nor on his satanic disposition and evil nature in anyone else. In order to be in His Church all men must be born again.

We might have thought Peter's behaviour to be inexcusable and his words unpardonable,

warranting some kind of strong disciplinary action, such as loss of position or suspension of privilege. If the Lord had been merely human it might have happened too. He might have said, 'Peter, you've already proved totally unworthy of the honour; I rescind the promise; give those keys back to me at once; I've lost confidence in you'. But, praise His name, the Lord was not merely human. He was and is God, beside which, save in His own heart, He had not yet given the keys to Peter; they were only under promise. He had not made a mistake; He was under no illusions about His disciple; He knew the man and had chosen him with care.

Jesus had no intention that Peter should have and use the keys at that time for the following reasons: (1) they were too great for him to handle until he was made fit to

use them; (2) he did not know which locks they would fit or where to look for them; (3) the Church to which they granted entrance and membership was not yet being built; (4) the gates of death and hell had not yet been opened; (5) the key to those gates was not included among those promised to Peter, but was retained by Jesus; (6) he was as yet short of another key, without which those he had already been promised were incomplete; (7) the Church could not be built until the Holy Ghost was outpoured by Christ.

The Lord deliberately withheld the keys from Peter until His own most vital and more important moves were made, and at that time all these lay in the future. Peter's key function also lay in the future, beyond his Lord's death and resurrection and the commencement of His heavenly ministry,

but this was largely unknown to Peter. Jesus had made but little reference to it up until this time. He had spoken of it once to Nathaniel right at the beginning, but only vaguely, 'angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man', but they all found that rather obscure. He had also said, 'what and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?' But again they did not know what He meant. He was referring to the plan (known only to Him) of overall salvation which necessitated His return to heaven to present Himself to the Father that the Holy Ghost should come. Nothing He had said could be quickened into life in them except by the Spirit, so from all eternity it had been arranged that the Son should ascend up to His Father, leaving the field clear for the Holy Spirit to come and operate. Not until then could the promise to

Peter about the keys be quickened into life and power and be put into operation, for the keys are spiritual.

Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

Following these things and while still in the district of Galilee, in keeping with God's will, the Lord planned to give Peter, with James and John, an altogether new and vital revelation of Himself. This was to take the form of a vision of Himself transfigured in glory. In keeping with all He had taught them about His Church it was important they should see Him transformed before their eyes into a person more — so much more — than man. They had never seen and known Him as He truly was in all His glory in the kingdom of heaven; the flesh veiled so much of Him from their eyes. All the while He was on earth He lived spiritually in the heavenly state natural to Him and they needed to see

Him as He was in that state. Now the time having come for this revelation, within a very few days He took the chosen three up to a nearby height where they should see Him transfigured. It was a wonderful sight and for a while these earth-men passed into another world. It seemed as though heaven descended upon that mountain and Jesus was the centre of it, blazing with glory before their eyes. They were with Him in another kingdom. The Jesus they knew was a transfigured man; His face was the sun and His garments the light and the sun was brighter than they had ever seen and the light whiter than they had ever known; it was heavenly.

When Peter had said, 'Thou art the Son of God', he had not expected anything like this; what rich gain his confession had brought him; they watched transfixed. But it had only

just begun: to their astonishment two other figures appeared in the glory and approaching Jesus engaged in conversation with Him; they were discussing the exodus. It was Moses and Elijah, but they were not referring to the exodus with which the apostles were familiar, but to the exodus which Jesus should shortly accomplish at Jerusalem. For the first time they began to glimpse the dawning of another world, another kingdom, another day, and knew how really He spoke and what He meant when He talked about His kingdom. Right there before their eyes Jesus, the Son of man, was revealed in a heavenly element in His true state, and miraculously enough, though themselves not transfigured, His three earthly men were in it with Him. Often He had talked about the kingdom of heaven being at hand and now they were in it, but

they knew they were foreigners there; they were only on the fringes of it looking in.

Ordinarily, in common with all men, they could not see into the kingdom or sense its overpowering glory and hear its normal conversation, but that day they knew the kingdom of heaven was indeed at hand. But it no more abode on a mountain-top than on a plain, for it is not material but spiritual and although locally it can be recognisable and identifiable, it is never merely geographical. Wherever the spiritual life and power and authority of Christ are, there is the kingdom, and within its bounds all the blessings and powers of the King of heaven are available and may be freely had. But this is just one of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. The three apostles almost certainly did not recognize all this then, but it was an amazing revelation to them nonetheless, of an

entirely different nature than Peter's previous one, and extra to it. What a sight! What a conversation! What a Man this Son of God was.

This was heaven on earth; what a kingdom! Peter stood with awe among his companions, as full of fear as of wonder; was it for this the keys had been promised him? Had he to open doors for men to enter into this? He was overwhelmed. Finding his tongue at last, he blurted out, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here, and if thou wilt let us make three tabernacles, one for Thee and one for Moses and one for Elijah'. He did not anticipate what effect his words would have. He did not know the full implications of what he had said, but once again it was wrong. In him, as in every unregenerate man, evil nature and spiritual ignorance can do nothing but degrade Jesus while seeming

to honour Him; they are the springs of the carnal mind and Peter's well-intentioned words rose from them; alas for him, his expression produced predictable results.

Immediately a dark cloud overshadowed them and a voice said, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear Him'. Once again a dreaded rebuke fell on his ears. This time though it came from the lips of Him who spoke from heaven, and terrible fear spread through their hearts. Stricken with terror they dropped on their faces and lay there, too frightened to move, waiting; was it death? A hand touched them, 'arise and be not afraid'; it was the familiar voice of Jesus; they were spared. Opening their eyes they rose from the ground and peered about them, but except Jesus all had vanished. The light had gone, the glory had faded, the voice was silent, the men had

disappeared, heaven had left earth, only Jesus remained; once more everything was normal.

Peter had done it again; he had repeated his former blunders; he understood nothing as he ought to have done, neither did his two companions nor any of the other disciples. Although none but Peter said the offensive thing, or voiced an opinion, they were all as ignorant of the truth of the kingdom of heaven as he and if they had spoken they would have said nothing better. When Matthew later recorded Peter's vow to Jesus that he would never be offended because of Him, all the disciples said likewise. But none of them kept their vow; although Peter spoke for himself he was also the voice of all the apostles; he put into words what the spirits of the select band were saying. He represents what unregenerate man really is,

even when privileged to be in closest proximity to God; that same spirit pervades the whole. Elementally Peter represents us all.

Dear Peter at that time was fallen Adam, man full of revelations, visions, doctrines, ideas, evil of nature, satanic of disposition, as ignorant of himself as he was of his Lord; but God gave Peter to Jesus and He loved him. How patient with men is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had purposely revealed to Peter the secret of Jesus' Sonship that he should confess it before men and he bravely did so; that was commendable and earned Peter an award. By promise he was made a future steward of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but when he was led by Jesus to the mountain-top for a view into that kingdom, instead of discerning the connection between the two

revelations, he wanted to build tabernacles. What shortsightedness! The conversation about the exodus should have given him the clue; instead it only muddled him further. Jesus did not scold him, Peter was absolutely earthbound; he had no idea of spiritual things.

A Kingdom not of this World

In common with his fellow-disciples Peter saw, or thought he saw, things about Israel and the kingdom of heaven, but he did not see the kingdom and the Church of God — he couldn't of course for he had not yet been born from above. He did not know the central idea or see the focal point of God's kingdom, nor did he know that the greatest wonder and chiefest glory of the new creation is the Church, or he would not have talked of building tabernacles. How slowly the mind of man converts to God. But Peter

was not entirely to be blamed, for like us all he was influenced by his national religious tradition and culture and history. During the vision he had seen and heard the Christ discussing with Moses and Elijah about an exodus He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. It was an entirely new theme of conversation to him; never before had the subject been discussed in his presence by three such giants of Israel. He knew that hundreds of years earlier Moses had led the children of Israel out of Egypt by a mighty exodus; he also knew it was commonly taught in rabbinical schools that Elijah would come back to usher in the long-promised Messianic kingdom, and he himself knew by revelation that Jesus was the Christ. Also he remembered that on a mountain-top in Arabia God had shown Moses the pattern of the tabernacle He wished him to make for

Him, that He might dwell among His people in the promised land, where every livelong day was to be like heaven on earth.

Who then could blame Peter for wanting to build tabernacles for all three men? Who can tell exactly how his mind was working when he made his suggestion and asked the Lord for permission to build? On a commonsense human level the idea he put forward was commendable and sincere, if somewhat impractical, but it was utterly mistaken; he was simply making misguided suggestions from an evil-affected heart. What he said was just as satanic as the protest which had earned him the Lord's rebuke previously.

It was all very upsetting for Peter, but O how necessary, and what a suitable time it was for the Lord to further emphasize and expand His teachings about the cross and

state His reasons and purposes for going there. Descending the mountain He told them not to tell the vision to any man until He was risen from the dead. Peter knew then that his theory had been totally wrong; the kingdom of heaven the Lord had been talking about all along was not the earthly one he had been expecting to appear immediately. Jesus had not been building His Church all this time; why — the foundation of it had not yet been laid, the Church was not going to appear until Jesus was risen from His grave, and that could not be yet, for He had not yet been crucified.

It was all very confusing to Peter — the Lord's revelations and gifts to him conflicted with his theology and Church doctrine. As mentioned previously he and his contemporaries thought the Church was Israel after the flesh, but apparently it was

not. When the keys of the kingdom of heaven were promised him with power of binding and loosing in heaven and earth it may have seemed to him that something of a parallel nature to that which happened to Jacob at Peniel had been granted him. When the Lord met the patriarch there and changed his name to Israel he had been given power with God and man and elevated to princely rank among men. Something like that had been done to him also; wasn't he now a prince with God, a patriarch of the Church? His name had been changed; he had the promise of the keys, and power with God and man in heaven and earth, but the carnal mind is enmity with God — he just did not understand. Though unwillingly, somehow he was in conflict with the Lord Jesus; lying deeper down in him than he knew, something just could not go along

with the king at all; Jesus and His kingdom were mysteries to him.

The Kingdom of Heaven

None of the apostles at that time knew the spiritual nature of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had chosen them out from all other men to be with Him and from this place of vantage they had witnessed many manifestations of His power but they had seen little of the inward glory of His majesty. John, writing later with hindsight, said of Jesus' first miracle at Cana of Galilee, 'He manifested forth His glory and His disciples believed on Him', but what they all thought at the time remains unsaid. Similarly Peter records what to him had been the peak of heavenly manifestation — 'we were eyewitnesses of His Majesty'. Matthew also,

reporting Jesus' mountain-top exposition of the laws of the kingdom, follows it up with His sevenfold parabolic discourse on its rise, nature and development in this world unto the shores of eternity. But at the time they saw and heard these things it is certain they had very little understanding of them. That there was a mysterious spiritual aspect to the kingdom of heaven they could have had no doubt, but they could not define it, even though the Lord Himself had been their teacher.

Right at the beginning of their discipleship He had taught them a wonderful prayer in which, if they had known what to look for, they could have discovered the key to the kingdom. 'Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come' He said. The very opening words contained the clue, but they found neither key nor clue

in any of it. Jesus knew they had missed the point, so during His later discourses He called out, 'Who hath ears to hear let him hear'. But, as Isaiah said, their hearts were gross; privileged as they were to see and hear what had been denied others, they neither saw nor heard anything with their hearts; their understandings were almost entirely devoid of knowledge. At that stage of discipleship they thought that Jesus was only a prophet — everybody did. Their greatest teacher, Nicodemus, beholding the miracles Jesus did, thought and said He was a teacher come from God; nobody knew.

Strait is the Gate

Not until later did Jesus even release the fact that John Baptist was more than a prophet, so no-one could be blamed at that stage for not believing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He had not deliberately

withheld truth from them though, neither had John. His forerunner had laid a straight enough path for feet to walk in; that was part of the ministry to which both John and Jesus had been commissioned and of which Isaiah had prophesied. John's voice cried out to the people in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight', and he baptised those who responded to his word. It was only the baptism of repentance, but he preached and practised the one baptism he knew and thereby made a straight path to the Lord. It was also a straight path for Jesus, for He came by that same way to the people and into His ministry as a king in the kingdom of heaven on earth.

John's was not the even straighter path of the Baptism in the Spirit into eternal life in the kingdom of God; he could not minister

that, and in any case Jesus did not need it. Neither could He Himself minister it then; He could not baptise into the kingdom of God until He had first revealed the narrow way and established the straight gate. Jesus did not need John's baptism for any of the reasons other men needed it. He was baptised only in order to fulfil all righteousness before the eyes of men. He validated water baptism because it was the medium in which best to reveal His worldwide ministry to all men: (1) as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; (2) as the Son of God who baptises with the Holy Ghost. All was anticipatory for Him at Jordan; the coming of the dove symbolized to everybody what then was not, but yet should be, viz. that the gate was open, straight and narrow, into the kingdom of God. Within four years all was

made plain. God commenced the new era with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through Him at Pentecost. All is now narrowed down to this one man, who and what He is, and what He has done.

As the dove descended upon Jesus in Jordan that day, the voice of God the Father said 'This is my beloved Son', and before all present Jesus was anointed for ministry and marked out as the Christ now publicly revealed to be preferred above everyone. But beyond and above all that, it was also a pictorial anticipation of the new era which should commence at Pentecost, when, having received the promise of the Spirit from the Father, Christ should shed Him forth for the building of His Church. The straight path for every man's feet is the baptism then being prefigured in water and later accomplished in the Spirit by Jesus; all

must find and enter this straight gate into life in the kingdom of God. Jesus said that few find it because the gate which leadeth to destruction is wide and the way is broad; many there be that enter and walk therein, He said. By His experience at Jordan Jesus set forth the truth that Calvary and Pentecost are one — the baptism, the gate, the way. He is the Resurrection and the Life; the resurrection is the proof that the gate is open, and the life He lived is the clear way.

Of Keys and Kingdoms

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus spoke little of this though. He did tell Nicodemus he must be born from above; He also spoke about Father's kingdom to His disciples and indicated to them the straight path. As far as they were able they left all and followed Him along that way, though often in spirit and mind they were quite baffled about spiritual

things. He knew that things were difficult for them and that some things were impossible, for His Father's kingdom consists only in and of spirits; but His Father had given these men to Him so He led them on. God is the Father of spirits; His word is entirely of a spiritual nature and is wrought exclusively for the eternal kingdom of God. However, because they could not yet live in that kingdom He did not mean they could not live in the kingdom of heaven.

The two kingdoms are akin, and so alike in some aspects that sometimes they are mistaken for each other, consequently it is mistakenly taught that they are the same. This is a grave error because it leads to much misunderstanding among the children of God. To come to a correct understanding of the two kingdoms it may be best to think of their kinship as that of twins; identical twins.

Even further than that, Siamese twins (that is joined together which at times they are). In fact, so closely are they joined in scripture that at times it is almost impossible to distinguish the difference between them. But so important is it for us to discern the differences between them that we must do so or endanger our spiritual life.

The kingdom of heaven had also a physical and material side, which was at everybody's hand in John's and Jesus' day — it still is. As with any earthly kingdom, some of its blessings may be had just by being present when they are being dispensed. Kingdom of heaven blessings are of a higher order than providential blessings but may be likened to them. Providential blessings are those blessings which God has provided for all without distinction, and in their order are quite miraculous; just to be born a human

being is any man's entitlement to them. Likewise in grace there are blessings available to all who fulfil the very simple conditions upon which God gives them. To ordinary uncomplicated souls, just to be in the Lord's presence was a benediction, bestowing untold wealth, but wonderful as that was, He had more than that to give people and this He quite frequently did. The King loves to bestow undeserved favours on people; unthought-of blessings were freely given by Him for no other reason than that He distributed His bounty with princely grace for all. This is that higher kind of providence in the kingdom of heaven; everything there is of grace, and is as free to all as are sunshine and rain in the realm of nature. The Lord wonderfully demonstrated this on the occasions when He fed the multitudes. The people were not asked to

exercise faith, they were not asked to do anything at all but sit in an orderly manner on the ground, and this they did. He only did this so that His disciples could pass to and fro among them to distribute His grace to them. This is all He asked of them and then, without request of any kind, and quite apart from desert, He broke the bread and fish and they ate from His hand.

Another provision of like order was the creation of wine for the wedding feast; on that occasion none of the beneficiaries said 'please' or 'thank you' even. The Lord did not require it of them, nor did they give it; they did not even need to exercise faith for the miracle. His heart simply flowed toward them in human pity and heavenly power and grace; such is His bountiful goodness toward everyone. On these occasions all that was necessary was either that Jesus should be

there when the time was ripe or when the need arose, or that people should be there when He was dispensing His undreamt-of blessings. The provision was sheerly providential; people did not need to be members of His family or subjects in the kingdom of God in order to obtain them. They were given as being part of God's bounty free for all, good or bad, in the kingdom of heaven.

This can happen as well for an individual as for crowds. The man Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda was the beneficiary of one of the Lord's more individual miracles. He was not asked to believe anything. There is no record that he exercised any faith; the Lord just healed him. It was the same with the man born blind; he was not asked or ordered to believe anything before the Lord commenced His ministrations. He anointed

those sightless eyes with clay and told him to go and wash. There the man believed and obeyed and could see — it was all providential, given without asking as Jesus passed by. There were times when, according to His eternal wisdom He deemed it best for some people to exercise faith; whether the reason for this lay in the nature of the gift or of the person concerned is not clear. At such times the Lord might say 'believest thou that I am able to do this?', or 'according to your faith be it unto you'. By this method the Lord led hearts on and up from the ground of general blessings which with very little effort all may enjoy, to those greater blessings which can only be procured by the exercise of faith.

Comparatively few receive this latter class of favour; when they do so they usually become the topic of discussion for a while.

This kind of blessing which is open to faith alone is designedly of far greater worth and of longer duration than the former type.

Wine or bread and fish only satisfy temporarily, for thirst and hunger are recurring natural needs.

Many aspects of the kingdom of heaven are revealed in scripture beside those we have already considered. The Lord referred to one when He said there were some standing there which should not taste of death until they saw the Son of man coming in His kingdom. A foretaste of that was afforded the three on the mount, but it was by no means a complete fulfilment of His promise. The dying thief saw into the fulfilment of that on the cross; 'Lord remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom' he pleaded. He may not have realized the fullest implications of his request, but he was

pleading with the Crucified. He surely never knew the vast treasures that would be unlocked and released by those dear wounds and that cross and the grave, nor did he realize the greater possibilities and blessings waiting to be revealed when the Lord procured the kingdom for men. Though the penitent thief certainly knew nothing of this then, at Calvary the right to have and live and reign in the kingdom was bought outright by the Son of man for us men. The gracious Lord rewarded the word of faith from a thief's cross and gave him a place alongside Himself in paradise that day.

Days of Heaven on Earth

Fifty or so days later the waiting disciples, gathered together for the purpose, heard the joyful sound from heaven which ushered in the kingdom with power. O the mighty rushings as of winds of breath, and the

cloven tongues like as of all-consuming fire burning on every head; torrents of praise as of mighty waters rose and gathered and flowed unabating to God like rivers running to the ultimate sea. They lived to see and experience it, yet neither they nor anyone since has witnessed the still greater fulfilment of which Christ spoke saying 'the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels'. That day is still future and it will usher all the Lord's subjects into even greater things, when the heavenly kingdom shall come on earth in all fulness in the new creation. The kingdom of heaven will not then be functioning among men living in hellish conditions under satan's power, it will be universal. Rather than being available, the providential blessings of God the King will belong to everybody as a matter of course in that paradisiac state. Truly

then it will be heaven on earth, the kingdom of God and heaven.

In its present aspect the kingdom of heaven reached its height during the days of the Son of man on earth. Those days were so full of blessings and wonderful works that Jesus said the time would come when His disciples would long for one of the days of the Son of man. There is no doubt that John Baptist's and Jesus' annunciation that the kingdom of heaven was at hand led the Jews to believe that the kingdom would be restored to Israel as it was in former times. But the Lord was clear enough about it; 'My kingdom is not of this world', He told Pilate. The kingdom then was and still is spiritual with material and physical manifestation; it was not then, nor is it now, political or terrestrial. The Lord's intention was and still is to break the grip of satanic power over human lives and to free

the devil's prisoners from his grip so that He can entirely save them and establish them in conditions of heavenly blessing. Today this is the responsibility of the Church, hence its need of His presence in the midst. Given that with His power and authority the Church is irresistible, He will do His own works in the same way as before.

The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God, being the kingdom of the Father and His children, was not at hand in John's day, neither was it immediately at hand during Jesus' lifetime. As He said, His hour was not yet come, and until it did come new birth was not available to anybody. That is why Jesus did not give Peter the keys to that kingdom; nobody else but the Lord Himself can handle those — they are the keys of hell and death and therefore could not be used until He had died; He is the key-

man who unlocked the straight gate through death into the kingdom of God which is the exclusive kingdom of Fatherhood and sonship.

In the same way as heaven is God's abode, created by Himself for Himself to live in, and may be thought of as His 'country', so also is the kingdom of God central to the kingdom of heaven. As God and heaven are not to be confused, and except by metonymy, never interchanged, so also in thought and exposition must those two kingdoms be kept distinct. Metonymy is a grammatical device, used occasionally by writers and orators, whereby words of distinct meaning are used to imply something other than, though not entirely different from or unconnected with them, such as crown or throne for king. This is a wholly acceptable idea, thoroughly understood by poets and authors and. not

infrequently used in scripture. George Fox once wrote to Oliver Cromwell 'see thou touch not the crown Oliver' meaning 'do not aspire to kingship', and he never did, although he may often have placed his hand on the literal crown. Again we know the phrase, 'the lion and the unicorn were fighting for the crown', and by the crown we mean supremacy, kingship, rule, not a golden diadem: the crown is but a symbol.

As miracles are the expression and result of power, and soul is the expression and result of spirit indwelling a human body, so also is the kingdom of heaven the expression and result of the Kingship of God in His kingdom. The union and likeness may be so close as to be indistinguishable to some men, but the distinction is very real and most important in scripture, and indispensable to proper interpretation of spiritual truth. Since Jesus

Himself made the distinction it ought to be accepted without reservation without any need to labour the point unduly. The vast difference between the two kingdoms is made outstandingly clear in His teachings: He said of the kingdom of God that except a man be born from above he can neither see nor enter it. On the other hand He said the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force. To the thoughtful heart nothing could be plainer.

The death and resurrection of the Lord is the key to the difference between these two kingdoms. People had no need to undergo death and resurrection in order to receive His gracious ministrations, but to be in the kingdom of God every person must know and experience the power of the resurrection. When He was on earth, operating as from His Jordan anointing, He

brought to men the natural conditions in which He lived; to them this was the kingdom of heaven. Those three days of crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection are the most crucially important days of earth's history. What took place then is not our present concern, but it must be our ever-present preoccupation; it was certainly the Lord's.

Until His revelations at Caesarea Philippi, the Lord had not mentioned the cross, but from that time onwards He began to show the disciples the terminal goal toward which He was heading. Being faithful as well as truthful, having declared His own unswerving life-purpose, He then said, 'if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'. There must be no compromise; He never softened the blow — if He must go to and

through death and resurrection, so must they. His determination to build His Church could only find fulfilment in life through death, whether it be for Himself or His people; it could be done in no other way than by death, nor could it stand in any other state than resurrection; He knew that.

To attempt to save self or soul from the cross, or to keep one's own life in order to gain the world, and also to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ at the same time, is impossible. There was no way Jesus could lay the foundation of His Church, leave alone build it, unless He denied Himself, lost His life for our sakes and gave up all ideas of gaining the world, and there is no way we can be built on that foundation unless we similarly give up all hopes, ambitions and claims in this world. Jesus' word to Pilate is

clear and conclusive, 'my kingdom is not of this world'.

Son of the Living God

The Lord was seeking to open up the disciples' understanding to perceive the spiritual nature of the Church. From the moment He asked His question and gained the answer He required, Jesus determinedly moved their thinking from the natural to the spiritual plane. He referred to Himself in the question as 'I the Son of man', and Peter's answer was, 'Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God'. At once to the understanding heart the purpose of the exchange is revealed — of the flesh He was Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary; of the Spirit He is Christ the Son of God. The perfect way to describe this union between Spirit and flesh is Son of man. The question was vital, a key to the unfolding of God's plans; so was the

answer. The time had come to reveal the world of spirit in a new way, and Jesus moved forward into it with purpose: 'I will build my Church', He said, 'and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. The word 'hell' used by Jesus here is 'hades' the place of departed spirits, and His reference to it lays bare the fact that His intentions and operations regarding the building of His Church were related primarily to the spirits of men.

This is why, when Peter made his objections to Jesus' death and resurrection, the Lord heard satan talking to Him. Satan is against Him and His Church, but neither he nor the gates of hades could deter Him from His purpose. In keeping with this, when He was transfigured on the mount and appeared as He is in His kingdom, ablaze with glory, Moses and Elijah, two departed spirits came

to talk with Him about His exodus. Moses had not seen death in quite the way other men see it; he had been liberated from the body by the Lord, who then secretly buried his body in the wilderness of Moab. Elijah never knew death at all — he had been translated bodily to heaven from a spot in the wilderness somewhere beyond Jordan. They knew that Jesus was going to accomplish the exodus in Jerusalem. Both would be there with the multitudes of their nation still being held in hades; theirs was a more favoured condition perhaps, but as Jesus they had concern for their less-favoured brethren. Each of them knew spiritual release and translation; their state in glory was infinitely to be preferred above what Israel knew in the Mosaic exodus from Egypt or while they were journeying to Canaan. Far better than release of soul and

spirit from the body into hades, they were free in glory with Christ, whose Spirit had been in them for prophecy during the days of their earthly ministry, and they contemplated with joy the spiritual release and translation of their fellows.

As may be expected, this was far beyond the comprehension of the three apostles. They had been called by the Christ to work with Him on earth in the kingdom of heaven and confessed Him to be the Son of God, but now they saw Him revealed in a completely new light and setting. Confused and astounded as they were, they knew then that the gates of hell He had mentioned earlier could never withstand Him. Nobody had ever buried either Moses or Elijah, and here they were standing and talking with Jesus, apparently as alive and definitely embodied as Jesus was. Where they fitted

into the Church of which He had spoken, or what their relationship was to the Church He was going to build the apostles did not know. Perhaps we may have a clue to Elijah's position in Jesus' statement that John Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah. John Baptist himself confessed he did not have the Bride but that he was the friend of the Bridegroom and Jesus said he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

We cannot be certain of John's position now, but the presence of Moses and Elijah holds very real significance, for by the manner of their departure from earth these two men set forth the death and ascension of the Son of man in a special way. Moses died and was buried, as was Jesus; Elijah, on the other hand, did not die but was caught up bodily to heaven as also was Jesus. Their

appearance was as a dual sign: (1) of the close of their dispensation so near at hand and (2) an ensample and sign of the end of this present church age, when the dead in Christ shall rise first and then we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air'.

The whole scene on that mountain-top, though so full of precious truth for those present, was full of both historic and future meaning also. Christ, the Creator, was there with face shining like the sun, glowing with light; so was Moses, who wrote the account of the first creation's sun and light. Peter, James and John were there also, and John was to write of the Church of the new creation, New Jerusalem, which needs no created sun or light to shine in it because the glory of God shining from the Lamb

lights it. Elijah, the fiery baptist of the old covenant was there also; he called down the fire from heaven which consumed both altar and sacrifice on Carmel and destroyed those who would fight against God.

Moses points us to Redemption through blood, Elijah points to the birth of the Church through baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost. He represents the fiery baptism which fuses spirits into life in God and communion with each other, consuming all sin and salting with fire, transforming the whole into a living sacrifice. Moses and Elijah, who in their respective ministries point to Christ, combine in their persons to present Him central to the whole Bible scheme of creation, redemption and regeneration. No others than these two joined with the Lord could have made quite

the same contribution and present this same effect — it was a perfect trinity.

When descending the mountain later, the mystified disciples said to the Lord, 'why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?' To this the Lord virtually said 'he has', and they were more mystified still. Only slowly, very very slowly, were they beginning to grasp at spiritual truth. They came down from that height convinced they had just seen the kingdom of heaven come on earth in a way unknown before, but to their mystified understanding things seemed all wrong. All the teaching they had imbibed from their infancy had been reversed; it seemed to them that Christ had come first, not Elijah. They had met Jesus first, indeed had known Him over many months, but had not met Elijah until that very day What was the explanation? The explanation was John

Baptist; they had met him before they met Jesus and accepted the fact that he had been Christ's forerunner. The spirit and power of Elijah had created a personality in him similar to Elijah; he did not call down fire from heaven, but he was a burning and a shining light and he did warn of unquenchable fire and eternal burnings and declared that Christ would baptise with the Holy Ghost and fire.

The merging messages and ministries of God's men all relate; whether they belong to old or new testament they originate and terminate in and point to Christ. There is a spiritual affinity between all God's ministers. In some it is more marked than in others, but whether obvious or not, it is there. There is spiritual continuity and linkage too, binding and uniting the spirits of men to one Father and one another in one kingdom or

another. This is why Jesus came. He knew that the souls and personalities of men were being developed according to their spiritual fatherhood, heredity and destiny, and that we all live in one or the other of two invisible kingdoms over which either God or satan rules. Both of these kingdoms are at present with us on earth, and it is impossible for men to live in both of them at the same time. It is possible to exist in satan's kingdom of hell on earth and at the same time be affected by the kingdom of heaven and receive many of its blessings. Similarly it is possible to live in God's kingdom of heaven on earth and be affected by the kingdom of hell and live in the kingdom of God at one and the same time.

Thy Will be Done on Earth

There is of course a third kingdom in which all people live, namely one of the kingdoms

of this world. It is to our relationship and responsibilities in this realm that the Lord was alluding when He made such remarks as 'render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's'. The particular incident which gave rise to Christ's comment on the subject was the matter of paying tribute money. Among the Jews this was a hated tax, and if at all possible many avoided paying it. Shortly after the events considered earlier, Peter was approached at Capernaum by a tax official who asked, 'Doth not your master pay tribute?' Peter answered, 'Yes', and went off to report the conversation to Jesus. When he did so he found that the Lord had clearly foreseen and anticipated the situation. Forestalling any request Peter might have made for money, Jesus turned the challenge into an opportunity to

highlight a well-known truth, namely that the children of the reigning monarch never pay taxes. In any case they are the children of the one to whom the taxes are paid and ordinarily children do not have to contribute to their father's upkeep; on the contrary he supports them.

Neither Jesus nor His disciples were children of any reigning earthly monarch, however, so they paid the tax as they ought; Jesus makes everything daylight clear. To outward observation it seemed an ordinary enough occasion, but Jesus turned it into a most extraordinary affair. He sent Peter down to the sea to catch a fish with a coin in its mouth with which he was to pay the tax for Himself and Peter exclusively. There is no evidence to show that the band were without sufficient money to pay the tax for the Master and Peter, and that financial

straits necessitated the miracle. There were no pressing circumstances or outward reasons why the Lord should have done what He did. Then why did He do it and only select Peter for the favour? Why did it have to be him and not one of the others, or all of them?

When Jesus turned water into wine there was a reason for it. When He fed the multitudes it was absolutely necessary for them to eat, but why this miracle? He did it for sheer love; there was a deep inward reason for what He did, and if no-one else knew why He did it Peter and He knew. In His heart He did not relish the rebuke He had earlier needed to administer to His erring apostle, and He had awaited the opportunity to compensate His sore disciple. He knew the pain in Peter's breast; all the man's successes seemed to be doomed to

failure; it was heartbreaking to be called satan by his Lord and He knew Peter was inwardly grieving; it was unbearable and unforgettable. So on the day they were halted at the seat of custom to pay their taxes He seized the opportunity and turned it into an occasion to reassure Peter — magnificent Jesus.

The Lord's gesture must have been sweet balm to Peter's grieving heart, healing his wounded spirit; but to the rest of the faithful band it was in the nature of the last straw that broke the camel's back. They were all very upset and aggrieved by it. It appeared to them to be nothing but sheer favouritism. Even John and James, the other two members of the select band chosen to accompany Jesus up the mountain seemed to think so too; a storm of inward passions was brewing and ready to break. Had they

eyes to see it, the Lord had only delayed payment for those extra moments so that He could use the opportunity for everybody's good.

Despite their unwarrantable attitude He overlooked their pettiness and pressed home the lesson. He was free and He had come to make them free. He wanted them to realise they could move anywhere in the heavenly Father's realm without restraint or fear and enjoy all its privileges and provisions to the full. By the miracle He showed all with eyes to see that all the fish in the sea and all the money in the world were His; He produced fish and coin together. He was the real King, the Son of the King, but He was not the son of a Caesar or a Herod. Those money-dependent monarchs of earth needed to tax their subjects so they could run their kingdoms

and live a life of luxury and comfort in kingly style, but not so the Son of God. Though He was Lord of all, He was living humbly in an earthly kingdom and for the time being was 'subject to the powers that be', therefore He paid taxes as every true son of God should.

It was a most singular miracle and must have been astonishing to all who witnessed it.

There can be no doubt that it astounded as well as satisfied the tax gatherers, but what great heart-searchings it caused among the chosen band. Why was Peter so favoured? Why did Jesus pay tax for Peter and not for everybody? Why did it always have to be Peter who was preferred above the rest of them? Why hadn't Jesus sent them all a-fishing for money? Weren't they all His apostles? Hadn't they all the same needs? Oughtn't they all to be treated alike? Why this favouritism? It wasn't fair, it was always

Peter. Peter had the revelation, Peter was promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven with power to bind and loose in heaven and earth, and now Peter alone had his tax money paid; it was all Peter. Why was none of the rest of them so privileged? Was Jesus, without directly saying so, showing them who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven? That band of apostolic men was seething with a sense of injustice, and decided that something had to be done about it, so they made up their minds to test Jesus out. 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' they asked Him. The question arose from very mixed thoughts and emotions. Was it the Father who had given Peter the revelation? Was it Jesus, about whom the revelation was given? Was it Peter, to whom the revelation was given? Confusion reigned; they wanted to know once and for all.

Except Ye Become

Jesus rose to the occasion and went straight to the heart of the matter; calling a little child unto Him, He set him in the midst of them and said, 'Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven'. The Lord's reply was plain and stern and most illuminating, His language severe. Their hearts were wrong; it was necessary to administer a rebuke to them all; every one of them was thinking of having privilege and holding positions, but what He was concerned about was their condition. They thought their citizenship in the kingdom was assured and had been so for a long time past, but they were in presumption —

according to their Lord not one of them was in it.

The apostles must have been shattered. They were thinking and asking about promotion, exaltation, preferment, but He was speaking about entrance. There was no mistaking the implication of His actions and remarks — they were plain for all to see and hear. They had all been so sure that if anyone on earth was in the kingdom of heaven they were. Surely they couldn't be hearing Him aright; they had been following Him now for so long and serving in the kingdom of heaven — didn't that indicate anything? They had believed so, indeed had taken it for granted that they were well in, but from His remarks it could be inferred that at best they might not be, and at worst were certainly not. They had wanted to know who was greatest in the kingdom; He

seemed to be implying they weren't even in it, in fact that they weren't even converted. But they had left all and followed Him — surely that proved they were converted didn't it? Whatever did He mean? If they still needed converting, then Jesus was speaking of a different conversion than they knew — He was. Without exception they all needed a new deep radical inward work wrought in them which would convert them into little children.

Every one of them had responded to His call and had undergone some degree of conversion from their different occupations and walks of life, but none had been born again, nor could they be until they knew death and resurrection. They were disciples under a teacher, sheep following a shepherd, servants in His kingdom, but not yet children of His Father and living stones in

His Church. Their conversion had not dealt with the inbred sins of pride, jealousy and envy; their nature had not been changed; they were outwardly converted but not inwardly regenerate; it only needed the incident of the fish and the coin to reveal that. They all needed a new birth, a birth that would free them from themselves and all desire for personal greatness. Their natural lust for position and power was totally unacceptable in the kingdom, they must become humble and childlike; conversion couldn't do it, or else they would have been like that. Regeneration creates trust of Christ; He had such visions of blessing and glory for His Church, and was planning shortly to reveal His further purposes for them. If only they had waited, all would have been made plain and the unpleasant scene avoided.

Nature will out however; jealous hearts and proud spirits hastened hotly to contest the Lord's actions, and if we had been of their number we should all have done the same. Superficial conversion, however real it may be, is insufficient to regenerate the spirit of man — only the deep internal work of the cross and the power of the resurrection within can change a man's nature.

Conversion as a result of convictions is a good and necessary step toward total regeneration, but 'ye must be born again' is the unchanging and indispensable way to life in the kingdom of God. The apostles at that time had only undergone conversion from the teachings and practice of Judaism to the teachings and works of Jesus, but as the Lord indicated, not one of them had yet experienced the kind of conversion required for inclusion in His Church. He knew to

whom He was talking and also what He was saying — 'Except ye be converted and become as little children'; He was talking to His apostles. In so far as inclusion in His Church was concerned, despite the revelation granted them, they were all unconverted; each one, including Peter, was still spiritually blind and ignorant of the truth.

Conversion by the power of God unto regeneration is the only conversion that brings a man on to the Rock; attraction, conviction, tuition, decision are good and necessary and must have their place in a man's experience, but cannot of themselves bring him into the Church. Christ Himself must build His Church and 'Christ crucified is the power of God', says Paul, pointing the fact that the uncrucified Jesus could not do it. This is one of the reasons why the Lord,

while He was on earth, suppressed publication of the knowledge that He was the Christ; He knew His claim to be the Christ was the whole point of the controversy between Himself and the authorities. The whole nation had been long in expectation of the Christ, and at His birth the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds that Mary's child was He. Few if any believed it though, and throughout the latter part of His ministry the question was constantly raised and the point argued.

It was not until He stood before the Sanhedrin in the presence of the High Priest that the Lord made known His identity publicly; there He confessed under oath that He was the Christ: 'I AM', He said, and so saying claimed to be God. To His hearers it was conclusive proof of His guilt; they condemned Him to death and approached

Pilate with demands for His crucifixion, and so the time of Church-building drew nigh. The living crucified Christ is the Church-builder; He is the power of God unlimited, and the Church is His masterpiece.

.... as We areOne

So it was that, although as yet the Church was not established on earth and men were unready for it and unworthy of it, the Lord revealed further truth about it to His disciples. This He did in course of some instruction concerning personal relationships among themselves. His intention in doing so was corrective as well as instructive, and was delivered with an eye on the immediate past as well as toward the not-too-distant future: 'if thy brother shall trespass against thee go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone, if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother'.

They were all aware of the incidents to which He was alluding, especially Peter; they had all trespassed against that man and even more against the Lord.

It had been a most harrowing time for everybody, and knowing Jesus, they must have been prepared for the Lord's corrections about their bad behaviour, but they almost certainly did not anticipate what followed: 'If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican'. The Lord was laying down rules of conduct for His Church of the future. There was now no doubt in their minds as to His former statements about His Church. He certainly intended to build it and to their joy they were all going

to be members of it; more, they were to be a family of brethren. Coming as it did after the incident at Capernaum and the searching statements about their conversion, this was most reassuring.

He spoke so naturally about it, yet with such assurance that there was no doubting Him, and they listened with amazement to His words: 'Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven'. There was no mistaking His meaning. Despite their ill-deserts they were all going to be in His Church and would all share the power He had previously promised to Peter alone — astonishingly He was now giving it to the Church as a whole. Following His departure, the Church, not just one privileged apostle, nor yet a group of apostles, was to be the highest authority and have the greatest power on earth; it

would be available to all. They must have felt humbled and very ashamed; it was needless and wrong to have been so jealous of Peter. The Lord had been intending to tell them the truth all along, He had only withheld it because He could not reveal it until He had first exposed their pride and warned them of the consequences of it.

The Lord's remarks to them were made in context of the kingdom of heaven, because it is the privilege of the Church to display its heavenly calling on earth. Church members must live and relate and act together on earth as the children of God, a heavenly company creating a heavenly state amidst hellish conditions. God's children are far outnumbered on earth by the children of the devil, their satanic counterparts and opponents; but although they are so few by comparison, the power, authority and

influence conferred upon them far exceeds anything at the disposal of satan's children. The Lord is most encouraging to His inbuilt ones, 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them'. In this connection numbers are not His chief concern, nor are they necessary; two or three are sufficient for the Lord's purposes. He is concerned here that His Church should recognize, appropriate and use the authority and power of their Lord, the 'I AM' in the midst.

He was in the midst when He spoke; they had no doubt of His authority and power; He stood there among them at that time purposely to impress upon them that the same authority and power would be theirs when He built His Church. As well as building it upon Himself, He would build it around Himself and although He would then be

invisible to them, He would not be absent from them. This is how and why He would vest such authority and power in the Church; whether few or many, they must do the work; He would authorize and empower it. At the same time He made something else very clear also, namely that His Church is neither an autocracy nor a bureaucracy; it is not governed by one human being, nor by a group of persons. In these days this is a most important point for every child of God to grasp.

God does not intend any person or group of persons, be they called a hierarchy or an apostolate or a bishopric or any other name, to rule over men's spirits and souls. Neither does He intend the Church to be a democracy, and lest any should think this He went on to show that, however small a company it may be, even though it be but

two or three, to be a church it must gather in His name, or more correctly into His name. Into the midst of such a company He will come, He said — the Church is a theocracy. He governs it Himself directly, not by proxy; He stands in the midst for that purpose.

Only on these grounds could the Lord give the Church such power. He never conceived the idea or gave anyone ground or permission to think that, apart from Himself, the Church had power to do anything; certainly it cannot govern itself, even if it be composed of apostles entirely. Plainly He is implying that it is really He who is going to do all the work; and of course this is the truth, for the Church is all Him. His disclosures about the Church so far are very great, though very simple: (1) it is His; (2) He is building it; (3) it is built upon Himself; (4)

it gathers in or into His name; (5) it gathers around Him; (6) it is the highest authority on earth; (7) He grants it supreme power on earth; (8) it consists only in resurrection life. His basic plea is for simplicity and harmony. If the Church is to exercise such great power, all the members must be one — the irreducible minimum. It cannot be maximised beyond that — one must be all, and Himself that One.

Throughout the whole of this section the Lord purposely speaks of twos and threes, not multitudes: 'if thy brother shall trespass against thee' He said — a man and his brother, that is all. And again, 'if he will not hear thee then take one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three'; hereby the Lord is revealing the secret of heavenly life and power. It has always been like that right from the very beginning; He makes this plain by

such statements as 'I and my Father are one — Jesus and Father — just two; or if it be three, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The three persons of the blessed trinity are gathered together into one, and are one, having one name — God. Upon this truth the whole Church is built. the Lord of the Church wants the Church to be one as He and His Father are one — it cannot exist otherwise. He later put it into prayer in these words, 'that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they may be one in us.

Yet another phrase from His wonderful prayer reveals how truly His desires for His Church spring from His own enjoyment and understanding of triune life: 'I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one'. So simply He unfolds the amazing truth; Jesus, the Father and the Church perfect in one; what an unexpected tri-

unity! Always it is the trinity. His concept of eternal life for Himself was unbroken union with His Father, two in one and no less than this is His concept for the Church also. His determination for the Church is that we all shall be brought into that union, for He knows no other eternal life; this accomplished, it will be at one within itself; there is no other way. By the eternal Spirit the Church is born into the union of the Father and the Son to form a trinity with them in that unity. This is a marvellous revelation, far exceeding that which Peter received in Caesarea Philippi; the Lord was opening up wonderful truth to them for the whole Church, and we all must come to a proper understanding of it.

This is the thinking underlying all the Lord's statements about His Church; because of it brothers must be gained, not lost. The Lord

insists that if a brother has trespassed against you, go and win him; do not allow separation between you, it is loss; go and gain him for yourself and God. Beyond gaining him, you must also come to thorough agreement with him, wholehearted and true, for this is but a beginning; it is but a basic repair. Beyond this necessary reconciliation, prayer has to be made; the restored position must be incorporated into the main body, for there is even further work to be done in the name of Jesus. All the brethren must witness the loving agreement and join with you in it. Beside being one with each other, unity must be established with the Church and with Christ.

This agreement must be so real that Jesus is in the midst unaggrieved, forming a trinity, otherwise prayer cannot be made by the

church in His name. And if prayer is not in His name the full power He is so willing to give cannot operate properly. The power is the power of the trinity and will only operate as it should in a church when the pattern of the perfect trinity is formed in it. A church must meet in perfect unity, even if it be only as two or three gathered around Him. It must be a demonstration and an expression of the blessed Trinity, making request in the harmony of perfect agreement, or else it will become impotent. The power which works to bind or loose in earth or heaven is the power of the Christ of God; access to this power is granted only to those who fulfil the conditions of the Christ. These are very simple: the Lord carefully couched His statements in words which wholly embrace the truth. He speaks of a mystery, but does not use mystical language;

there is nothing difficult about what He says, yet His words are all too frequently neglected or misunderstood and therefore are misinterpreted. This may be due in part to the way the Church came into being at Pentecost: it was phenomenal, first a hundred and twenty, then within a few hours another three thousand, all in one day.

From that time onward, over the space of a few decades, it grew equally phenomenally, turning the world upside down. Ousting devil-worship, spiritism and idolatry, driving out Judaism and heathendom, it grew by the million and became the established religion of the middle east. It was all very thrilling, but therein lay its chief danger: Jesus had spoken of twos and threes, now it was thousands and tens of thousands. Among many other things of major importance the

whole concept of the simple trinitarian basis of the Church was in danger of being lost also, hence the epistles.

The basic teachings of Jesus about principles of church gathering have been so long obscured that they are now almost non-functional. We ordinarily think of Jesus in the not-too-distinct midst of a company of people, somewhere central to the whole. This is partly true, but not wholly so, which is a great pity, for thereby we lose the full meaning of what He intended by the remark. It is noticeable that although the Lord knew how greatly the Church would grow from its natal day onward, He deliberately refrained from all reference to spectacular numbers. If when talking of a local church He ever spoke of larger groups than two or three it is not recorded. This was not because He wished us to descend

into the awful pit of despair, sometimes apparent when, to excuse their failure or to make apologies for small numbers, men say 'numbers are not important'. There is a very real sense in which this saying is true, but there is also a very real sense in which it is not true; God does care about the masses very much.

Two or Three in My Name

What the Lord was saying by His modest statement is that two or three with Him in the midst is a sufficient number for a local church. Beyond that He is also saying that just two of us can exercise mighty power and move in great authority, and more important than that even, He is stating the trinitarian principle of gathering. In application this could mean that when we gather we should not think of Jesus standing in some imagined spot central to the whole company, but

rather that He is in the midst of all the multiplied twos and threes that form the gathering. If this was clearly understood, the sense of His presence would be so greatly heightened among that company that it would be completely transformed. Think of a church of a hundred people; if these were broken down into twos there would be fifty couples; now if each of these couples recognized and knew Jesus in the midst of them what possibilities of worship and blessing would open up. Understood and practised properly this kind of meeting would revolutionise church gatherings; relationships would become more personal, coldness would melt away and warmth of brotherly love would kindle among us till the fire reached unto heaven and spread over all the earth.

See then the need for brother to gain brother, if only that this sense of the Lord's presence may increase and multiply in the churches. With what power and zeal also would the churches increase in effectiveness; souls long bound by the devil would be liberated, things long loose among the saints could be bound. Earth and heaven would meet, God and man would combine, angelic and demonic hosts would engage in conflict, powers and authorities would clash and works of darkness would be destroyed. Let every redeemed soul recognize its privileges and move into God's revealed will, for these matters are not the exclusive rights of a select few. The Lord did not say it shall be done only and if two apostles or elders shall agree together; any two on the Rock gathered together in agreement in His name will do, for not they but He who is in the

midst of them will do it. The whole church is responsible before God. It is a sad thing indeed for any church if two people cannot be found so in agreement that they can harmoniously ask favours of the Lord and receive answers. None must seek to lay blame on another. Each must resolutely shoulder his or her own share of the blame for the prevailing powerlessness of the churches and groan under it till we all rise up and rectify the situation with vigour.

Offences Shall Come

There can be little doubt that disregard of these plainest teachings is one of the main factors in the churches' present powerlessness. This is not the Lord's fault, for He sought diligently to impress us with the importance of these basic matters so vital to the Church's life. It is noticeable for instance that throughout the entire period

covered in this section of scripture He kept drawing attention to the sin of offending people. An offended person is not likely to want to be one with the person or persons with whom he is offended. The person who constantly gives or causes offence can seldom be in a position to effectively wield the power of God. He pointed this out to Peter almost immediately after He had promised him the keys; Peter was an offence to Jesus and He told him so. That is serious; a man who offends Jesus can never walk with Him; he may follow Him, but not walk with Him: the Lord relegated Peter to His back, 'get thee behind me satan, thou art an offence unto me'. Rather than be stumbled at the offence the Lord chose to lose the companionship of even the very elect. He is resolute; He will not allow anything said or

done by anybody to stop Him from fulfilling God's purposes.

He will neither be stumbled by others nor cause others to stumble, nor will He countenance the wanton stumbling of others by any of His Church. This is brought out in the incident over the tribute money. The whole episode involving the miracle was engineered so that the authorities should not be unnecessarily offended and to draw attention to truth. Giving needless offence is not a mark of spirituality but of carnality. The fact that we are children and free is no reason why we should avoid paying taxes; we must do all in our power to obey 'the powers that be' and to 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's'. Continuing this emphasis, He said we must be particularly careful not to offend children who believe in Him. Rather than that should happen, He

said a millstone should be hanged around the neck of any person who did it and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea. The implication is that he should be dead and gone out of sight and mind for ever.

The whole world is full of woe because of offences; they will surely come, He said, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. So many souls are being needlessly stumbled by people who claim to be Christ's disciples; offences abound everywhere; people are being hindered from coming to Jesus and He is righteously indignant about it; it must stop. His judgements of offenders are scathing. A man is to act ruthlessly in self-judgement to the point of self-mutilation rather than offend others. He is surprisingly unrelenting about it; His stern criterion, oft repeated, is that rather than

cause others to stumble a person should prefer to enter into life maimed rather than go physically whole to hell. Whatever it is that causes anyone to stumble must be cut off or plucked out as the case may be — excised from the body without hesitation or mercy if necessary. Reading the Lord's words is very solemnizing; we can have little if any doubt that He offers no hope to anyone who constantly causes others to stumble; if they do so they cannot continue in that spirit and state of forgiveness which is so vital to eternal life. Self-judgement is an indispensable exercise for those who claim church membership. Paul says 'if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged.' Because mutilation of the body does not purge sin from the soul, some may be surprised at the Lord's unwonted vehemence. His words were most pointed

and He meant every word He said. He never used idle threats; the drastic sentence arises from His concern for others. Even though He had called Peter with intention of making him one of the chief apostles, if he had continued in his offensive attitude to the Lord He would have cut him off. To continue excusing oneself for giving personal offence reveals a hard and heedless heart, condoning its own sin and holding others in contempt. This degenerate heart attitude exalts self and despises others and is most reprehensible and inexcusable before God; it is the clearest indication of pride. Souls must be loved and won despite their defects and we can never win anyone by constantly offending them.

Pressing His teaching further the Lord reintroduces one of His favourite themes — the shepherd and his sheep. Commencing

with the question 'how think ye?' to alert them to their responsibilities, He then proceeds to outline a situation familiar to them all. A man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray; he immediately leaves the ninety and nine and goes in search of the one that is lost, and if he finds it he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the ninety and nine which went not astray. There was nothing unusual about that, it was happening constantly; 'don't you think that is how it should be?' He is asking. He did not wait for an answer. They all knew what He was saying and that He was right. Contrary to giving offence to people and being content to lose them, we all ought to be out seeking and finding the lost. It may be surprising, even shocking to some, that Jesus should speak of leaving the majority and going after one, but every shepherd

does so and isn't that the natural course to take?

His words are generally interpreted in context of His own good shepherd heart, but He was not speaking then in that context. He is really saying we all ought to have a shepherd heart concerned for others. 'See that none is missing', He is saying, 'Go after the lost. If necessary leave those that are safe; seek the strays'. This should alert us to the danger of current notions now spreading erroneous ideas in some churches, suggesting that the Lord's present concern is only with perfecting the bride for His coming. By the parable He corrects the selfish notion; He has always been concerned about that, but no more now than ever and certainly not more exclusively now. There is nothing better or given more

priority or considered more important to Christ than seeking and finding the lost.

How Much More Should You

The Lord's final teaching in Galilee about the Church is once more precipitated by Peter: 'Lord how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, seven times?' The question is reflexive and self-justifying. What great changes God must work in the human heart ere it can function properly in Christ's Church. There is little doubt Peter was very sincere but he phrased his question to imply that he was wanting to be, if not actually being, very generous and gracious; he felt that all his fellow-apostles, and his brother particularly, had sinned and trespassed against him quite unjustly. He had perceived that, in common with his fellow-apostles, there had been jealousy in his brother Andrew's heart against him over the Lord's

gratuitous promise of the keys of the kingdom to him. Then the incident of the tribute money had highlighted how offended they had been over imagined ideas of greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

Andrew had indeed needed Peter's forgiveness on those issues and presumably he had received it; what Peter was now seeking was some clarification; he was seeking some direct teaching concerning the whole matter of repentance and forgiveness among them: are there any limits to forgiveness? The Lord's earlier teaching had made clear that the only sin which can prevent a brother from being forgiven is refusal to receive the word in a spirit of penitence. Though love abound and grace be shown, without repentance no-one can be forgiven personal offences, even by the most gracious heart, for, unless repentance

prepares the heart for the gift, it cannot be imparted. The great offence is to refuse to repent, for then love and grace are rejected and forgiveness can never be found.

Jesus' words had provoked many thoughts in Peter's mind; is it possible that a brother can sin against a brother too often to be forgiven? The Lord's answer to the suggestion in that question is 'no', ('I say not unto thee until seven times but until seventy times seven') and He tells a story which illustrates the point and shows His heart on the matter. The parable is about a king and his servants (not about Himself or themselves — He does not treat His servants in the manner described); He is seeking to illustrate a principle of divine truth by drawing upon an imaginary incident based upon facts well-known to them all. In His day earthly lords did the kind of thing He

describes so skilfully, so they easily understood what He was saying. It is a story about relationships — first between the lord and his servants and then between the servants themselves. Jesus is really saying that no man ought to think he can be so sinned against by his brother that he finds it impossible to forgive him. Every man has so greatly sinned against the Lord and has received such great forgiveness from Him, that immediately upon request he should be able to forgive anybody anything; the Lord can. An unforgiving spirit is, by the act and attitude described in the parable, declared to be an unrelenting spirit.

Breakdown in churches often occurs because of failure to appreciate that each member is labouring for the king in the kingdom of heaven on earth. Every member of a local church is a subject and servant of the king,

and at His coming shall render to Him an account of his stewardship. What the Lord is dealing with is indebtedness, that which we owe to each other. One of the hallmarks of a forgiven soul is a great sense of indebtedness and generosity. There is no servant of the Lord on this earth but that he owes his fellow-servants far more than he can ever repay. The basic debt is not a financial one, though the Lord uses monetary terminology. He is referring to greater debts than can be reckoned in cash. This is plainly brought out by the way He interchanged His words earlier when teaching them to pray. First He taught them to say, 'forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors'; commenting later on the request He substituted trespasses for debts, 'for if you forgive men their

trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you'.

Paul saw this clearly and said to the Romans, 'Ye are debtors', and 'I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise'. He knew that if he did not discharge his debt he would be trespassing against them, but like his Lord he was not talking of money. Finance could be involved in it of course, but indebtedness to each other lies in areas far greater than and very different from that. The Lord had previously asked them, 'what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' This unanswerable question had taught them the incalculable worth of one human soul. He implied that there is no exchange value for a soul and said that for a man to gain the world and lose his own soul would be the utmost folly. So valuable is the soul of man

to God that all the riches of the world are not to be compared with it; a man's soul is the most precious thing he has.

So it is that when He wishes to make His Peters and Andrews understand the abnormality of unforgiveness in His kingdom, and its abomination in His sight, the Lord introduces the horrible idea of selling a man and his wife and his children and all he has so that repayment may be made. The king in His parable is purely imaginary of course: as mentioned before, this king and lord is not Himself, but Jesus the prince of teachers is drawing upon His knowledge of the age in which He lived. In those days wealthy men bought and sold slaves; heathen lords had, and in some parts still do have, ultimate power over fellow human beings, acquiring and disposing of them at will, even unto death. The Lord

sketches the background of His teachings with skill, highlighting the great difference between the attitude and actions of the imaginary king and those of his slaves; the king, though a despot, could be compassionate and merciful, but the slave was the exact opposite.

The point Jesus was making was that because He had forgiven Peter (and indeed every one of them) all his sins, he ought, upon request, to freely forgive his fellow-servant without reservation and for the same reasons. Forgiveness among us must flow from being forgiven; receiving compassion, we must be compassionate. The Lord, by the parable, seeks to generate in us a holy fear of being possessed of a hard, bitter, unforgiving spirit. To be unforgiving and without compassion toward one another is to be regarded by us as being

unforgivable. He was not so much giving doctrinal teaching about judgement and eternal punishment as giving an illustrated answer to Peter's question. Doing so, He also gave an unmistakable definition of His own attitude toward men, namely instant forgiveness upon request, not on the grounds of people's deserts, but of His own compassion. At the same time He also revealed to Peter, and to all, that He is expecting every one of His servants to behave in like manner among themselves. We must all remember that we have to render our personal account to Him, not only about our indebtedness to Him, but our indebtedness to each other as well.

Beside this, by the parable the Lord also gives insight into the importance of repentance. The servant who was finally punished knew no repentance. He knew his

lord's forgiving spirit and besought his mercy and grace, but he never repented; if he had done so he would have had mercy on others. Instead he received mercy and forgiveness from his lord without any intention of forgiving his equals. He illustrates evil developed to the unforgivable degree; he gave offence to all, his lord, his fellow-servants, his victim and to all sense of decency. The Lord taught us to pray 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us', and this parable is told to illustrate the reverse working of that principle. Not in vain was John Baptist sent to Israel before Jesus, preaching repentance; 'bring forth fruits meet for repentance' he said. One of these fruits is mercy, another is compassion, producing correct attitudes toward brethren and fellow-servants and little ones and above all the Lord.

Repentance for the remission of sins is not just a wish for forgiveness. It is a total change of mental attitude about self and toward God and fellow-men.

We must all beware of the spirit of unforgiveness which justifies itself from forgiving someone and feeds on texts of scripture which seem to support the attitude. But it is all a pretence. Forgiveness is nothing if not bestowed spontaneously from the heart. Rising above all personal hurt, ignoring all affronts to dignity, we all must forgive one another freely and fully upon request. Paul asserts that goodness leads to repentance; we must beware of thinking that repentance leads to (invites or deserves) goodness, for that altogether contradicts the plain statement of scripture. The lord in the parable told by the Lord forgives upon profession without demanding

repentance. The Lord often did it, though not always (see Luke 5:18-26 and 7:36-50).

Repentance demanded of another is nothing other than a demand for recognition of sinnership and right and superiority if not lordship. Preparedness to forgive without demand to first see immediate or permanent change is the essence of love; few there be that attain to it. Spurious Christ-likeness based upon wrongly interpreted texts is one of the present scourges of the churches. On the day of crucifixion Jesus pleaded with His Father to forgive His tormentors and murderers without repentance — wonder of wonders — 'Go and do thou likewise'.

An earthly king may be deceived about attitudes and misguided in his judgement, but the Lord is not, neither must Peter or anyone else be. The fullness of love and

wealth of grace which delights to forgive is godlike — it is a nature and attitude quite unmistakable in whomsoever it is found. A word of forgiveness to a needy heart dispels a lifetime of sins, but salvation from the nature of sin that caused it may only be granted to the truly penitent. 'I will pay thee all', brings absolution from all debt, with no re-imposition of sentence if we truly repent. The Lord, by the parable, has said more than the actual words and by doing so has laid bare the spirits of men.

Let us love everlastingly and forgive eternally; Jesus is the Christ building His Church. Straying sheep must be found lest they perish, the offended must be apologised to ere they fall, brethren must be gained despite their trespasses; prisoners must be freed and all libertines bound; the despised must be loved and children valued

aright and all sins against one another must be forgiven. The Church must be built, souls must be gathered into that name, Jesus must be in the midst and Father over all. What a concept for the Church Jesus Christ is building!

Chapter 2 — A RESURRECTION CHURCH

The great difficulty facing New Testament authors when writing about the Church was the total lack of direct reference to it in their Old Testament scriptures. They did not have the same difficulty when writing their Gospels, for their subject matter, though not directly stated, was referred to copiously in Moses and the Prophets. When it came to the Church, however, they found it almost impossible to discover anything like the comparable amount of statements about it. Paul, for instance, found he could quite easily show from the Jewish scriptures that Jesus was indeed God's Christ, but could not so easily prove from them that the Church is similarly God's. This difficulty arose because nowhere in the Old Testament is the Church directly referred to as such. Instead it would

have been surprising indeed if it had, for as he said, the Church is the mystery hidden from ages and generations; it was the unrevealed secret of God not released to the writers of the Old Testament. The New Testament was given by God partly to reveal that secret.

If They Reject Me They Will Reject You

While it is true that the Jews were expecting their long-promised Messiah, it is just as true that they were not expecting the Church. It is now common knowledge that they quite unwarrantably rejected both Christ and His Church and still do so to this day. They had no scriptural ground or commonsense reason for doing either but reason would that if the former were done, then the latter was inevitable, indeed only logical. They could not accept the Church and continue to reject Jesus Christ, for it is

His and if the Church be built there is no plainer proof that He is alive, for He alone is the builder of it.

One of the sights of London is St. Paul's Cathedral; it is one of the greatest tourist attractions in the city and the acknowledged masterpiece of Christopher Wren's art. No-one who sees it would ever think of denying that Christopher Wren had been born and lived to become the great architect who designed, even if he did not build, the cathedral, (especially as there are so many other lesser buildings in the city which also testify to his skill). If the design of the great cathedral be accepted as Wren's work, so also must Wren himself be accepted; he cannot possibly be denied if his work be accepted. So it is with the Church; Christ cannot be denied if His workmanship be recognized — they stand or fall together.

The Jews knew this, and the book of the Acts of the Apostles furnishes proof that they refused to admit that the Church is Christ's building, and in so doing they provided themselves with all the excuse they needed to deny Christ also. From their point of view there was no certain proof that the Jesus they had crucified was alive. None of them had seen Him and to them this was tantamount to proof of the exact opposite of the apostles' claims. Certain of their compatriots testified to having met Him since His death; some claimed to have handled Him and to have held conversations with Him, and even said that He had eaten in their presence. But no-one except those who had been His followers said these things, and to the Jews their testimony was unreliable. If He was indeed alive, why hadn't He appeared to others as well as to

His admirers? Why hadn't any of His enemies seen Him?

The authorities utterly rejected the idea — to them all the evidence was circumstantial; only the Church seemed to know the Church; to the authorities it was all too coincidental and highly suspicious. In any case, to the Jews there was no need for any other chosen company beside Israel on the earth; according to their theology they alone were the people of God. The Messiah was theirs, He was coming to them and would set up His kingdom for them and no-one else. According to their interpretation of scripture in the light of prevailing conditions when He came there would be a period of restoration. They were prepared for a certain amount of necessary revision, but mainly the Messiah would redeem them from all the evil of Roman occupation and

oppression. Their Messianic hope was that He would establish an earthly kingdom for them rather like paradise in which they would dwell under His benign rule as the premier nation on earth.

When this Jesus of Nazareth had first begun His preaching and teaching among them it seemed for a while that He could possibly be the Messiah they envisaged, but it soon transpired that He was not. They had been mistaken in Him and disappointed. The common people heard Him gladly — they were carried away by His miracles but they did not know the law so how could they judge? It was His spiritual emphasis that had worried them. He seemed to find fault with everything they said and did, criticising their leadership, challenging their judgements and generally making the people dissatisfied with them. On one occasion Nicodemus,

their top religious teacher and foremost interpreter of scripture, visited Him to investigate His claims and was told by Him that he must be born again; ridiculous! What did He mean? And in any case why did Nicodemus of all men need to be born again? He was a Jew wasn't he? Why did a man born a Jew and as good and learned as he need a second birth? He was already ideally suited, as well as absolutely right to have a place in the Messianic kingdom, wasn't he? The whole idea was preposterous. But Jesus was the Christ, and as He later told Pilate His kingdom was not of this world at all; sadly enough by then He was already rejected, betrayed by His own. Since He who was so scripturally authenticated was so unwarrantably rejected, it was inevitable that His Church would be rejected too. They more than He,

for there is no direct statement in the Old Testament which can be proved to be written of the Church. Therefore when we read about it in the New Testament we find a great scarcity of references to the Old Testament; the writers could not find many scriptures of the same unmistakable order they discovered when writing or speaking of the Lord Jesus. There are many which have been applied to the Church, but unless this had been done by the authors we should not have known their meaning. Of course, since the Church is the new creation of Christ, this is to be expected, but it left the New Testament writers without power of verification of their statements in the eyes of the Jews.

An Everlasting Kingdom

This is why all the apostles, without exception, sought to establish three things:

(1) the authenticity of Jesus Christ; (2) the authenticity of the resurrection; (3) the authenticity of the outpouring of the Spirit. This they did in two ways, first by referring to the scriptures and secondly by reference to themselves; the scriptures witnessed to Him and these things, and so did they.

However, they did hark back to the Hebrew scriptures when speaking of the Church, and rightly so, for although there is no verse which speaks of it directly, there are many which refer to it indirectly and may be used for that purpose. As an instance of this we may cite the verse in Psalm 22 which says, 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee'. The latter part of this verse is both translated and interpreted by the writer to the Hebrews as, 'in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee'. Here the word

Church is substituted for congregation and the word sing is inserted before praise.

Beside the fact that the writer was inspired to do so, this is a most natural, as well as a perfectly legitimate interpretation. Beyond challenge the psalm is Messianic: it is an inspired preview of the cross and the Lord's inner conflicts there. Given this fact, it is a matter of logic that the congregation next mentioned, following Christ's death and resurrection, is the Church. This is clear, since He describes this company as His brethren, for neither Israel nor the innumerable company of angels are ever accorded that privilege. Without making it his chief aim, the writer to the Hebrews, in course of his epistle, makes abundantly clear that the holy brethren of Christ are His Church. Certain it is that as far as His contemporaries in His own nation were

concerned, they did not want to be known as His brethren, their action showed it to be the last thing they wanted; they crucified Him.

To the writers of the New Testament, the Church was revealed in the Old Testament entirely by apostolic hindsight. As the testimony of Jesus' disciples was clarified and later written down, it became obvious that the Lord had quite deliberately fostered the idea of brotherhood among the disciples. This is specially discernible in John's Gospel, where the words of Jesus to the apostles in the upper room and to Mary at the mouth of the open tomb are recorded. Matthew also reveals how Jesus earlier introduced the idea of this new relationship to a house-gathering in the words, 'Behold my mother and my brethren', at the same time stretching forth

His hand toward His disciples. As we have already seen, it was in context of Church teaching that He spoke of 'gaining thy brother'. In light of this, Jesus' clear statement to Nicodemus becomes very relevant to all, 'ye must be born again'.

So it was that in the beginning the disciples entered the new era with expectations along the lines of brotherhood in a new family.

When He rose from the dead and onward for the next forty days, the Lord continued His instructions to them in relationship to His intentions for the future. There is no record that during this period He ever mentioned the Church as such. He did give infallible proofs of His identity, commanded the apostles not to depart from Jerusalem, spoke of things pertaining to the kingdom of God and told them to go into all the world and preach the gospel, making disciples of

all men. He also promised to be with them always, even unto the end of the age, and instructed them to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, but He never used the word Church. He fully intended to build it as He had said earlier, but did not specifically say so then. He spoke of the kingdom of God, of baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, of enduement with power, of preaching to every creature, of going into all the world. His words, though not the same, were quite as definite; His aim was to give them a different concept of the Church, a larger vision of God, a higher motive for living than they had hitherto held; they were to be witnesses unto Him to a greater degree. They who were to baptise others were themselves to be baptised in the Holy Ghost He said; apparently the new

era could not commence until that happened. Jesus knew all along that He could not build His Church except in the Holy Ghost. The Church of Christ is the Church of God and can only exist in the kingdom of God; He had as good as said so to Nicodemus.

From the beginning He had instructed His disciples to pray for Father's kingdom to come, and when telling them His parables about the kingdom of heaven had slipped in the truth about the righteous shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father: 'who hath ears to hear let him hear', He said: what He had said was important. Later He had sought to impress on them the necessity of asking Father for the Holy Ghost, 'He will give the Holy Ghost to everyone that asks Him', He assured them. Finalizing His teaching about Him, He said,

'Ye shall be baptised in the Holy Ghost', adding, 'Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you'. God had not planned a Church outside the Holy Ghost, it was impossible anyway; the Church is God's and can only have being in His kingdom; it cannot exist anywhere else at all.

As long as this age shall last the Church shall have partial existence on this earth. By far the greater number of its members, including the Head Himself, have been here and have already departed. We only sojourn here for a temporary period. During its time here it should enjoy kingdom of heaven blessings as befits it, for beside living and moving and having being in Him, in common with all other creatures, the Church is also in benefit of all the extra providence of being in the Spirit on earth. It was therefore inevitable that at the dawning of the new

day of earth's history, the disciples should be thinking of the Church in terms of a kingdom. Jesus had taught them to pray, 'Thy kingdom come', therefore before they were baptised into being as the Church they asked Him, 'Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'

It was a perfectly natural question only to be expected, so without rebuking them He corrected and redirected their thinking: 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which God hath put in His own power but ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me ... unto the uttermost part of the earth'. The Church is comprised of many witnesses; each one of them is filled with the eternal spirit and life of Christ; both individually and corporately they are Christ's living, eternal witness in the earth. Yes, the

apostles should live in God's kingdom, but not in the way they thought; Christ's Church was not going to be Israel's kingdom but God's.

God had given the kingdom to Israel once, intending that they should 'be above and not beneath', 'the head and not the tail', but they had disappointed Him. With powerful hand and an outstretched arm He took them to Canaan, that they should turn Canaan into Israel, but instead Israel became Canaan. Throughout most of their history Israel proved powerless to do what God wanted. Why then should the disciples think they would turn Rome into Israel, especially now they knew their King was not going to remain on the earth with them? No, the kingdom they envisaged was not the one Jesus spoke of — theirs was small, territorial and national; His was great, spiritual and

international. They had at first visualized a Messiah with a sword like David's, having the wisdom of Solomon, administering the law of Moses in the power of Elijah under the anointing of an Isaiah. What they envisaged for their Messiah and His kingdom forty days after the resurrection who can tell? Whatever it was it was wrong, for they had no idea of what the Baptism in the Spirit would do to them, and when it did happen they could not immediately interpret it aright.

God — Outpoured and Given

Everything turned on the planned advent of the Holy Spirit. Of all the things that happened on the day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit was of far greater importance than the baptism in the Spirit they experienced. The outpouring of the Spirit was nothing other than the gifting of

the third person of the Trinity to men; the most important thing was not that He was given to anyone, but that He was gifted by God. It could be written of Him, as it is written of Jesus, 'God so loved the world that He gave the one and only Holy Ghost'. What is true of the Holy Ghost is as true of Jesus also. The epochal event we celebrate at Christmas is not that Mary brought forth her firstborn son, but that God gave His Son. The virgin was necessary to the event and by it she became unique in history, but immeasurably greater than that, by His birth God created a new epoch in eternity; He had given His Son. Similarly, when the one hundred and twenty were baptised in the Spirit and the Church was born, the event was unique, but in importance it was not to be compared with the fact that at that time the Holy Ghost was outpoured.

On the day of Pentecost God moved on into yet another era of time and another phase of activity according to His eternal plans. Whatever else began on that day, the establishment of the Church, the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth, the commencement of God's family, call it what you will, none was so great as the gifting and coming of God the Holy Ghost. 'God so loved that He gave' is probably one of the most wonderful statements in all literature. Without oversimplification the whole of the Old Testament revelation could be contracted into its opening phrase, 'In the beginning God made', and the entire New Testament compressed into 'God so loved that He gave'. Combined, the two declare, 'God is'; the message of the Book is — 'God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost'. Failure to grasp this has

caused many to make great and grievous mistakes.

Over-emphasis of the birth of Christ has led to the heretical elevation of the virgin above God's Son in many quarters; she was very blessed but she was only the vessel in which Jesus' body was formed; similarly and equally lamentably also, in many parts the Baptism of the Spirit has become more important than the Spirit in Whom the Baptism takes place. There is a complete reversal of roles here though; in the former that which is being formed is regarded as being less than the person in which it is being created. In either case, the birth or the baptism is of far less importance and significance than the persons of the Godhead involved in the event. Both events were epochal: the first because it was the birth of Godhead into humanity, the second

because it was the baptism of humanity into God. All other things that surround or are associated with these amazing events are only significant because of these glorious facts. Though they are related to them and have an importance, they are quite subordinate to them and must therefore never in any way be promoted beyond their relevance.

Perhaps one of the major faults of modern church teaching is failure to present the death of Jesus Christ as it ought to be taught. We must realise and preach afresh the fact that Jesus died to remove all the reasons why God could not justly give the Holy Spirit to men. Just as it required the miracle of virgin conception and birth in order that God may give His Son, so it needed the miracle of the death and resurrection and the return of that Son to

Him in order that He could give the Holy Spirit. All these miracles had to be accomplished before the Church could be built, for apart from them it could not exist. The Church is the Church of God, that is of the whole Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; it belongs to and exists only as a result of the persons and work of all three members of the blessed Trinity: the Father begets each member of it, the Son builds each one into it, the Holy Spirit is He in whom it is built. At once it becomes apparent that individual reception of the gift of the person of the Holy Ghost is of far greater importance to anyone than any other related experience he or she may know.

Among the Old Testament prophets, both Isaiah and Joel speak of this outpouring of the Spirit, though in different ways. Peter

familiarised the Church with Joel's prophecy immediately the Church was born. His famous phrase 'this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel' has become the term of reference and identification for almost every Pentecostal church in the world. It is the most easily identifiable, and perhaps the most quoted of all Old Testament and New Testament scriptures relating to the Baptism in the Spirit; it is very important for that reason, but even so it has no more importance than any other. Isaiah's great words on the subject are of equal importance with those of his lesser-known compatriot and were written some three centuries before Joel's more renowned words. They are connected with Joel's prophecy concerning the epochal gifting of the Spirit by the word 'pour' — 'I will pour water on him that is thirsty and floods upon

the dry ground', 'I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed'. Later Isaiah changes his first figurative reference to the Spirit from 'water' to 'wine and milk without money and without price'; this is an expansion of the original idea, for by different biological processes both wine and milk are derivations from water. Both speak of the same event and cover the same period of time, but though Joel's prophecy is more detailed than Isaiah's, Isaiah's prophecies are far more basic and comprehensive than Joel's.

What we are observing here is a common feature of Bible prophecy. Generally in scripture the earlier in time a prophecy is given the more brief, basic and fundamental it is, while those made later in time and nearer to the event spoken of are fuller in content and more expansive in detail. As an

example of this we may take the prophecies made concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Himself. The first was spoken by God Himself directly to Adam, 'the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head'. Nothing could be more basic and brief than that; it is absolutely fundamental and utterly comprehensive. Compared with Isaiah's prophecies given thousands of years afterwards about the virgin conceiving and bearing a son and the further complementary detail later given of Christ's crucifixion, the Genesis statement is insignificant for size and content, but who will say which is the more important?

Discounting for the moment Jesus' and John Baptist's prophecies about the Holy Spirit recorded in the New Testament, Joel's was the most recent of the Old Testament statements about His gifting and the results

of His coming. It is not therefore surprising that Peter should refer to it, for not only was it the most recent, it was also the most detailed. The most marked difference between the two prophecies is that Isaiah's have to do with life while Joel's deal with ministry and service. Isaiah speaks of sons and daughters springing up like willows by the watercourses, and later links invitations to come thirsty to the waters and poverty-stricken to the wine vats and milk churns with questions about 'labouring for life' On the other hand Joel's word is frankly to do with exhibitions and demonstrations of the miraculous — prophecies, dreams, visions, wonders and signs in earth and heaven.

Isaiah's writings have great affinity with John's, whose Gospel has to do with life, and who records Jesus' statements about the Holy Ghost and living waters; Joel's find their

affinity with the synoptic Gospels and John Baptist's heraldic declarations of a baptism with fire. In keeping with this, John says comparatively little about Jesus' works, while each of the other Gospel writers make much of them. Whether presented prophetically by Old Testament writers or reported historically by New Testament biographers, both aspects of the Holy Spirit's function and works are vital to the Church, the one for its life and the other for its ministry. Both have to do equally with the kingdom of God: Isaiah treats of it in earthly figures as the sphere of God's rule, while Joel emphasizes more the sovereignty of God as He moves with power in the whole universe. Both deal with the outpouring of the Spirit and its results, placing emphasis more on the outpouring than on its effects.

Second in importance to that epochal event is the initial gift of that same divine person to a human person. This is by far the most important event in any individual's life and is spoken of by Paul as the sealing of the Spirit. This gifting of the Holy Spirit to a person seals that soul as being totally redeemed, properly converted, thoroughly justified, utterly saved, completely regenerate, entirely sanctified and instantly baptised into Christ and His Church. The Holy Spirit is Himself the Seal of all this and being given to us, assures it all unto us.

There could be no gifting of the Spirit by God apart from His being given to persons.

Analytically we may think of Him as being given, apart from being received, but in the beginning it could not be so. That is why Jesus was so insistent that His disciples tarry in Jerusalem — He must be received. The

reason for such powerful insistence is this: in the eternal being of God each person of the Trinity is as dependent upon the other two for life as they upon Him; none of them have personal life except by unity in one being. Each must have distinct personal existence and at the same time share common being. Because the Holy Ghost by nature cannot exist apart from having being in another as well as in Himself, it was quite anti-God that He should be given and not given to someone. This is not to imply that He depends upon human beings for His existence — He does not — it is to show that when imparting eternal life God acts according to eternal laws in all He does. He always moves in harmony with unchanging principles of life, and can do no other. The only things impossible for God to do are things inconsistent with His being and

nature; for instance He cannot sin or deny Himself or He would cease to be God.

Therefore when dealing with men He acts absolutely in conformity with the laws and principles of His own being.

That is why on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit, being outpoured, was also given to men. Maintaining His being in the Father and the Son, He also takes up residence in every person being saved, thereby uniting them with God and establishing in them the communion without which eternal life is impossible. The Church is God's new creation; the three persons achieved it between them; it took the presence, activity and energies of all. This new creation was no more the work of one person of the Godhead than was the first creation. When we sing 'The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord', we sing absolutely

truly, but when we sing 'She is His new creation by water and the word', we are only expressing a part of the truth, for He is only one of the Trinity engaged in the work.

The Promise of the Spirit

Too readily we do God disservice by elevating one person of the blessed Trinity above another when we ought to give full credit to each. Giving Christ the glory for our salvation is right and proper, but in doing so, let us remember that He Himself said He was sent by His Father to accomplish the work for Him. He constantly gave the glory and credit for all things to Him, saying His glory was given Him by His Father and crying out, 'Father glorify thy name', or 'glorify thou me with the glory I had with thee before the world was. John says of Him, 'we beheld His glory, the glory as of an only begotten with a father, full of grace and

truth'. Jesus' glory was to glorify the Father and the Spirit's glory is to glorify the Son, that He in turn may glorify the Father.

Peter makes very clear that the risen and ascended Jesus 'shed forth this which ye now see and hear' as a result of 'having received of the Father the promise of the Spirit'. Peter had also heard what John had heard and later records — 'If you love me keep my commandments and I will pray the Father and He shall give you another comforter, even the Spirit of Truth that proceedeth from the Father that He may abide with you for ever'. Pentecost was the fulfilment of that promise. God had prompted Isaiah and Joel to write of it and its results, but the promise was made for the Church before a single member of it was born and before it was written down for Israel to read.

Again we are on the same ground of eternal truth; what is of prime importance is that the promise was made. It is not so much the fact that the promise was made to the Church, but that it was made as part of God's plan and commitment. God made the promise to Himself. In giving the Holy Ghost God was being true to Himself. Beyond being true to His word, God was true to a promise made in heaven before there was an Isaiah or a Joel to write it, leave alone a Peter to draw attention to what the prophet wrote. The most important factor about the day of Pentecost was that it proved the integrity of God; it showed the Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was at that time inviolably whole and wholesome, and that God's probity was utterly dependable then as it ever was and still is today.

God is as true and upright in unrecorded eternity as in history. God promised Himself He would do something and He did it — He is utterly dependable and trustworthy. When no other ear heard or eye saw, when there was no other to know what He did or said, and therefore no-one to judge or to prove or disprove anything, God made promises and commitments about man to Himself. Setting things in motion He made worlds, started stars on courses, fixed circuits, set times, agreed participations and activities for each person of the Godhead, and worked out the whole scheme of men's salvation. The original promise of the Spirit was made in course of those counsels — it was made by the Father to the Son with the consent of the Holy Spirit. The Son was Messiah designate before He was known on earth as Christ Jesus; it was agreed prehistorically in

heaven and unto the fulfilment of it He was born on earth. He lived and died and rose again here and ascended to the throne again to receive of the Father the promise of the Spirit on behalf of the sons of men.

He had taken back to His Father a perfect manhood and had no need to ask for the Spirit on His own behalf, but knowing that His human life and perfection had only been possible because of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, He knew that it was completely impossible for ordinary men to live eternal life on earth except they too had the Holy Spirit. As a man Jesus knew the Spirit of God in many ways, some of which could be listed as follows: He was born of the Spirit, anointed of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, led of the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, did miracles by the Spirit, spoke by the Spirit, offered Himself to God by the Spirit

and was raised from the dead by the Spirit. At different times He exhorted His disciples to ask for and receive the Spirit, said He would send the Spirit, told them to baptise in the name of the Spirit and also promised He would baptise them in the Holy Spirit, 'Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you' He said, 'And ye shall be witnesses unto Me' — presumably He meant that we should experience what He experienced, that is, that we should be made like unto Him. Surely there is no other way men can prove Jesus' words both to themselves and angels and devils and men.

A Miraculous People

God wants a Church comprised of people who are all witnesses unto Jesus, God's representative man, and each pointing to Him, directing people's thinking, ideas and convictions unto Him, God's ideal man. This

cannot be done by just anyone or with lip and finger; only those whose lives are explicable and understandable because of Jesus, those who have been created of God by Him and are obviously His workmanship, can do it. These are a people for whom there is no other reasonable explanation than Jesus Christ the power of God. God is a miracle to human minds and so must His people be. If there is a natural human explanation for the Church, then there has never been a true Church; the Church is a company of supernatural people. Physically they are as normal as any of their fellow human beings, but spiritually the Church is not normal except by heavenly standards. Each member formerly existed on the earth by the same means and in the same manner as any other person, but through spiritual conversion leading to regeneration, their old

manner of life finished and a new one began. Beside their generation by human parents, each one of them has been generated by spiritual parents also, namely the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Every Church member is generated from above on to the earth, a new spiritual being. To belong to the Church this is absolutely necessary, because no-one's regeneration coincides with his or her natural birth. The Lord says, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit'. By this He means us to understand that every human being has a dual birth into this world — one part visible and the other invisible. That which is visible is of the flesh and that which is invisible is of the spirit — these two combine in every human birth. It is impossible to have human generation without spiritual generation; flesh cannot

exist in this world apart from spirit indwelling it. It is the presence of the spirit within that gives life to the body. The human father of the child is generally known by all aware of the birth, but the spiritual father is not.

It is generally believed that when the Lord made the above statement He was referring to what is known as first birth and second birth; the text is almost invariably preached that way and indeed that interpretation is correct. But it is also limited; the Lord was saying far more than that, He was both propounding the fact of human birth in two elements, and at the same time stating the ground of need for new birth. When we were born of flesh we were born of fallen flesh, therefore and at the same time we were born of the fallen spirit, satan, also. As a human body cannot come into this world

apart from a human father, neither can a human spirit enter this world without a spiritual father. Jesus Himself identified the spiritual father of mankind in these words 'Ye are of your father the devil', and in another place, 'ye are from beneath, I am from above, ye are of this world, I am not of this world'. When He was born into the world He was an absolutely unique child; absolutely unique from all eternity, He was and is God the Son uncreated, co-equal with the unique Father and the unique Spirit; He was and is and shall ever be one unique God with them.

Doubtless we shall forever be unable to comprehend the mystery of God. It is equally certain we shall be unable to fathom the depths of the mystery of the incarnation; what questions crowd the mind. For instance how was it possible for the great

and eternal Son to lay aside His infinite greatness in order to become a human being? How did He succeed in doing that? That is the greatest miracle of the incarnation — how was it possible for God to become man? To come to a man already in being, take him over and indwell him is a more feasible proposition; to appear on earth as an already grown man is equally feasible. To come in the vicarious form of an angel of the Lord is a far more credible thing to the human mind, but to be born of a woman — a virgin! How could God possibly become so infinitesimally small as to be almost non-existent, fuse and identify with a woman's seed and pass through all the processes of human birth into life?

Wonder of wonders, truly not the birth but the conception of the babe was the unique miracle. How did that happen? How did God

generate the flesh of that babe? He was incomprehensibly made man. God was the originator of the flesh as well as the father of the spirit of Jesus. He was absolutely unique, God the original Spirit manifest in the flesh; God the Son became the human Son of God and Son of Man; the Christ became Jesus. By His own testimony He was the Life, the Resurrection and the Life. 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven', He said, 'he that eateth me shall live for ever'. So utterly pure and wholesome is He that when referring to our spiritual diet He actually included His flesh; we must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Almost the entire company that heard Him say that rebelled against it and left Him. It was strong meat, too strong for them, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they strove among themselves. 'The flesh profiteth

nothing', He said, 'the words I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life'. That was more understandable, and then 'the bread which I will give unto you is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world'. They were confounded. The life He lived in flesh was exactly the same as the life He lived in spirit — ethically and morally there was no difference, none at all; He and Father were one; before their eyes He was as perfect in the flesh as God was in the Spirit. To have life we must accept the fact that His God-life and His human life are one and the same and eat Him whole by faith. He, all of Him, is our food — His nature, His personality, His disposition, His attitudes, His words, His works, His ways, His habits; He is the feast provided by God for us. His flesh is as genuinely God as His spirit, because God was the father of it, and seeing He was not

speaking of the physical flesh when saying we must eat His flesh and drink His blood, we should be most grateful for the Gospels which provide accounts of His life and times in the body. We are not now confronted with the same kind of dilemma those people of old were confronted with. The spirit and life with which and in which He spoke are now given unto us; we should not need to struggle over His sayings as they did.

Paul provides us with the perfect revelation of truth about it all — 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me'. This is the only way a man may be said to be eating Christ's flesh; it can only be done by letting Him crucify our flesh to death so that He can live in it as His own. This He does, not

by destroying our physical body, but by annulling the power and subduing the effects of its sin — negating its propensities and living out His life in and through us. By doing this He makes our flesh as acceptable to God as His own. We must eat His flesh, imbibe His Spirit, learn of Him, until He is revealed in us as truly and as fully as He was in His own flesh and blood body two thousand years ago. Following our regeneration we must hunger and thirst for that life He lived in the flesh, eat and drink Him and make His life our mental aesthetic and emotional sustenance.

Father of the Lie

The children of God are a new race of people on the earth — they are born of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They have not gone back again into their mother's womb and been born again

physically, but have been born spiritually from above, and can say with Jesus, 'I am from above'. They were from beneath, their father was the devil, they did the lusts of their father, liars in substance as he from the beginning because they were fathered into the world a lie from him. This may not be easily understood at first, and therefore may be unacceptable to some, because even when unsaved lying was not a habit of theirs. These all must understand that when speaking thus, God is not referring to a particular person's habits, but to all human nature. Because Jesus was begotten entirely of God, He only was entire truth, and could say He was that. It does not matter who he is or what breeding a man may claim after the flesh, or to what degree of honesty he may have attained in speech or conduct — because he is not a son of God he is a lie in

this world. Spiritually he was begotten of the liar the devil, physically he was born of fallen flesh, ethically he was begotten and conceived of the lie spoken in the garden, 'ye shall be as gods'.

All humanism has that lie as its root and heathendom has the liar himself as its god; in fact satan is the god of this whole world. Confident in this knowledge, the devil brazenly presented to Jesus the suggestion that He should fall down and worship him. The devil is both the original lie and the liar. He is the father of it all and is the god and father of every human being other than Christ born into this world. The lie simply stated is, 'it is possible to live independently of God'. That is a lie. Being begotten of the liar, man is born a lie, he exists in a lie; and as a lie, and apart from regeneration by God dies a lie to continue a lie for ever. He has

been a liar by life, for by the very act of unregenerate living he has propounded the myth that God is not, and has lived on God's earth in the kingdom of hell under king satan. This is that terrible state in which all men are conceived and born and are existing, against which John cries out, 'We know that the whole world lieth (asleep) in wickedness (the wicked one)'. Into this darkness, deception and death Jesus speaks, 'Ye must be born again', and it makes complete sense. Long centuries have rolled over the minds of men, erasing from them the facts of life, but not the effects of the lie, and except the God of truth had given us His Book and sent His Son, we should not have known we were existing in the devil's kingdom, dead to God. Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God' comes the word, 'Ye

must be born again', 'except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God'.

Now it is one thing to tell a man that, but quite another to make it possible to him.

That is why none of the Old Testament worthies from Abraham onward, or before Abraham for that matter, ever spoke of it.

New birth was not possible unto men before Christ, whether born under grace or law.

Until Christ came the new second man had never been seen on the earth, nor His language heard. When He came He brought in a whole set of new ideas and a new vocabulary, backed home by a new life. He was a new force in the earth, commanding everybody's attention and demanding everybody's response, provoking action for or against Him. 'I was born who and what I am, I did not attain unto it, nor was I trained into it, I am the Son of God, I was born; so

also must you be if you would become the children of God'. His body was so full of God, His praises, His worship, His life, that He called it a temple — 'Destroy this temple' He said, 'and in three days I will raise it again'.

If a man's body be anything other than a temple of God it is a synagogue of satan, a temple of idols, a tomb filled with effigies, masks, artifacts of eloquent death made worse for religious practices. Until He gives us life we all are dead, bound up in trespasses and sins for grave-clothes and entombed within our own bodies; therefore we must be born again. In order that this may be accomplished, God poured out the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. If He was going to bring in His kingdom and Christ Jesus was going to build His Church, He just had to do it, for neither can exist outside the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is not

territorial, neither is it in or of material things. It consists of a quality of spiritual life and soul-states in God the Holy Ghost. For this the spirit of man needs to be regenerated and his soul saved.

There is no way this can be done other than through the work Jesus accomplished on Calvary. Man cannot commence to live an entirely new life until his old life has been ended — they can neither be mixed nor divided within him. New life is only possible after death has taken place; it can only be resurrection life. Life cannot be imputed, it must be imparted. It cannot be superimposed upon an existing life as an addition to what a man already has; it is given to be a substitutionary life. It does not fuse with the old, it takes its place. Many blessings, each of them praiseworthy, may be given to a man as by imputation from and

because of the work of Christ at Calvary, but new life can only be imparted to a man by death and resurrection; these ultimate elements, more powerful than all Christ's works, must take place in every one. By this alone can any man be regenerated and enter into new life in the kingdom of God — there only the new-born children of God can live.

Each person so born of God the Father is built into the Church by Jesus Christ; He builds His Church of God's children only.

That is why Jesus made clear to Nicodemus that except a man be born of water and the Spirit he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God; 'Ye must be born from above', He said. So saying He gave notice of God's intention to outpour the Holy Spirit.

For God the Father can no more beget children apart from the person and work of the Holy Spirit than He can beget them apart

from the person and work of the Son. Later John records Jesus Christ as saying that they who believe on Him should receive the Holy Spirit who would pour forth from them like rivers. This accords with what the Lord said before His ascension, 'ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit', which itself was a confirmation of Cod's promise to Israel through John Baptist. This was an absolutely necessary procedure, for no-one is either alive or of the right quality to belong to that Church until he has received the Spirit.

Pentecost and the Spirit of the New Creation

God's plans for the Church are very different from anything He had prepared for any other people — they required and included the giving of the Spirit in an entirely new way. As Genesis 1 reveals, the Holy Spirit had been moving on the earth since the dawn of creation and He is still here in the same

providential role and capacity toward all men to this day. It can as truly be said of Him as it is written of Jesus, that 'without Him was not anything made that was made'. David saw this quite clearly and said, 'whither can I flee from thy Spirit?' No man can evade His omnipresent workings. Jesus made this plain by the prodigal's words upon his return from 'the far country' in the parable: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight'. If a man fly to the uttermost part of the universe or make his bed in hell the Spirit of God is there; from the commencement of time He is and has been everywhere present. Unrecognized by men and unspecified to them by God, He has always been the medium of life and breath and all providential blessings for all mankind.

When God created air-breathing animate bodies, He did so by the Spirit. When He inspirited Adam and Eve, He did so by the Holy Spirit, causing moulded dust to turn to bone and flesh and commence to breathe and become living souls. The Holy Spirit is indispensable to God and the universe and all that lives therein. 'He is with you', said Jesus to His unregenerate followers, but was not satisfied by that. He knew that the Spirit's unknown presence and power is not a sufficient condition for Church-building. He must be specified, recognized, received and known and honoured, and come fully into His own. He is an eternal and necessary member of the Godhead, equal with Father and Son and works in combination and co-operation with them for salvation and Church-building.

So important is the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus could not build His Church until He had died, risen again and left the earth clear for the Spirit to come. It was all a logical procedure, God had to create the right conditions for His purposes to be fulfilled; 'if I do not go the Comforter will not come', Jesus said, and in a few days quit the earth. All the Man Christ Jesus did on this earth He did as God for God in God and unto God; Calvary's fullest accomplishment and greatest work was wrought in the Spirit. What Christ wrought in and through the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, great and necessary though it was, in nothing outclassed or overshadowed that which He wrought in His spirit in the Holy Spirit. The physical sacrifice and bloodshed took but little time and filled only a tiny space, but its place and power in God and His redemptive

plan is immeasurable. The spirit and power in Jesus were those of the eternal Christ of God. All He accomplished in time as the Logos of the cross, though accomplished on earth was more importantly wrought in God. This is preserved in the Spirit and remains in power for God's use today and for all eternity. That is probably one of the chief reasons, if not the very chief reason, why the Holy Ghost needed to be poured out in a special way on all flesh. Without this no flesh could be regenerate; God knew it was impossible so He did not attempt it. Flesh and blood must have access to the Spirit for that which was wrought by the spirit of Jesus through His flesh and blood. What Christ accomplished is only available unto man today in the Holy Spirit.

Behold then the generosity of God; let us marvel at His wisdom and glory in His power.

He who withheld not His only begotten Son from death, upon receiving Him back gave also the Holy Spirit. Let us worship Him, the Father of glory, whose love spared not His pain to beget children. Suffering Son, who in Thy body bore the agony of the whole being of God, of the Father heart and groaning Spirit, yearning for children, help us to understand. O Eternal Word, spoken most clearly at Golgotha, Son of God and man, teach us by Thy Spirit where and wherein Calvary's power really lies; Son of Man, open our understanding to that death and resurrection that as Son of God Thou shouldst baptise sons of men into sons of God in Thy Church, in the Holy Spirit.

So it is that the Holy Ghost is come anew and spoken of in all His glory; as once He brooded over the deep that the word of the Father may be formed into this material

universe, so now He broods over the great deeps of Christ's Golgotha that men may be born and live in the kingdom of God. The Holy Ghost knows the profound intensity of desire lying in the heart of the Father and the unbearable travail of the Son's sacrifice equally well. He feels the fulness of all, and through the Son's offering brings forth from Father's heart the seed of God. For this reason He consented to come from God to men on a new mission, proceeding forth first from the Father to and through the Son in great heavenly outpouring. In one concerted act the Father, who promised and gave Him to His Son for this purpose, sent Him to men in Jesus' name and the Son who received Him from the Father continued the act in one unbroken procession, sending Him on from the Father to His waiting people. For the building of men into the Church of God

the Holy Spirit was channelled from the Father through the glorified Man Christ Jesus in one grand co-ordinated process.

Pentecost was a carefully directed operation; the outpouring was very limited indeed. It was not a universal breathing and moving as when in the beginning the Spirit hovered over the deep in darkness, waiting to bring forth cosmic light and create and envelop the earth with air for every living creature to breathe. Contrary to that, it was very contained and highly concentrated; it was as local and specific as creation's was broad and general; it needed to be. If we think of it as the counterpart of God's careful inbreathing into Adam of dust we shall be correct. This is why the Lord spoke of the Holy Ghost coming upon them; until then He had been here universally, doing His providential work around the whole earth;

the very breath men breathe, by which we all are inspirited at birth, is connected with Him.

Although introducing a different theme and speaking with more meaningful emphasis, this is virtually what Jesus said to the apostles in the communion chamber, 'He is with you and shall be in you'. With this in mind, God poured out the Holy Ghost very narrowly through Jesus in the beginning. True it is that Peter at that time quoted Joel as saying, 'It shall come to pass in the last days that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh', saith the Lord; Amen, so He will, but He did not do so all at once. Although the Spirit is wholly given, He is not poured out and given to the whole of mankind simultaneously. Doubtless He will be one day, that the earth may be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the

waters cover the sea, but it is by no means possible to say when that shall be.

Without directly saying so, the Lord gave notice of His intentions with regard to the outpouring of the Spirit when He promised His apostles they would be witnesses to Him 'in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth'.

Undoubtedly He was making promise according to a preconceived plan of operation, for that is exactly the procedure He followed when outpouring the Spirit. He did not outpour in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria all at once. There was a series of outpourings, each of them directly or indirectly connected with the first, but consecutive to it and less than it. The first outpouring spread abroad a little until all Jewry was included, then came the Samaritan baptism, followed afterwards by

the outpouring at Caesarea. Each was as sovereign and direct as it was limited and purposeful.

This method reveals a planned programme to which God is working. All flesh is scheduled for an outpouring from on high. We are now living in the days the Lord was thinking of when He spoke of 'the uttermost part of the earth', perhaps we may all agree that we are needing another visitation of the Lord. It is certain that the Church of God cannot be built at a speedy rate apart from that. Only those upon whom the Spirit falls and into whom He enters and in whom He remains can be (indeed are from that moment and by that reason) members of Christ's Church.

The Conclusions of Gamaliel

It is quite impossible to join the Church. Many attempted something of this nature in the beginning but failed; it is just as impossible today. Gamaliel, who was one of Jewry's most respected teachers at that time, seemed to have had some understanding of this. It is impossible to judge whether or not he fully grasped all that was going on, but there is no doubt he had some enlightenment on the inner workings of the Church. At that time the rapidly increasing spread of the Church in Judea was causing great alarm in Jerusalem. The authorities were quite unable to contain it; they tried propaganda, threats, imprisonment and beatings, but everything failed and they were afraid. Despite all these preventive measures, the apostles were filling Jerusalem with the gospel; the Church was flourishing on persecution. Wise

Gamaliel observed all this very closely and after much thought came to some very sane conclusions. He compared what was happening with a couple of previous religious movements he had either personally observed or had made it his business to investigate. Both these had occurred fairly recently and both of them had come to nothing. Speaking of the leader of one of them he said, 'About four hundred joined themselves to him, but he was slain and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought'. The other also foundered in a similar way; the leader was killed and the people dispersed.

Gamaliel, though a man of the world and a non-Christian, was very shrewd. He noted that there were certain similarities between these earlier movements and Christianity, for both the leaders of these former

movements had been slain, and that is what had happened to Jesus. He also knew that the one great insistence of the apostles was that Jesus was not dead but alive. Gamaliel never mentioned the resurrection though — it would have been imprudent to have done so, but following his process of reasoning allows the assumption that he may have believed more than he was prepared to say. Theudas and Judas, the respective leaders of the two earlier movements, died and were still dead. While they were alive the people had joined themselves to them, but when the leaders died the movements died also; it is impossible to join a dead man. Quite contrary to this, the Church had only sprung up since Jesus' death. When Jesus hung on the tree, all except one of His disciples and His mother forsook Him and at first it looked very much as though history was about to

repeat itself, for the Nazarene's followers had been dispersed also, but now things looked different. For every disciple that forsook Him at the Passover, there were now probably as many thousands, none of whom had formerly owned His name.

This Church was so different from those other groups, for it had formed since Pentecost — it was most unusual to say the least. Gamaliel, the famous doctor of law, was ready to believe that perhaps God was in it after all; if so he was right. If he had known it, not one of those multitudes had joined the Church, not only because they couldn't, but also because they wouldn't have dared to attempt it, they were too afraid. Gamaliel may not have penetrated this far into the phenomenon, but he was aware of it just the same, and advised caution in handling the leaders of the

present movement. The man had observed something inexplicable to him; it did not fit into his ideas or follow the usual pattern, nor could it, for Jesus was building His Church.

Two scriptures inform us of the method the Lord adopted when forming His Church. The first states that He 'added to the Church daily such as were being saved'; the second says that 'believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women'. To arrive at the correct order of saving truth we must reverse the order of the texts: no-one can be joined to the Lord. These two things happen simultaneously, but although one is impossible without the other, the former can only take place when the latter happens, for it is entirely contingent upon it. To be added to the Church is a great privilege, but to be added to the Lord is a much more marvellous

miracle; to whomsoever this is granted it is the miracle of all miracles. Every person added to the Church is a miracle and has been added by a miracle; indeed that person is only in that miraculous position as a result of a series of miracles of exceeding great magnitude. To understand this we could not do better than follow Peter's singularly powerful prophetic ministry when challenged at Pentecost.

As it was in the Beginning

Commencing with a brief testimony to his own experience, he goes on speedily to quote Joel at some length and, pausing only to speak briefly of Jesus, passes on to David's great prophecies concerning the Lord. Having done so and leaving David in the tomb, he points to Jesus alive on the throne shedding 'forth this which ye now see and hear; Jesus whom ye crucified is

both Lord and Christ', he cries. Pricked to the heart by such preaching, thousands of his hearers, feeling their guilt, begged to know what to do. They must save themselves without delay, disassociate themselves from their guilty generation, repent and be baptised in Jesus' name for the remission of their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit. With wholehearted belief and total commitment these men abandoned themselves to the word they heard, obeyed Peter's instructions and were thereby added to the Lord and by Him to the Church.

This is the only way for mankind — the way of the Christ, the Church, the apostles and the scriptures; since the newly-risen Lord Christ added to the Church this way in the beginning we may be sure there is no other way now. The true Church has continued like this without change from the beginning.

Anything on earth purporting to be part of the Church and existing other than this and by this means is not a scriptural church.

Reading of the amazingly rapid growth and spread of the Church, we become aware of two things: (1) its inclusiveness and (2) its exclusiveness. From its very natal day onward people of all nationalities were included into it; all those who were born again at Pentecost had previously been devout Jews by religion, if not by birth.

Many strangers of gentile extraction from far off lands were gathered in Jerusalem on that first great birthday at Pentecost. The reaping from then on was very wide and extensive, and also very exclusive; the gospel terms, though published freely everywhere, were very selective. Only those who obeyed without demur were included; there was room for no-one else. Once in the Church

they were soon taught that nearly all former religious practices must be deliberately abandoned. If the converts were from heathen backgrounds they were expected to forsake all former practices immediately and totally. Bible reading and prayer could remain, so could special fasting and alms-giving. Some things, such as circumcision, could not be erased from the flesh and so must remain, but it carried no privileges and must no longer be regarded as having any significance and certainly no importance. The Church is the new Israel of God; Jews are not a chosen class above gentiles now — all are equal here.

They did not know all these things immediately, so they had to learn them, but everybody had a great zeal for God and an equal desire for fellowship. With total simplicity 'they continued steadfastly in the

apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers'. It was the invariable result of being added to the Lord. It is perhaps a great pity that the translators interpolated the words, 'unto them' into the text, for they are not in the Greek, nor are they necessary to the verse. They may give some degree of fluency to the reading, and be thought to be beneficial because of that, but they are a sure indication of failure to understand the truest meaning and work of the Spirit inspiring Luke the historian. If any words were to be inserted at all, it would have been better to have made the text read, 'the same day were added to the Lord', and thus draw attention to the Lord rather than the Church. The primary insistence is that when souls are added to Him they continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine

and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers.

There is a fundamental principle governing all Church truth, namely this: the Church is Christ's. The Spirit was given to Him for the special reason that He should build His Church; He is the God-chosen head of it and He alone baptizes into it. Therefore every single person who becomes a member of it must first of all be added to Him; it is a love operation as well as a life and power operation. Added to Him first, we all in that act are added to the Church also, for the Church consists of no-one other than the company who specially belong to Him. As an instance of this we may cite the apostles, who we know are ensamples to the Church: these are always referred to as being Christ's apostles, not the Church's. They did belong

to the Church, but only in a secondary sense. Primarily they were His, not theirs.

This was so for all of the Church; miraculously added to the Lord they also found themselves added to one another in such a new way that the only word by which the relationship could be described was 'fellowship' or 'communion'. Beyond what was formerly possible to them by the bonds of mutually shared religion, in a new and unprecedented way 'all that believed were together and had all things common'.

Suitable to their relative states of being, they were on earth what God was, and still is, in heaven. God is a fellowship or communion of three persons living together in one, having all things common — they share everything, including the Church. Into this blessed estate men are called and baptised to enjoy God's eternal life in holy

communion or fellowship with one another equally; the Church, like God, is a communion.

This word communion is defined as 'the act of making common'; it describes an act rather than the state into which we are brought by that act. Paul tells us that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son; it is a most marvellous statement and may be put thus — we have been called by God into the Son's act of making us common with Him. This is such a wondrous thing, so breathtaking in suggestiveness that only with veiled eyes may we read it. So far as Christ was concerned it cost Him, Calvary. So far as we are concerned it requires the baptism in the Spirit. Before and far above all other, each person's communion must be with God. No-one can possibly have eternal life except by communion with God, and He

can only give a person eternal life by the act of making His Son the Son of man by the virgin; God incarnate was a fellowship, the highest example of union of God and man; O the wonder of it! Having accomplished His purposes thereby, God received His Son back again to heaven, and poured forth the Holy Ghost that Christ may baptise us into this eternal life. We men of earth are then made children of our heavenly Father.

The Eternal Fellowship

The apostle John clearly understood it this way; to him God was an eternal fellowship of life; he saw that there never had been any eternal life apart from eternal fellowship, so he had no difficulty in understanding the basis of life for the Church. He sums up everything in this way — we have fellowship with the Father and the Son and thereby have fellowship one with another. He never

uses the word Church in any of his writings. All he sees is a family of sons in fellowship of love with their Father and each other in a lost and hostile world. Except to emphasise the need for new birth he does not speak of the kingdom of God. He does however report Jesus' statement, 'my kingdom is not of this world', which saying was at the time a great relief to Pilate and a bitter disappointment to some of His disciples. But whether kingdoms be terrestrial or spiritual, John is more occupied with the being of God and the miracle of new birth than the lesser miracles with which his fellow Gospel-writers fill their pages. This is by divine selection and inspiration of course; it was ordained of God to show us the source and life and authority of the kingdom rather than the course and works and power of it.

The synoptists emphasise the throne and the kingdom. John reveals king Jesus the Son of God in person. His testimony is 'I and my Father are one', and His prayer to the Father on behalf of His disciples is, 'that they may be one in us, I in them and thou in me'. So great is the communion He has in mind for the Church that His prayers for it can only be couched in terms similar to those in which He thinks of His own relationship to His Father; 'that they may be one as we are, that they all may be one as thou Father art in me and I in thee, one even as we are — one'. One, only one, just one, no more; many persons in one being, perfect in ONE, and that one Jesus — 'that the world may know that thou hast sent me'. That is John's presentation of the Church as it lay in the heart of Jesus and was prayed out in his hearing en route to Gethsemane.

Not for John the revelation of the body given later to Paul, or the concept of building which imbued Peter. In obedience, according to their callings and ministry, his fellow-apostles spoke of being baptised into Christ's body, or being built into God's house respectively, but he was called to speak about being born into God's family. They all three approached the same subject in their differently appointed ways, but all agreed in one united testimony; their writings complement each other perfectly to reveal the Church in fullest light. Of the three neither Peter nor John specifically wrote to the churches in the same way as did Paul; their epistles are more general in scope and pastoral in character.

John's output was more copious than Peter's, for in addition to epistles, he wrote a Gospel and the book of the Revelation, all of

which are about eternal life. The theme gripped him, flooding his mind so full that it suffused all the literature he wrote. He saw that the coming of the promised Holy Spirit was primarily for this purpose. To him Pentecost was not so much the fulfilment of Joel's ancient prophecy, as the fulfilment of Jesus' more recent promise: 'at that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me and I in you'. That saying became the root of all John's thinking and speaking. From it sprang all reason and desire for eternal life. He was not going to be left an orphan by this wonderful Jesus whom he had followed these three years: 'I will come to you', it was sweetest music to John: 'because I live ye shall live also', He said: John could contemplate nothing more wonderful. Jesus was going to comfort them all with another Comforter; they would then

be positive that He was alive; more, that He was Life itself. He had claimed all along that He and His Father were one, that He was actually in the Father and the Father was in Him. Indeed, so great were His claims to this union that they amounted to assertions of absolute identity — 'he that hath seen me hath seen the Father'. It was not possible for even Him to satisfactorily state the baffling truth He and His Father enjoyed — a visible, an invisible and an indivisible presence and one eternal being.

For a matter of three years now they had lived with Him, but they did not know that seeing Him they had seen the Father also. Father was visible in the Son, so also was the Holy Spirit; in Jesus God, all of Him, was manifest. But it was the invisible Christ who was both in the bosom of the Father and manifest through the flesh of Jesus that was

the real Saviour. God — the whole being and three persons of God — is our Saviour. The allocations of work and the agreement about functions necessary to salvation were decided among the persons of God according to their respective relationships to each other, but whatsoever any one of them did or does or shall ever do, was and is and shall be done by all.

The literal body of Jesus of Nazareth seen and handled of men, was of no more value for spiritual life than His actual flesh and blood were valuable for spiritual food and drink. He said, 'except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood ye have no life in you, my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him'. Yet He also said, 'it is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing;

the words that I speak unto you are spirit and they are life'. He could only say that because in His bodily habits, functions and exercises He maintained heavenly standards of life; His behavioural patterns were absolutely perfect, true spiritual life lived out to the full in the flesh.

What He was meaning was this: in Him all the nature, virtues, characteristics, power, intelligence, wisdom and knowledge of God was in being on earth. Paul put it summarily in these words, 'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead (that is Father, Son and Holy Ghost) bodily', it could not have been better expressed. In His physical body on earth Jesus manifested a kind of life which could not justifiably be accorded any thing other than eternal existence in perfection. Whatsoever Jesus did, Father and Spirit were in and with Him to do; the

one exception to this was when they forsook Him on the cross. Therefore the cross was the greatest proof of Jesus' claims, for His death was the greatest test of them; the resurrection was the greatest demonstration that both the proof and the test certified Him to be the genuine Son of God.

When the Holy Father and the Holy Spirit forsook Jesus and left Him all alone on the cross, they did Him the greatest service and paid Him the sublimest compliment possible. If they had remained it could never have been finally proved that He was God the Son. But taking their leave of Jesus there, they showed the world that in His own personal Self Jesus was God in His own right and that, being so, He did not need their personal presence and assistance to die. They did not forsake Him as cowards forsake their post and duty in the hour of

danger, and their friends in greatest need, but as loyal friends, desiring nothing for Him but His highest good and greatest glory. They wanted the honours of redemption to be heaped upon Him, not themselves.

The Lamb in the Midst of the Throne

John reported the success of it all as he saw it later when the Lamb as it had been slain stood in the midst of the throne. He was surrounded by beasts and elders and myriads of angels, all of whom were saying with loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing'; it was overpoweringly wonderful. In response to this demonstration of heavenly praise, every creature in the universe lifted up its voice as one in psalmody, singing to the Lamb and Him that sitteth upon the throne. The whole

universe was ringing with praise, led by that celebrated and honoured representative company of the Church, 'the four beasts and the four and twenty elders'. Their song was full of thankfulness and praise for redemption and they have come to God out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation to bear their part. John was listening to the song of the new royal priesthood. They brought no sacrifices of earth to God; these are priests to no nation, people, tongue or kind on earth: they are priests of God alone. They make no sacrifice, God has provided the Lamb and made the sacrifice and now it stands alive in the midst of the throne; the living sacrifice is enthroned forever slain; the mystery lay bare before their eyes.

Every lamb slain by man for sacrifice is laid dead upon some altar, to be warmed by its

fires and consumed by its heat in fervent hope that it may be accepted by an unknown god. But this Lamb is not lying dead. He is standing upon the throne; He is alive, risen, standing. The Greek word for resurrection means 'to stand up from' or 'to stand up out of' — the slain Lamb is the resurrected Lamb. Living creatures, elders, angels encircle and throng the throne of His glory to praise Him, and every creature in all places of His dominion adds its voice to bless and honour and glorify God and the Lamb. 'So be it', say the four beasts, 'and the four and twenty elders fall down and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever.

For God to be glorified by the Church and the angels and all creation, Jesus had to be strong enough to die alone, and willing also. This was the great test into which He entered in Gethsemane and from which at

the third attempt He rose from His face victorious. He had entered into time by a miraculous birth to live out His day among creatures of time. Thirty long years ran out their course before He revealed Himself to men; His day was nearly expired when He stood at last in Jordan. He had then but a short three years, about one eleventh of His life to live. He did not live on the earth long; He had not come for that purpose but for an entirely different reason, and from His anointing He moved onward to accomplish it.

As He approached nearer to the end, He told His disciples about the cross; He must go to Jerusalem and be rejected by the nation's elders and scribes and chief priests there and suffer and die and rise again. It was a grievous thing to them, but He had not told them half of it; the worst of it He kept to

Himself. They would not have understood if He had told them anyway; beside, it was too painful for Him to talk about it. But it underlay His thinking all the time. He knew His day was running out fast and that soon His hour would come. It struck for Him when two of His disciples Philip and Andrew, came to Him with the news that some Greeks among the crowd wanted to see Him. 'The hour is come', He said, 'the Son of man should be glorified; now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour, Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again'.

The timing was perfect. The Greeks were up for the Passover, this was the hour and Jesus knew it. He moved on steadily through the last activities of earth's little day to

Gethsemane and Golgotha with the words on His lips, 'Father the hour is come: glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee'. He allowed nothing and no-one to stop Him or hinder Him; He made no excuse though the pain in His heart was almost unbearable and the thought unendurable. Still He kept the secret to Himself. Isaiah had prophesied that He should be stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, but could not write this; none of the prophets could, for God had not allowed it. The spirit of Christ which was in them for their ministry could not tell Israel this, it was so awful. The secret price of redemption was known only to God, and Jesus was the one designated to pay it. He wanted a Church built on Himself, built by Himself, for Himself, so He must pay for the privilege. He did not share even with His chosen disciples the cost, and left all but

three behind when He went beforehand to finally agree the terms with His Father.

The weight of His grief and agony hung heavily upon them all. His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death and as He wrestled with His problem His sweat rolled off Him like blood, but still He never told them the horrors He endured, nothing tore it from His lips. All His life He had been a man of sorrows. It is never recorded that He laughed, He was too acquainted with grief. His joy was set before Him beyond the cross; to reach it He must endure the agony. So as a sheep dumb before its shearer He never opened His mouth to speak or His heart to reveal the cause of His unspeakable pain, until finally on the cross the last dread moment of His awful hour came.

'Eloi, Eloi lama sabacthani'. In a moment the secret was out, and the burden of His heart

broke Him. Forsaken, utterly forsaken, in the dark. He could not see a soul nor feel His God; He was alone, bearing sin. He knew sin now. He had never known it before. It was division, loneliness, the blackness of darkness for ever. 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee': His spirit in Isaiah had prophesied it. He had known of it then, Calvary had coloured all He had ever thought or said. How could He give Israel up? From eternity He had anticipated forsakenness; love could not let His people go. So He came down from heaven and died, the forsaken one, that the name of the Father may be glorified, and it was. And because He glorified that name, His Father glorified Him. He glorified Him in Himself. He did it by forsaking Him. He left Him hanging on a tree, trusting Him, knowing that Jesus, just Jesus alone, was sufficient

and more than sufficient to deal with sin. God wanted us to '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'. The glorious crowning took place on the cross; by the grace of God He alone of the blessed Three was honoured to taste death for us all.

Neither Father nor Holy Spirit was crowned there; they left Jesus alone that the cross should be the throne of His glory, a throne exclusively His. How wonderfully God used that cross — it was at once a gibbet where the old Adam died, an altar where the new man was offered to God, a battlefield where the devil and his hosts were defeated, a destination where sin terminated, a quarry whence the rock was hewn, the place where Jesus was proved to be God and a throne

where Christ was crowned to build His Church.

Chapter 3 — THE HOUSE OF GOD

There is no evidence to show that Peter and the unknown writer to the Hebrews knew each other, but comparing their epistles it is evident they had much in common. They shared a common view of the Church, and in their different ways faithfully presented it in their epistles. As may be expected, the apostle Peter was greatly influenced by the statement the Lord Jesus had made to him in the presence of all the apostles at Caesarea Philippi, 'upon this rock I will build my Church'. His first epistle bears marked evidence of this, for in it he refers to the Lord as 'a living stone', adding, 'it is contained in scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded'. Upon Him, according to plan,

throughout the age God intends to build every person who is truly born of His Spirit. He has completed His heavenly abode ready for the new creation. Therefore every newborn babe must regard itself as a living stone, elect and precious as the chief cornerstone, already prepared for the building. In fact we are a generation chosen by the Lord specially for this. We are not to stumble at this word, says Peter, for we are appointed by God to be living stones in His house. This seems clear enough testimony to the fact that, contrary to the opinions of some, Peter did not regard himself as being the foundation stone of the Church.

As has already been discussed in chapter 1, there are those who have unnecessarily made Peter 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence', for against his will they have sought to give him a position he does not

and never did want. He never claimed to be the chief cornerstone, and had he done so he would have been self-evidently false, for by his own statement it was laid in Sion, not on earth. Like its Lord, everyone in it is from above; the gospel of the kingdom is preached in all the world therefrom. The Church has earthly manifestation, but it is not of this earth, neither is it from beneath nor yet of this world, it is of God. This is why, before speaking of living stones, Peter labours so effectively to establish the truth of new birth; each stone in God's house is a living person, born from above of God's incorruptible seed. Every new-born babe must approach Christ sincerely, as coming unto a living stone, with the object of becoming part of His spiritual house. He or she must desire to grow and become a member of an holy priesthood to offer up

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Of itself this resolve will strengthen the character and give purpose to life, and continued in will make us rock-like as He.

John also found this truth most appealing to his heart and in his own way writes of the Father's house. He does not use Peter's idiom, nor dwell on it as largely as he, nevertheless he as surely refers to the subject by quoting Jesus' own words, 'In my Father's house are many mansions'. Now mansions are palatial houses and Jesus says that Father's house is composed of many of them; so we learn that God's house is built up of many of these houses; what a mansion that must be! Peter tells us that living people are stones, John says that living people are God's houses, more — they are God's homes, and he makes this clearer by further

quoting Jesus as saying, 'We will come unto him and make our abode with him'.

The Lord was announcing God's intention of making individuals fit to be mansion houses for His permanent residence. John adds further to this in the book of Revelation where he records Jesus' vision of God's eternal home; this time He speaks of a city — it is the final revelation. John's contribution to the theme of God's eternal dwelling-place now becomes clear. A city is a dwelling-place, a house complex full of dwelling-places. The city of New Jerusalem is the whole company of regenerate sons, filled with the Spirit, indwelt by God — gathered together into one they form God's composite house. By living in each He lives in all as being His own body, the Church which is His home in the new creation.

The Church of the Firstborn

This truth is similar to that which the writer to the Hebrews expresses in more expansive style. His language and approach are rather different from Peter's and John's, but although he treats it more fully, the theme is the same: 'Ye are come unto mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel'. This Church in Sion is here designated as 'of the firstborn', and is being contrasted with the children of Israel at Sinai en route to Canaan from Egypt centuries before. They were assembled there then as a new-born nation

to receive the law of God governing being and behaviour in the promised land; these twin tablets of law were the most precious double portion the firstborn nation ever had.

These first-born males who were redeemed from death in Egypt were only few in number compared with the whole nation of people God saved from Pharaoh's vengeance at the Red Sea. Right from the commencement of His dealings with Israel God had intended to save the whole nation. He insisted that the lamb should be slain and its blood sprinkled on houses in Egypt for the preservation of the first-born because He intended to show the world that salvation is only possible because of redemption. The two events combine to point the whole truth; God was not showing special favour to a select few — the whole

nation were regarded by Him as His firstborn. The entire episode was only typical though, none of them was individually regenerate; even so, when they came to Sinai they stood before God as being born of water and blood.

Before giving them the Law, God told them that in so doing His design was to make the house of Israel a kingdom of priests unto Him. Nevertheless, in view of the impracticability of this, and having made plans for a central home among them, God selected a family of priests to be His house servants. Their duty and privilege was to offer up physical sacrifices to God on behalf of the whole nation, and from that moment they were committed to do so. Their service was exclusive in that area. Only priests and Levites were allowed to handle the physical sacrifices, but long before those animals

came into the hands of the priests they had been constantly handled by those who brought them. They bred them, fed them on what God provided, over-watched all their lives and finally offered them to their God; the priests were only their hands. All Israel were expected to offer up the spiritual sacrifices; that was a personal matter for which God held each man responsible. On Israel's altar the blood constantly testified of redemption for possession, atonement for justification and sanctification for identification. That blood needed to be copiously shed and continuously offered, for it could never take away sin, but we of the new covenant have need of neither shed blood nor of sacrificing priest on earth. The physical side of it is now past and there are no such duties left for man to perform.

Peter is careful to distinguish this in his epistle; he carefully separates the blood sacrifice of the Lamb from the spiritual sacrifices made by the priests of the new order. He refers to them in correct order, placing the physical sacrifice in the first chapter and the spiritual sacrifices in the second. The blood of Jesus is not now being offered from the altar of the cross; it is speaking in New Jerusalem. The physical sacrifice was made by Him once for all outside earthly Jerusalem and it brought to an end the age of physical sacrifice for sin because it expiated it. Jesus not only took away sin, His blood also brought in the reconciliation which has replaced the atonement based upon animal blood. He is now appearing in the presence of God for us, where His blood speaks out the terms, benefits and blessings of the new covenant

on high. There is therefore now no possibility that any kind of physical sacrifice for sin or blood of atonement could be accepted or even considered by God. His Son did it all perfectly and for that reason is now reigning on high, seated at His right hand. Nothing can be added to or taken from the sacrifice He made — it is perfect and can neither be improved upon nor interfered with; it is treasured up in heaven far beyond the reach of men or devils.

A Spiritual Priesthood

In relationship to this, Jesus is made a high priest for ever. His sacrifice is a living power and His service is eternal. He lives and as He lives He tirelessly offers Himself spiritually to God on our behalf. This is His priesthood. He functions in it ceaselessly and thereby we are saved to the uttermost. Into this priesthood we are called, and are formed

into a house of priests for this purpose. Jesus is the high priest over the house and we who are His house are the lesser or ordinary priests. Each of us is built into this house by God, to be His spiritual dwelling place, and He has placed His Son as Lord over it.

Of old God's people were called the house of Israel which simply means that God dwelt in Israel among His people and not with any other nation. In order to do this He first had a tabernacle made for Himself in which He dwelt for centuries, and following that He commissioned Solomon to build Him a temple: these were His only earthly homes. They were both constructed to His specifications on a basic threefold plan which embraced an outer court for the congregation, a house of ministry for the priests and an inner sanctuary for Himself.

The first was publicly the people's, the second was privately the priests', the third was exclusively God's; there He dwelt right at the centre of the nation. Though far removed from ordinary men, He wanted it to be understood by all that He was there, even though He had no direct contact with them. Far different from that, God now lives in His people personally, in the good heart of faith of all His sons, every one of whom is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

From the high priest downward this order of priesthood is entirely different from the Aaronic order, mainly in that it does not handle any kind of physical sacrifices. It does not slay animals or birds, or sprinkle their blood on houses or altars or people, its priests only handle the memorials of a past sacrifice. All their offerings are of a spiritual

nature and their sacrifices are identical with those Jesus made to God all the time He was on earth. No-one ever received the impression He was making these sacrifices; He certainly never told anyone what He was doing, He just offered Himself to God continually; it was a law of His nature. He was not constantly being slain physically, nor was His blood shed for sin daily, but He lived a totally sacrificial life.

From His birth He could say 'for Thy sake I am killed all the day long, I am counted as a sheep for the slaughter', but this spiritual ministry was natural to Him in the ages before His human birth. Unless He had been willing to make vast spiritual sacrifices He could not even have been born a man. He offered Himself in painless sacrifice to God before He was born. His offering was a love-gift to Love. When He vacated His throne in

heaven for a womb and a manger on earth
He resigned all the praise and power and
riches and wisdom and strength and honour
and glory and blessing which were so
naturally and rightfully His there. That is an
unimaginable sacrifice to us, but so great is
Love, and having done this throughout
unspecified ages, He continued to do it for
thirty-three years more as a man on earth.
While on earth He lived a life of complete
self-denial and self-abnegation. He
consistently refused to accept any power or
riches or wisdom or strength or honour or
glory or blessing which men would have
given or accorded Him for anything He did
among them, but gave His Father and God
all the credit for everything He did. Such
sayings as 'my Father doeth the works — I
know nothing of myself — I can do nothing
of myself — my Father sent me — I did not

come of myself' were constantly in His mouth. He was on a mission and lived in deep humility. He sought no glory of men, He was Lord of angels and though they ministered to Him as a man among men, He never received their praises until He was risen and enthroned; He had to be slain before He would receive them. His life was a life of perpetual spiritual sacrifice, and one of the great tasks in which He is currently engaged is teaching all who are of His household to live in the same way.

Peter describes this life as 'showing forth His virtues', (things worthy of praise) and says we are a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, a generation chosen for this purpose. All the spiritual sacrifices we can ever make during the course of life are nothing other than a showing forth of His virtues; it is entirely impossible to show

forth His virtues properly unless we do make spiritual sacrifices. These may or may not be related to material things, but whether this is so or not, these are the only offerings acceptable to God. In the language of priesthood this is exactly the same as saying we are witnesses unto Him. Whatever else may be regarded as necessary to being His witnesses, this life of priesthood is fundamental to all. When His praiseworthy virtues are manifested by us, it is the living proof that we have been baptised by Him in the Spirit into the priesthood of the Church. Paul takes up this same theme to Timothy and emphasises that the Church is the house of the living God. Laying down instructions concerning standards of behaviour for officers in the Church, he says, 'thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God'. If this is properly done, the mystery of

godliness Jesus revealed will again be revealed in this age. God will continuously be 'manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory'. This is His desire for all His people throughout the entire length of the Church age, which in another world will be extended unto all eternity. In this present age of time it is precisely what Jesus meant when He prayed 'I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me'. When all His virtues are fully developed in us and shown to the world without variation, it is indisputable proof to all that Jesus is alive and is the Christ; godliness is being manifest in the flesh again.

The Whole Family in Heaven and Earth

The concept of the Church dearest to the apostle John is as the family of God. John does not actually use the word 'family'; it is Paul who introduces it when writing his epistle to the Ephesians. It is part of his second prayer on their behalf, 'I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named' His great desire for this family was that they all should be filled with (into) all the fulness of God. There can surely be no more stupendous height of desire for mortal man than this; the prospect is breathtakingly wonderful. Right from the beginning God purposed in Himself to get glory for Himself in this way. The end to which He is moving is marvellous in the extreme. His revealed purpose is to fill both the Church and Himself. He fills the Church that the Church may fill Him — that is to say

fulfil Him. Not until all His purposes and desires are fulfilled in Himself in His own way and by His own means can the Church know all the fulness He has planned for it, for only in that lies hope for all His family.

When that fulness is known by the Church, then shall the Church fill the ages with glory world without end. God has planned a world of glory for Himself and His Church, a new everlasting creation continuing in bliss throughout the ages of the ages. The dispensation of the fulness of times mentioned earlier in the epistle is but the opening age of the ages to come. In it God is going to sum up under one head all things in Christ, whether they be in heaven or in earth. How long that period of summation will endure or all that will be accomplished in it no man knows, but fulness beyond our present comprehension and capacity lies in

it, and to it we are predestined. We do know that our eternity is bound up with Jesus' future in the mystery of the Godhead, and that God being His Father is also our Father, and there we rest, for being His body we are identified with Him in all things. What at first sight may appear duality of purpose is really singularity of purpose — the eternal purpose He purposed in Himself. Amen.

How naturally all the various similes of the Church fit together. When speaking of His flock and of Himself, the Good Shepherd, Jesus, said 'He calleth His own sheep by name', and Paul writing to the Ephesians and praying for the whole family, says it is a named family. It is exceedingly doubtful that every earthly shepherd names each of his sheep individually; they all recognize the shepherd's voice, but do not answer to a name. But the Good Shepherd's flock is

made up of named sheep only. Maybe shepherds look upon their flocks as their 'families' and have a very real relationship with them — empathy it is called — but none would want the relationship to be literal; the family is not named as is a human family. On the contrary the Lord's flock and the Father's family are one and the same; it is named — it is the family of God. Each member of it has been individually born of God.

Paul is outstandingly emphatic about this, 'one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all', and that is a matter of great wonder to all who know it. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of us all; no-one is in the family except God has fathered him into it. He accomplishes this at the same time as Christ baptises individuals into His body; it is a joint

action. We become a member of the body of Christ and a child in the family of God simultaneously. By the former operation we are made alive in the person and body of Christ and by the latter Christ enters all alive into the person and body of each of us.

Being members of one body, we all live in and by and express one life. Being members of one family, the Christ lives in and expresses Himself through many lives; all are one and one is all. It is with this latter part of the truth Paul is concerned here. His whole approach to God for us is coloured and conditioned by it.

One of the notable features of this epistle is the way the author succeeds in keeping references to himself down to an absolute minimum. At times when writing other epistles he had to make mention of himself more often in order to substantiate his

claims or to authenticate his calling, but not so to his beloved Ephesians. To them he but places his name at the beginnings of chapters 1 and 3 and then, except for the occasional use of the first person singular pronoun, includes himself with them in the collective pronouns 'we' and 'us'. His prayers in this epistle are perhaps the greatest petitions ever penned in the New Testament for the Church by any member of it.

Speaking of himself he says, 'I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, bow my knees ... I the prisoner of the Lord'. He bowed to the eternal majesty. He was totally unbowed in spirit to Rome.

That he bowed at last before the headsman's block made no matter to him — he was not the head, only a member. He minimised his captivity to Rome by magnifying his captivity to Jesus Christ, 'I

bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord' he said. He was always in the place of worship and thanksgiving and prayer. Jesus had captured him wholly; held there he had the eternal purpose of God in view and the everlasting people of God at heart. His concern was that the Spirit which sealed them God's should accomplish greater things yet, that they may be filled with all the fulness of God. The blessed Spirit who assured them that they belonged fully to God is now being petitioned in their behalf to strengthen them for the full indwelling of Christ. He knew that all God's children needed strengthening in the inner man or they would not be able to contain everything that is possible to faith. We must be rooted and grounded in love in a far greater way so that we may comprehend the love of Christ. The breadth and length and

depth and height of it are equally immeasurable, but apparently not beyond us.

The love of Christ is indescribable rest; in all its fulness it is incomprehensible to the human mind; it passes knowledge. It is knowable but uncontainable; it has no dimensions, only directions vaguely discernible to the intellect; the love of Christ is limitless. View it how we will from whatever standpoint we take, it has no horizons. It has no centre from which we may commence. Travel in which direction we may, we are always at the centre and starting point of His Love — HIM. That is why He must dwell in our hearts and why also we must love all the saints in whom He also dwells — we need both Him and them. Christ is so vast that it is not possible for one saint alone to comprehend Him and His love;

the rest of the whole family multitude is necessary to each of us. Let us beware of falling into the trap of knowing Biblical revelations about that love without personal knowledge of it gained by living a loving life. Our Father is not satisfied by being a lover Himself and neither must we be; because He is a lover He must make us lovers, we must be His children in this or we shall not be true sons of our Father. Jesus Himself says 'by this shall all men know ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another'.

It is absolutely certain that Paul, having discovered the highest secrets of eternal life, is seeking to imbue us with the need to discover them too. Because everything the Lord does is so good, it is easy to become satisfied with less than the best. If it were possible to ask any person who knew and perhaps followed and benefitted from Christ

after the flesh whether Jesus was a loving man, there is no doubt the answer would be an unqualified 'yes'. But it is equally without doubt that when Paul spoke of the breadth and length and depth and height of love, he was thinking in terms far exceeding anything any person saw or benefitted from while following Jesus on earth. He was meaning this when he said the love of Christ 'passeth knowledge'. He was talking of the as yet undiscovered fulness of the vast love of God. He alludes to it when he says, 'God, who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us', but can find no words in which to describe it; how is it possible to describe what is beyond description? Acts of mercy and grace unendingly lavished upon us may persuade us of that love, so that we join with the apostles to say, 'God is Love', and speak of 'the love wherewith He loved

us', and also enter into some understanding of its vastness, but O to be actually living in it as God is!

A Chosen Generation

Perfection in one is Christ's ideal for us. It can only be achieved when one and only one person's nature, life and character is displayed simultaneously in a whole generation, nation and people. When that absolute identity is shown in a people over a couple of thousand years, involving successive generations and spread throughout many nations, it is conclusive evidence of the genuineness of Christ's claims. With us men it is inevitable that a generation is born and dies and ceases to be; scientific researchers allocate a certain number of years to it. A man may leave his stamp upon that generation, affecting it drastically and ineradicably, but usually only

his contemporaries in his own nation are influenced by him. Seldom has any man impressed succeeding generations sufficiently to affect and alter their lives; if he has managed to do so they are usually only his own countrymen. Generally a man's influence is interred with him.

Christ's generation is not confined to a thirty or forty years time-period, it extends over thousands of years to include a selected portion of all mankind. The phrase 'chosen generation' is used of a certain company of people and it does not refer to the life span of a particular group happening to have existence on the earth between certain dates; the time factor is not involved here, it is unimportant. Primarily it refers to God's selective decision and choice and is intended to direct our thought backward in time to the generation of the nation of Israel at the

first Passover. Israel went down into Egypt as a tribe of seventy souls, Jacob, his sons and their children; between them they were the second and third generation. Isaac, Jacob's father, had been the first generation of Abraham's promised seed, Jacob / Israel was the second, and the fathers of the twelve tribes were the third.

However, although He loved them all, the Lord did not choose to work the great redemption and bring about deliverance in any of these generations; they had no need of it. He had made Himself very clear to Abraham when He gave him His word and made a covenant with him. He said He would bring Abraham's seed into the promised land in the fourth generation. The third generation (which included Joseph) died in Egypt, and the chosen fourth generation had succeeded them when God

moved to deliver Israel according to His word. Doing so He made Israel a holy nation of peculiar people by generating them into a royal priesthood who should offer up spiritual sacrifices to Him. This took place during a set period of time and only to a limited number of people, strictly a generation.

Peter does not use the phrase in its primary sense however. He is drawing attention to God's methods with men; he has no time element in his mind at all. It is significant that he addresses his epistle to strangers begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them. He says they are children redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who love Jesus and call on the Father who begat them of His own

incorruptible seed by the gospel. This was the method of generation chosen by God. The Lord elected to give all His spiritual children birth by the same means and of the same seed by which He begat Jesus physically through Mary. This is the chosen method of generation, and all those begotten by this means belong to that chosen generation. There is no other way of guaranteeing men and women will be living stones of the right quality to be included in His house-structure. Men and women of this natural substance could be built upon the chief corner stone laid in Sion, for they are of the same substance as He.

Precious Living Stones

To justify Himself in doing this, God had to ensure that each stone should be living as Christ is living, and precious as He is precious. This preciousness must not be

mere sentimental preciousness based upon personal appreciation or affectionate associations or historic connections or memorable events. Too often this bestows value upon worthless objects according to individual tastes and preferences, quite regardless of ethics or morals or proper values. To be precious each stone must be most valuable and rare, of incalculable price and worth more than all the combined treasures of earth. So it came about that God devised and carried through a scheme of purchase and production that would satisfy His requirements. He bought and begat a people who in process of purchase and production would be made precious with the preciousness of Christ.

First He begat a Son in flesh who was God in spirit, Jesus the Christ in person, sinless in nature and perfect in soul. Into His human

nature all the concentrated characteristics and qualities of essential Godhead, with all the preciousness of the eternal virtues which constitute God to be God, were instilled. He was unique, infinitely and unspeakably precious, the only-begotten Son of the Father of glory. Then all this inestimable preciousness was poured out in purple blood on the cross in a redemption unparalleled in history and unrepeatabe throughout the length of future time to purchase a people unique among men and before angels. By the very preciousness which made His blood precious God begat sons of the same precious quality as He.

When God brought out His people from Egypt of old they dwelt in tents in the wilderness; Israel were His people and He wanted to dwell among them and be their God. He therefore called Moses up to a

mountain-top and informed him of His wishes and asked him to speak to the children of Israel about it on His behalf. He wanted a special tabernacle, not like any of theirs but quite unique among the tribes — it was to be the best. His specifications were most exacting and the materials very costly and rare. Above all everything must be new, nothing old could be used, nothing could be adapted or merely converted. The quality of workmanship too must be absolutely exceptional, so for this He filled two men with His Spirit that they should do the work as of God. The tabernacle of God was exceedingly precious. Standing central in the encampment it spoke of Christ Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God. The standards set by God for His house were high.

It also indicates to us the standards set by God for His other sons. They too must be

new — mere adaptation or conversion cannot meet His specifications. He demands nothing less than an entire new spiritual birth for man; His requirements could not be met by any other means. Redemption and reconstitution of the entire human nature could not be achieved by anything less than an entire new birth — this and only this could make it possible. It is not within the bounds of credibility to believe that humans can have the preciousness of Jesus apart from this, but new birth guarantees it. Jesus is neither naive nor impractical when He says we must be born again; there is no other way He can make us precious. We must be born of His Father's seed so that we can be incorruptible of spirit, pure of heart and holy of life. God's children must be loving of nature, obedient of mind, joyous of disposition and glorious of countenance,

each one a precious living stone quarried out of the earth, solidly righteous that all may be built together on the foundation stone laid in heaven in mount Sion into a spiritual house for God for all eternity.

We are not able to decide just where in Jerusalem on earth the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost. It may be that Sion, the city of David the great king, was the place, but we do not know. It would certainly be in keeping with many of the ways of God and appear most fitting if it were so, but we are not told, and speculation is vain. We do know that it was at Jerusalem that the Church first became visibly manifest on earth. If it had been built there it may have been reasonable to assume that Peter was indeed its foundation, but it speedily became evident that the church at Jerusalem was in reality only a church, not the Church. The

Church of Jesus Christ had its first manifestation on earth there, and for a short while had no visible manifestation other than that. Because of this, the souls that were saved in Jerusalem were added to the company of those already saved there. It could not be otherwise at that time; in reality though, basically and primarily, they were added to the Church in mount Sion.

The Lord in the Midst

Soon the company known as the church in Jerusalem grew and multiplied and spread till it became 'the churches of Judea'; by adding to the Church in heaven Christ increased the number of churches on earth, and soon the phrase 'the church at Jerusalem' is matched by the phrase 'the church which was at Antioch'. By the time Paul the apostle began his ministry it was already well recognised and fully established

that the Church subsisted on earth as many churches. These all existed autonomously and conducted their own affairs under the oversight of their elders; ministry was indigenous and administration local; apparently no particular apostle was regarded as being chief of all. Paul, a latecomer to the apostolic band, was specially called of God and given much revelation about the Church and the churches; he perfectly understood the distinction between them and wrote much for our enlightenment.

To the Galatians he said he formerly persecuted the Church of God beyond measure and wasted it. This was a great sorrow to him, for he saw that when he had attacked men and women of God in the past he had attacked Jesus. When the Lord told him that at the beginning, it was a revelation

of unparalleled magnitude to him, but it was also of untold blessing to him, for by it he was prepared for the further revelations to follow. From the very first day of his conversion he saw the truth of identity upon which so much of his later ministry was based; he became positive that companies of saints in any location were a replica of the Church in heaven and were entitled to be called churches. He became equally certain that just as the whole Church was founded on Jesus Christ, so too every local church needs to be founded on Him.

For this reason whenever Paul went on his journeyings preaching the gospel he preached Christ Jesus. He realised and said that God had called him by His grace to reveal His Son in him, that he should preach Him among the heathen. Therefore he preached Him; not about Him, nor yet

primarily about His works, but Him; he loved to say of himself and his companions, 'we preach Christ Jesus'. If he took the scriptures in hand in local synagogues, he did so to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. If he stood amid heathen altars it was to point to Him whom they ignorantly worshipped. Wherever he was, his basic theme was Christ. He neither preached Peter nor himself, nor any other man as the foundation of the Church or the churches; always it was the Lord Jesus. In fact he went so far as to say that on one occasion he openly rebuked Peter at Antioch for his vacillation, and showed that it was commonly understood in Jerusalem that Cephas was only a pillar of the church there like James and John.

At the time Paul administered the rebuke Peter was living in fear of James who was

evidently the recognized leader among the saints at Jerusalem. So affected was Peter by James' austere power that he was not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel or standing firm and upright. But he was a pillar and it is a bad thing for pillars to shake and be moved about by winds of doctrine. It is also bad for a building when pillars lean toward one another instead of straight up. Most likely and quite acceptably to all informed people, Peter, despite his variableness, is an important cornerstone of the Church and is very vital to it for that reason. He shares the distinction with many others of his contemporaries, including Paul himself. They were each necessary to the Church but not one of them is the chief cornerstone.

Peter is most certainly one of the foundation stones, for Paul says the Church is built upon

the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which includes Peter. Confirmatory to this, in vision John saw that the wall of New Jerusalem has twelve foundations, and in them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. If the record is to be trusted he did not see anything specially or distinctively Peter's there. It must therefore be concluded that Cephas shares equal honours and position with the rest of his fellows and no more. With that he is doubtless well content. In one place Paul brackets him with himself and Apollos, asking who they were, and answering 'ministers by whom ye believed; ye are God's building'. He also claims, 'as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, for other foundation can no man lay than is laid, which is Jesus Christ'.

If Peter had been vital to every man, Paul would have been grossly in error, if not maliciously misleading not to have said so. He would have been guilty in God's eyes of withholding from people truth necessary for their salvation. If God had laid Peter as the foundation, or even intended him to be an indispensable necessity to everybody's experience, He would have said so. Instead we find passages of scripture such as these indicating that although he was vital to the Church as a minister in his day, and has since influenced it by his writings, his personal ministry was far less widespread than Paul's. His appearance at Antioch was disastrous. Far from being necessary there he was a nuisance, undoing the work of the Spirit, causing division among the saints, and even evil-affecting his fellow apostle Barnabas. Paul's rebuke was well deserved and

unhesitatingly delivered; Peter, a pillar of the church at Jerusalem, was found to be quite dispensable at Antioch. Paul's attitude was not schismatic; Peter was not dispensable to the Church as a whole or to the church at Jerusalem; nevertheless because of his behaviour upon that occasion he needed correction. His example was counter-productive to the gospel Paul was preaching — souls were being hindered.

However, when speaking to the church at Antioch earlier, Paul had paid tribute to Peter's work, saying that God had opened the door of faith to the gentiles. This is a reference to Peter's visit to Cornelius' household at Caesarea and the initial outpouring of the Spirit there. In certain respects, as we have already seen, Peter was the key man in God's plan for the advancement of the gospel in his day. The

door of faith was not opened to the gentiles until Peter went to Caesarea to the Roman garrison there; God started with the army, sending in His shock troops under Peter's command. The Baptism in the Spirit opens the door wide into any situation, and Paul was indebted and most grateful to Peter, for at that time his was a follow-up ministry and he knew it. However, once through the door he went far and wide, ever reaching out into the regions beyond, preaching Christ and His gospel, with the result that all over the gentile world churches sprang up as the Church of Christ grew. It was Paul and not his fellow-apostle who laid the foundations of those churches, and he did so by preaching Christ, not Peter, to them.

Paul laid the foundation in a threefold way; he laid down the fact that Christ is the foundation of: (1) the Church universal; (2)

the church local; (3) the life of every member of it. He also made clear that he was only responsible to lay the foundation; 'others build thereon', he said. Others following after him, whether they be apostles or prophets or pastors or teachers, could only build up churches which had been raised up by his ministry on the one foundation he had laid — they could not lay another foundation. So strong was he on this point that he said any thing other than what he preached was a perverted gospel, 'another gospel, which is not another' really. There is no such thing as another gospel; to preach anything except Christ crucified as all sufficient for all need for all eternity is not good news but evil tidings and falsehood. More terrible still, he asserted that in order to believe and promote such things, people would have to 'remove from Him who had

called them into the grace of Christ'; in other words they would move off the foundation altogether.

The issue which called forth such powerful remarks from the apostle was circumcision. It was over behaviour associated with this that he and Peter disagreed and took sides at Antioch: for many years it was an all-absorbing topic among the churches. So vital did it become that finally the leading brethren met together at Jerusalem to discuss it. This conference resolved the issue and their findings were published over James' signature, not Peter's. The united decision of the apostles and elders was a denial of the necessity of circumcision for the gentiles' or anybody's salvation. They were not commanded to cease practising it, neither were the Jews — they were told it was not necessary to salvation; Paul put it

succinctly when he said, ' in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature'; this dictum became the rule of the Church.

Circumcision has not ceased to be practised among Jewish nationals, whether they be of the Church or not, but it has entirely lost its spiritual significance for the Church. To this day, if people wish to practise it as part of their culture, or because it is thought to be medically advisable, then they may; spiritually it is neither right nor wrong to do so. When God incorporated it into His Old Covenant with Israel it became the sign of inclusion therein; it then symbolised the cutting off of the sins of the flesh, but now that Christ has died and risen again the symbol has given way to the real.

Circumcision typified one particular aspect of the work accomplished by Christ on the

cross where all was fulfilled. Circumcision is now of the heart; it is real in the spirit and not symbolic in the flesh; that old circumcision is now called 'the concision'; we are 'the circumcision'. Therefore if a child of God is circumcised in the flesh he must not think there is any virtue in it; he cannot build that upon Christ, it is of no spiritual value whatsoever.

According to the Pattern

Once the foundation has been laid in our lives we must all build upon it, and we must take great care in doing so. Men, whether they be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, or whatever position or office they hold, are not allowed to build any other form of church or doctrine upon it than has already been laid down in scripture. Similarly no church member must attempt to build anything other than a

Christ-like character upon it. We must pay attention to three things: (1) that we are on the foundation; (2) how we build upon the foundation; (3) what we build upon the foundation. Unless our attitude toward building is correct we shall not even begin to build. It is a lifetime occupation and we must be very concerned about the materials God requires. It also ought to be remembered that no builder, building for eternity, builds without a plan; it is recorded that God commanded Moses to build according to the pattern he was shown on the mount and he did so. Important as the Tabernacle was, it was only God's temporary dwelling-place — there was nothing permanent about the actual structure. Yet the Lord was most exact about it, giving instructions down to the smallest details; nothing was left to

guesswork or personal whim, and most certainly nothing was done at haphazard.

Paul's approach to church-building was no less painstaking than Moses' approach to making the Tabernacle. His description of himself is very suggestive — 'a wise master builder'. First he laid the foundation by declaring the testimony of God in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit: Christ Jesus is God's Son: by His sacrifice and blood He redeemed us: in sheer grace He imparts Himself and all to us by a succession of gifts. In the language of Paul, and appropriate to the figure by which he is teaching the truth, the gold, silver and precious stones refer to those things. They are the materials supplied by God for building, and all of them are hardly come by in the natural, very seldom are they found on the surface. It is a rare thing to find gold, silver and precious stones

lying around above ground, they are to be found generally in mines and veins and lodes, and as it is with the natural, so it is with the spiritual. In another place Paul calls these things 'the deep things of God', saying 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him'.

Paul makes clear that God's house is people — they are the living stones of His temple. First he says to the Corinthian church, 'ye are the temple of God', and later individualises the concept of the temple by adding 'your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost'. By this we see first that the local church is a temple, and secondly that each individual saint is a temple also. The whole body of saints is a temple comprised of individual temples. Writing still later to the Ephesians

he welds together all the major ideas of spiritual revelation and carries the temple-house imagery still further. In a concise passage of remarkable insight he speaks of fellow-citizens in the household of God 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit'. In this inspired passage he combines all the concepts of truth concerning building, city, household, temple, habitation. And doing so he reveals that the individual temple which is included in the local temple shall in the end be fitly framed and builded together with every other local temple into the ultimate temple-city-

household of God. It is an amazing revelation and a thrilling prospect.

These are the unseen, unheard things which lay deep in the man Jesus of Nazareth. They never entered into the hearts of men in His day; although they saw and heard Him they did not know that His nature was pure gold, that redemption was in His blood and that rarest jewels were treasured up in His mind. They neither mined down and through His humanity into His Godhead, nor tunnelled through His manhood to trace the veins of redeeming love; neither did they find the ocean of understanding where His pearls of wisdom were hidden, nor stumble upon the reef where the diamonds of knowledge were stored; they never discovered the lodestone of faith or the vast pocket of ruby-red Love in Him. They saw and heard in Him the love of a man of God, but it never entered into

their minds and hearts that He was the God of redeeming Love, the immeasurable ocean of pearls, the diamond's eternal reef, the everlasting rock of faith, the inexhaustible pocket of rubies and the green emerald's everlasting seam. They did not know His preciousness, He was the stone the builders rejected.

To His contemporaries He was a stone of stumbling; they found Him to be a rock of offence, and being disobedient, they stumbled at His word and were confounded. They set Him at nought; the princes of this world have been made foolish: their wisdom has come to nothing, for they crucified the Lord of glory. They have set aside the foundation for eternal life and built up their hope of living with wood, hay and stubble, things of no eternal substance, which shall perish in unquenchable fire. Yet by that

rejection, the Lord, the wise Master Builder, prepared for us the things He has provided for building.

Those who entered into His open tomb unwittingly entered into the heavenly mine shaft. The tunnel was invitingly lighted up for them by shining spirits sitting one at the head and the other at the feet in the place where the body of Jesus had lain; Peter was confused, John was convinced, Mary was challenged and comforted. None of them then knew the scripture that He must rise again from the dead; in common with their fellow-disciples they had heard Him say repeatedly that He was going to rise from the dead, but had never really believed it. It seems they were good orthodox believers who were not prepared to believe anything unless it could be satisfactorily proved to them from scripture.

Unfortunately this attitude was not confined to them only, it is also a very modern affectation. Sadly enough the majority of people who adopt this position really mean that they will only accept the interpretation they themselves put upon scripture, and only believe what they think it means. When risen from the dead Jesus had to take His disciples through the scriptures, showing them the things concerning Himself and also open their understandings that they might understand it all. They had never understood until then that to believe what Jesus said was to understand the scriptures; later John was to write 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'.

How much John saw that resurrection day, or into what dimension of understanding he penetrated we do not know, but as surely as the removed stone allowed entrance into

the tomb and revealed the resurrection, so that resurrection is the revelation and the open way into all the precious things of God. It revealed Christ to be the foundation stone, elect, precious, 'cut out without hands' from out the tomb to be laid as the foundation of the Church in Sion and the churches in every nation. Striking with power upon the feet and legs of every image, it will destroy them all, so that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Yet when here among men as man no-one knew Him. His contemporaries recognized Him as a true man, but not one of them understood He was the Christ, so they refused to accept Him as God.

Only the Spirit of God knows the things of God and the Spirit of God was not in them, so their position was hopeless — they could

not possibly recognize Him. It was therefore essential that the Spirit of God be given unto men or we could never know the precious things of Christ, or that they have been freely given by God. So it was that just as Christ was given to be the foundation stone of the Church, so the Holy Spirit was given for the building of it. He has been given purposely by God that He might bring to us gold, silver and precious stones from Christ, those heavenly treasures that God considers to be the only materials acceptable for building. He does this primarily by joining each one individually to the Lord. We must first of all be well-founded on Him in a most personal way. The Spirit can then ensure to us a constant, free supply of these essential building materials, all drawn from the personal eternal life of the Lord Jesus.

Gold, Silver and Precious Stones

The qualities of Godhead in Him made Jesus' human life what it was; they were hewn out or cut down or harvested and built up with patience into a wondrous personality in the experiences of the everyday. He was born the Son of God; His nature was pure solid gold, but on that foundation He had to build up and display a character of gold equally pure and solid. He knew that all the while He was on earth the redemptive purposes of God must flow throughout His whole person like His life-blood did through His body or there could be no redemption for men. Like silver arteries and veins they supplied the rich motives for living, without which life would have been in vain. From this vast store of loving intentions His imperishable words and works issued like a mighty river flowing freely to all classes and conditions of men. Throughout the centuries since, those

treasures have been mined and cut and polished and set in their native gold and silver by hosts of preachers and writers. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers all have borrowed them to reveal the Christ of God in their lives and preach Him to men and make us see that the life-work of every son of man born anew a child of God is likewise to build up that same character in themselves. We all must be pure gold, solid silver and precious stones like our Lord. The wood, hay, stubble which come more easily to hand must be spurned. No man has to dig or mine or tunnel for them — they all grow on the surface within reach.

Too easily men in their folly mistake means for either sources or ends and reach out for that which comes most readily to hand. They mistake and misplace the wood of the cross

for the word (Logos) of the cross; they substitute the flesh of man for his spirit, and falsely promote stubble into glory. The cross of Calvary was only a wooden means to a spiritual end. God put it to use, and having accomplished His purposes thereby, has discarded it. He does not wish it to be venerated by us, but put to spiritual use. When Paul said, 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ', he went on to explain the spiritual reason why: 'whereby the world was crucified unto me and I unto the world'. Always he speaks of the cross as the instrument or place of Christ's supreme spiritual contest and accomplishment. He preached it as the power of God which destroys the contrary power of sin, satan, self, the world, the wisdom of the world, the flesh and all other things contrary to God's

will. The wooden cross never accomplished that, it only had the power He conceded it over the body of His flesh for His purposes. The spiritual cross does it for us though — on no account must we build with the wood. Peter says 'all flesh is as grass', echoing the words of Isaiah, who added, 'surely the people is grass, the grass withereth'; hay is poor stuff for building — it is even worse than wood. If a man builds his own and other people's flesh on to the foundation of Christ; it will surely perish in the fire. There are those who, like Israel in Egypt, gather straw stubble to make bricks, but compressed dirt laced with stubble and baked in the fire is no substitute for precious stones; they too shall burn. Beams of wood, bales of hay, bricks of stubble could be made somewhat presentable, even decorative perhaps, but all would be pretentious. Who

would think that a building made of these materials could be anything but temporary? And how vulnerable to fire!

When God desired Israel to construct and furnish a tabernacle for Him to dwell among them, His first directive to Moses was about the ark. It was to represent Christ, so He ordered it to be made of two materials, wood and gold. The wood was to represent His humanity, the gold His deity. We are commanded to build with gold — we already have sufficient wood of humanity. If we use His gold our humanity will become as His. Should we use wood, we should be building only a structure of our own human ideas and humanitarian ideals. In the last analysis this kind of structure can be nothing other than deified self constructed in place of the pure gold nature of the love of Jesus. This can only happen by the abuse of the cross,

and propounds a scriptural idea grossly distorted — 'I am crucified', leaving out the words 'with Christ'. The cross is 'the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord', or else it is mere wood; Jesus is the gold of the cross; He is the God of the cross.

Silver as well as gold had a place in tabernacle structure. It was used to make books and fillets and chapiters for the posts which held the hanging or screens which formed the outer perimeter of the courts of the Lord; also for the sockets for the pillars of the sanctuary or tabernacle proper, and the pillars which held the vail at the entrance. As gold stands for the nature of God, so silver represents the redemptive purpose of God; the tabernacle stood and the screen hung upon redemption. The outer hanging spoke of the flesh of the Lord Jesus from which the redeeming blood

flowed. Jesus' basic purpose in assuming flesh and coming into the world was to redeem. So must every true son of God build upon this foundation — the silver purpose of redemption. Our attitude to people and use of time and circumstances must be redemptive.

The days in which we live are evil, not good. Time itself is against us and will pass unredeemed unless we purchase opportunities to live and work for God and His gospel. When born from above, sons of God are born anew into this world to redeem. Our blood will never be spilt for the redemption of men, or as the purchasing price for their souls — it is not of the right quality, nor is it necessary. We must lay down our lives for the purposes of God in spreading the gospel and have being in this world primarily for that purpose. Divine

nature and human nature must unite in us to live entirely for God; everything must combine to that end, otherwise our flesh is as grass, and harvested it is nothing but hay. The hot wind of fire passes over it and it is gone.

The Shoulder and the Breast

Precious stones found place in the tabernacle scheme of redemption on the shoulders and breast of the high priest. They were permanently set in ouches of gold upon the ephod, which was the outer garment of his ministerial regalia. Apart from the two tables of the law in the ark and the Urim and Thummim of judgement in the breastplate there were no other articles of stone within the tabernacle. Together with the gold and silver they comprised the major part of the treasures of darkness heaped upon the Children of Israel on the great

night of redemption, that 'night to be much observed of all the Children of Israel in their generations'.

On the two onyx stones set in gold, one upon each of Aaron's shoulders, the names of the Children of Israel were engraven in their order according to their tribes. On the breastplate fastened to the ephod were twelve different stones upon which again the names of the twelve tribes were engraven; these were set in four rows of threes. Fixed upon his shoulders, the place of strength, and upon his breast, the place of love, the high priest bore the tribal names of the house of Israel in all their preciousness before the Lord for a memorial continually — they were a redeemed people. So to the golden nature of love and the silver purpose of redemption was added the priestly

ministry of precious stones; without this ministry all else would have been in vain.

Meaningful as the gold and silver of the tabernacle proper were, and precious though the stones were, all would have been death without the priesthood, for all these things were inanimate. Though He had the tabernacle made for His habitation, God really lived in His people, His house was Israel; He said they were a kingdom of priests, chosen to offer themselves up as spiritual sacrifices to God; what a privileged people, what precious stones! The whole of Israel were represented as precious living stones on ephod and breastplate, animated by Aaron's life, ever kept in memory before God.

We have a ministry related to this also; we are chosen to be the Lord's remembrancers. What is stubble to precious stones? Who but

the stubbornly perverse would build with stubble when precious jewels are readily available? With eyes wide open to the consequences, we must avoid the terrible traps into which some of the early churches fell. Without the love nature of God, our gathering and gifts and giving and gainings are brassy substitutes for pure gold. Let us beware lest quicksilver be mistaken for real silver; what flows through the veins of the churches must not be the mercurial passion of an unconverted Apollos. The ritualism of John's baptism, though it may not be called that, is no substitute for redemption and Jesus' baptism, and gifts of the Spirit are clanging brass in operation if the love of God be missing.

Paul says these same things under another figure in one of his other epistles. First laying the great foundation to all eternal life and

character-building, he instructs us to 'build up one another in love'; everything is to be in love. He then follows on to wake up the sleeping and the dead to walk circumspectly in the light, redeem the time and be constantly filled with the Spirit. This is the task we are to work at, buying up every opportunity to build up a personal, family, church and social life worthy of Christ.

The truth is in Jesus; if we have heard Christ and been taught by Him we shall apply ourselves to this constantly. But this is not an end in itself, He cannot leave it there; we must also put on the whole armour of God, get into the heavenly wrestling, fight the holy war in the heavenlies and pray. We have to wrestle through to where the precious stones lie — they are hardly gained. Precious stones are people; pray for all the saints. Be specific; 'pray for me', he requests,

'I pray for you and what prayers he prays. Two superb examples of these are included in the letter; the first is for light about power, the second is for love unto all fulness; the power is to bring us unto love. It may be safe to suppose that amongst all the ordinary people of the civilised nations, the most valuable of all natural mineral substances is precious stone. We sometimes speak of someone being worth his or her weight in gold, but valuable as that may be, an equal weight of diamonds would be of far greater value. The Lord showed this in the day He ordered the precious stones bearing the tribal names of Israel to be inset in gold and fixed on the shoulders and breast of the High Priest. The gold was the setting for the stones, the stones were the setting for the people. The Lord is undeviating in all He does and says; what He ordered in the Old

Testament is advised in the new; what was on the shoulder is now in power, what was upon the breast is now in the heart; precious, precious people, peculiarly precious.

Aaron's full regalia for office was wholly for glory and beauty; standing among his brethren before the Lord he was gloriously and beautifully holy. Holiness is gloriously beautiful in God's sight, unsurpassed in all the heavenly realm. Aaron was the highest, chiefest and greatest of all the priests. His official garments were six-fold, namely a breastplate, an ephod, a robe (of the ephod), a brodered coat, a mitre and a girdle. To these, as extra to them, were added the precious stones that finally he should stand complete and walk and minister and supervise all in heavenly perfection. All those garments of splendour,

so full of spiritual meaning, were only foundational to the precious stones. By colour and materials and craftsmanship the robes were very precious, but altogether they were only made to carry the names of God's people in constant remembrance before Him.

It is significant that Aaron should wear a breastplate, for the robes were more suited to royal courts than battlefields. True it was made of gold and not steel, but it was all the more suggestive for that. Beside this, both the ephod and the robe, to which the golden breastplate was bound by golden chains, were fashioned at the neck like a coat of mail. The whole regalia, though to be worn in the Lord's house, implied battledress. How aptly then do Paul's words describe the thoughts of God — the only way into effective prayer for mansoul is via the

wrestling in heavenly places. Souls were not won without battle or redeemed without blood; satan fought to keep his captives.

There is a hint of battle in Christ's intercession, and His saints are called to join Him in the continuous war.

Aaron's garments are enumerated in almost reverse order to that in which they would be donned in the day of his robing. Even that was done to emphasize that, uppermost, outermost and foremost upon his body, the precious engraved stones should stand out. Symbolically Aaron was a great pray-er, moving in love and power, always bearing the people with him, upholding every one of God's children in light amidst the incense of Christ the pray-er and intercessor in the home of God.

The Lord God Himself is very definite about what the precious stones stand for, saying in

one place of those who love Him, 'they shall be mine when I make up my jewels'. So also is Peter, who tells us that every one born of God into life in His spiritual Israel is a precious stone specially chosen to be a member of this royal priesthood. John's vision of New Jerusalem brings to us a clear revelation of apostles garnished with precious stones. In fact in his eyes the entire city glows with light and glory like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. John's book is really the revelation which God gave to His Son Jesus Christ, who signified it to His servant John. Father and Son saw the New Jerusalem of pure gold and precious stones as the end product; Christ regards the Church as His one great pearl.

Ever Living to make Intercession

In the eyes and estimate of every member of the Church, everyone must be regarded and

valued as a possible Christian. Regardless of our knowledge of election and estimate of prophecy, true availing prayer must be made for all men. Nations, tribes, families and individuals must have place in our prayers; intercession must be made for them in breadths and lengths and depths and heights of love. This unrivalled privilege is set scripturally in context of such phrases as sons of men, Jews and gentiles, all men, principalities and powers, the whole or every family, your hearts, all saints, the Church. We must be rooted and grounded in this so great love, not for selfish indulgence, but for others, and ultimately for travailing prayer that God's children may be borne to Him.

All men of whatsoever kindred, tribe or nation or tongue or culture, must be sought. Whatever their family they must be made to

see, understand, know, comprehend.

Urgency must be upon us, the precious stones must be sought out, found and added to the Church. Only His love will be sufficient to make us as concerned as He about others. Souls are precious to Him; He must dwell in our hearts so that we become rooted and grounded in Love; He is Love and loving toward all, wanting to add them to His Church. Men must become as precious to us as to Him or we shall not pray for them; except we value them aright we shall not spend time and strength or give of our substance and love for their salvation. They must be embedded and engraved upon breasts of pure gold or we will not put our shoulder to the task or open our heart to receive them into the beauty and glory and joy of the Lord.

Wherever we look in the New Testament we find this same emphasis upon prayer. It is one of the four basic things upon which the original church at Jerusalem was built up under the apostles' supervision from the day of Pentecost onwards. Indeed, as the precious stones were the seventh thing which brought the high priest's royal regalia to perfection, so prayer is the seventh privilege to which the saints were called at the beginning. Prayer crowned the churches' experience then, and it is no less a crown now. First men repented, then they were baptized in water, then they received the Holy Spirit; after that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayers.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was itself the result of prayer,

both on the part of the Lord and of the one hundred and twenty. He said He would pray the Father that He would give them 'another Comforter', and they engaged in ten days of unbroken prayer; upon that the Holy Ghost was poured out. Seeing this is so, there can be little doubt about the importance with which prayer was regarded among men on earth and by God in heaven. Every man built up his own life with prayer, therefore the Church was built up also. Prayer for souls adds precious stones to a man's personal life achievement. It also unites him with the Lord Christ, who is even now interceding at God's right hand, seeking precious stones to build into His Church. Whether Christ in heaven or we on earth, all are engaged in building. He is building gold, silver, precious stones. What are we building? Each stone in Christ's building is a sacrificing priest; he

must be, because the High Priest is. A man must make real sacrifices in order to attain to his heavenly calling, even as his Lord did; without definite spiritual sacrifice it is not possible to attain to this ministry.

The men who were the Lord's intimates on earth followed His example well. Being later possessed of His Spirit, they walked in His ways and soon developed His habits; in turn they showed to the newly-converted what they themselves had heard and seen. 'That which we have seen and heard', says John, 'declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us', so they laid it down as fundamental to the Church that they should pray. Consistent with this, note their statement of intention to their brethren when ordaining deacons: 'it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables we will give ourselves

continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word'. To them the word of God was all-important and they realized that apart from prayer they could neither receive it nor speak it.

They taught the Church this from its natal day. Following a season of prayer they were baptized in the Spirit and following that Peter stood up with the eleven and spoke the word. Directly after this the spectacular miracle soon followed at the hour of prayer, and again Peter spoke forth the word; for his pains he was thrown into prison. Upon release he was again found preaching the word to his accusers, seeking thereby to lay the foundation stone in hearts, forcing men either to accept the word or to reject it. With his companions he afterwards returned to their own company, where, by one Spirit they all engaged in one prayer. Their united

request was that with all boldness they may speak God's word. The result was precisely as they prayed, 'they spake the word of God with boldness'.

Under no condition could the preaching of the word be left; they were put under so much pressure that the apostles unavoidably left other things, but not this. For the sake of the word they even had to neglect dependent widows; this was most distasteful to them. It was done entirely without malicious intention, and to rectify the anomaly they ordained seven deacons of the people's choice, but they refused to leave the word of God. The word of the Lord was paramount to them. To that very day it rang in their ears, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'. The force and urgency of the command was unforgettable. To preach the gospel was

their foremost intention, for it was the primary reason for their calling, so in order to minister the word, they gave themselves to prayer.

The twelve kept priorities right for the churches; by giving themselves so completely to prayer and the ministry of the word they set an example for all time and their singleness of purpose laid a sure foundation. Before long the centre of apostolic influence moved from Jerusalem to Antioch, where the tradition of the original elders had already been received to good effect. There, prophets and teachers and apostles-to-be spent time fasting and praying, waiting upon the Lord, ministering to Him. Not surprisingly from such a company God raised up and sent forth the word into the whole gentile world. So it goes on; right through the history of the early

Church — prayer and preaching. It was well and truly built because it was properly founded in every heart successively added to the Lord.

So far we have observed three aspects of building and three builders: (1) Christ building His Church; (2) Paul, the wise master builder laying Christ the foundation of every local church; (3) every man building on that foundation. In its own realm each is important and absolutely indispensable to the fulfilment of God's eternal plans. To this we must add yet another aspect of building equal in importance to the other three, namely edification, or the building up of each other. But this will be considered later, for it belongs to another order of Church truth, and must have its rightful place there.

Chapter 4 — THE BODY OF CHRIST

Paul's revelation of 'the Church which is His body' is one of the most absorbing preoccupations of the people of God at this present time, far exceeding in popularity any of the other equally important aspects of the Church. There is much talk of body ministry among us, and the subject of edification is more often than not thought of as body-building; it seems to have greater airing in these days than the Lord adding to the Church such as are being saved. If this is really so, it is a disproportionate emphasis and most regrettable, but even so body truth must be given its proper place in our thinking, or full understanding of the doctrine of the Church is not to be gained. Every facet of the precious revelation of Christ's Church must have its proper place

and receive due emphasis, for each is necessary to the fullest development and proper function of the others and together with them contributes to the whole.

I Am Jesus

One of the reasons God raised up Paul the apostle was that He should give him the revelation that the Church is the body of Christ. This revelation is for the most part immortalised in his Ephesian and Corinthian letters, and, if we may judge with accuracy, this revelation was very dear to his heart.

This is not at all surprising, for this truth was implicit in the words which first wakened his soul to reality on the Damascus road, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' and the answer left him trembling with astonishment and fear — 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest'; Paul did not know that he had been persecuting Jesus.

There is no record in the Gospels that this arch-enemy of the Church had ever met Jesus or been near Him even. How then could he have persecuted Him? It was a strange introduction. Without doubt if Saul had been asked he would have said he had never once raised a finger against His person, yet at that first critical meeting Jesus names him as His persecutor. It must have been a most baffling thing to Saul, for he believed Jesus to be dead, and it is totally impossible to persecute a dead person — he does not exist. He had openly persecuted the Lord's disciples, he had done it relentlessly and boasted of it; everyone knew he was the avowed opponent of the Church and waged war against it with zeal. He frankly detested the name of Jesus of Nazareth, but he had never said anything to or against Him personally. How then could

he possibly be accused of persecuting Him? He was confounded, but now he could no longer refuse to believe what formerly he had denied — that Jesus was alive. Three whole days of blindness and prayer and fasting gave him opportunity to search his soul as he saw it in the light of Christ. Not only was Jesus alive and all His claims true, but in some mysterious way he did not understand, He was also identified with His followers in the present. It was almost unbelievable, but to the logical Paul there was only one rational explanation to that: Jesus must be living in the bodies of His people. There was no other reasonable explanation for Jesus' statement that by persecuting them he was actually persecuting Him; the realization of it was awful.

If this or something like it was the process of Paul's reasoning that day it was absolutely correct, and God's gracious dealings with him at the end of his prayer vigil absolutely confirmed it to him. At the hands of merciful Ananias Jesus baptized him in the Spirit and came to live in him; at the same time he was given back his sight and instantly entered into life and was then and there commissioned to service. How soon after that he received the divine revelation that the Church is Christ's body we do not know, but whenever it was he understood it perfectly, for he had already been introduced to the idea of it at his conversion. If Christ lived in the persons and therefore in the bodies of church members, then obviously the Church must be His body; upon reflection it would have been no surprise. From this spectacular beginning

Paul never looked back. He had been chosen for this, separated unto the gospel and from this sure start he moved on to yet greater heights of revelation. All this mass of truth he faithfully passed on to others and how indebted we are to him for his faithfulness. Following his calling, with unremitting energy he spent his life travelling, preaching, teaching, writing until the end.

Perhaps at times unforgettable memories haunted him — the sound and sight of stones thudding into the body of Stephen, or the cries of some other tortured soul, making him shudder and cry out. His letter to Timothy is a revelation of the self-condemnation with which he viewed himself: his behaviour was unforgettable — 'I was a murderer and blasphemer' he cried. He now loved the Church he once persecuted because it was the body of

Christ. So total was his repentance and so deep his sorrow, that his desire was to live only to serve it, for serving the Church he was serving Him. He bitterly regretted that he had so hurt the Lord; what lessons of eternal love and life he learned on the Damascus road, and what a foundation was laid there for his later doctrine. For ever after the most wondrous aspect of the Church, exceeding all others to him, was that it is the body of Christ, and that is how he chiefly presented it. The theme so greatly coloured his thinking that in one memorable passage he said his one desire was to 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake which is the Church, whereof I am made a minister'

'My flesh for His body', what a concept, but that is the man; his devotion to Christ and

His Church is an inspiration to us all. There could scarcely be a more positive means of fixing anyone's identity than by seeing or handling that living person's body, it is normally accepted that to be able to do so is proof that the person is alive. This is the degree of identity and proof Paul meant to convey when he spoke of the Church being Christ's body. His initial encounter gave him much enlightenment which was steadily augmented by what he learned through many ongoing personal experiences, plus the tutorial revelations of Jesus Christ; to these were added also the unspeakable words he heard and things he saw when he was caught up to the third heaven. By all these things he was systematically equipped to speak and write with unrivalled authority on the subject so dear to his heart.

There is no doubt about the importance to us of this revelation concerning the Church of Christ; so vital is it in Paul's estimation that he writes of it in his epistles in a very special way. Of all these it is generally considered that his epistle to the Ephesians is the finest example of his expository powers on this theme. It must surely be considered the greatest revelation on the subject and must therefore figure largely in our present considerations. In course of the revelation, moving through chapters one to four, Paul uses seven related phrases — His body, one body, increase of the body. Later he includes the phrase 'He is the saviour of the body' and fully discharges to the Church the burden of his apostolic revelation. Gathering these phrases together we see that the Church is the body of Christ alone, that it is one, it is whole, it is an indivisible

and ever-increasing company of people; the repeated assertion is that it is one body.

Maintaining the Unity of the Spirit

Paul, always careful to maintain the unity of the Spirit, fought desperately to prevent schism among the early churches. In his capacity as apostle to the gentiles he felt it of utmost importance to do this and it was due largely to his skill and success that the visible Church emerged in unity from the first century A.D. He was very aware of the two major disputes raging among believers in his day and saw clearly how, through men's misplaced convictions, the devil works to destroy the eternal purpose of God. He therefore sought to expose the devil's lies, preaching the truth widely and teaching the saints consistently to combat the devil's contrary purposes. Beside this, whenever necessary he laboured much by letter also,

writing three epistles, namely Galatians, first Corinthians and Ephesians, with the specific purpose of destroying these vicious intentions of satan, and to instruct and build up the saints in love.

In the epistle to the Galatians he first declares the source of his gospel — 'by revelation of Jesus Christ'. He then openly shows that although there had been an unpleasant incident between Peter and himself at Antioch, there was no rupture between them. When he had rebuked Cephas it was for temporary vacillation, that was all; there was no enmity between them, he only reproved his fellow-apostle for a bad lapse in behaviour — there was no difference between them in doctrine. In fact when he was at Jerusalem later there was perfect agreement and fellowship among all the apostles, he says. As a result of this

meeting, with the consent and agreement of all the apostles, he went to the gentiles and Peter to the circumcision, each feeling he was sent with the blessing of God and men and they sealed it all by giving each other the right hand of fellowship. Parting with each other's blessing they went about their God-given duties in separate ways; there was no division between them at all, only utter commitment to do the will of God and fulfil their calling.

By his speedy action the great danger of racialism was averted; what a schism it would have been if it had been allowed. There is no such thing as a national church; racialism and nationalism have no place or recognition in Christ's Church; they are utterly destructive of the spirit and understanding as well as the enjoyment of true Church fellowship. There are not two

bodies, one Jewish and the other gentile; there is only one body. This is the great truth for which Paul laboured all his apostolic life, 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. This endeavour lay behind all his writings and preachings against the alleged importance and necessity for circumcision. There is not and never can be any such thing as a national church such as Church of England or Church of Rome or Church of America, etc. As surely as the Church becomes nominally national it will become nominally Christian and that nation will force it to become its servant.

Paul saw this clearly; he also saw that if the Judaisers were allowed to impose their circumcision on the gentiles, enforcing the practice and teaching it as an accepted doctrine and rite of the Church, all the churches would be in serious heresy. Man,

with his inherent tendency to ritualism, loves ordinances and outward show, substituting these for the spiritual reality they represent. To have accepted the tradition of circumcision would have ensured the destruction of the Church, making it just another form of Jewry under another name. Paul also saw that if Jewish believers were given a concession and allowed to practise it, whatever anyone said about it, it would be considered a spiritual virtue and become a recognized Christian ordinance and would sectionalise and divide the Church. He therefore made, and doubtless often repeated, the classic statement that 'in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation' — this he said is a rule which must govern all our walk.

It is a fundamental dictum, first written by Paul and preserved unto us, that being baptised into Christ, we are 'neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female' among us, 'we are all one in Christ Jesus'. As stated by the apostle, from God's point of view, for the purposes of His kingdom there are three and only three ethnic divisions among men — Jew, gentile and the Church. By first birth man is in one of the first two groups, by second birth he is in the Church; he cannot be in any two of them at the same time. There is no such person as a Christian Jew or a Christian gentile; if a person is a Christian he is a member of a new race. With this kind of trenchant thinking and fearless preaching Paul dealt with one of the errors: we could do with some of that kind of men and

preaching today; we would greatly benefit by them.

The second danger was that of internal schism in the local church. Paul wrote against this to the Corinthians, strongly attacking their partiality, carnality and lovelessness. He had heard that Communion meetings at Corinth had become occasions of callous gluttony on the part of some and that uncontrolled use of a particular gift had resulted in complete disorder and confusion in the meetings. Added to this, visiting ministers were treated as heralds of new truth; against their wishes and God's intentions His ministers had been received in the wrong spirit altogether. The import of their teachings had been grievously misinterpreted, as a consequence of which unity of belief and practice no longer existed in the church. It was not the ministers' fault,

it was because of the pitiable childishness of the Corinthians. As to the social realm, if anything things were worse: behaviour was terrible, marriage relationships had broken down, lawsuits were in progress between church members, authority was being flaunted [?"flouted"?], true communion was unknown.

Schism cannot possibly exist in the body of Christ, but it had ruined the body of believers at Corinth and news of it broke the apostle's heart; his response was this epistle. The effect of it upon the church was little short of dynamic, bringing people to repentance and restoration, cleansing and re-establishing the position there. It appears from the second epistle he wrote that, as a result of his first epistle, the schismatic practices and tendencies were stamped out completely, the saints were reconciled to

God and each other and all the old things passed away.

His Great Love Wherewith He Loved Us

Of the three epistles, the Ephesian is the most frankly doctrinal. Its lofty instruction in the knowledge of God and the mystery of Christ is without parallel in scripture. In common with all his teachings, it was a personal revelation from God to Paul. He received all his great understanding of the mysteries of God by the same means. To the Galatians he says he received the gospel he preached by direct revelation from Jesus Christ; to the Corinthians he makes clear that by revelation he also received the ordinances he established in the churches; to the Ephesians he declares that his knowledge of the Church was equally an original revelation. He saw and presented the Church as a new creation of God in its

eternal position, the place it had always held in the plan and purpose of God and the person of Christ. He does not attempt to write as though he knew all the counsels of God, for he did not, but he writes as one under commandment, having been made privy to secrets hitherto unrevealed to men. His vision incorporates all ages and extends throughout all time, commencing and finishing in eternal being. We were chosen in Christ by His God and Father before the foundation of the world, says Paul, and are awaiting a future time of gathering together into one and then passing on into ages of ages of glory. He puts the Church into perspective with God's eternal purposes; it is a predestined company chosen in Christ to be His body and He their Head. The presentation of this truth is made in such an astounding way that the mind can scarcely

adjust to it. The Church which is His body is such an important company, that in order for His Christ to be head of it God actually had to do a new creative work in His Son. This was an astounding thing, for until then God had not created anything from the beginning of the world. In order for this, His Son had to be born and live and die on the earth and be raised from the dead, for the miracle He planned was so stupendous it could only be accomplished during the resurrection. Everything before that only led up to it. Now resurrected, exalted to the throne and sitting at God's right hand, Christ holds the highest possible position of power and authority under His Father's headship. Subject to that, everything is under His feet and He has been given to the Church as being head over all things to that body.

So great is Paul's effort to show the Church's exalted position, it is almost as though he under stresses the importance of the Head, and at first the heart bristles that in order to magnify the importance of the body he should appear to minimize the glorious Christ, but of course it is not so. The impression gained, if not purposely given, is that God, having a body of wondrous worth to Him was concerned to produce a head worthy of it. The wording is that God gave the head to the body, not the body to the head, and that is a most amazing suggestion — it is marvellous in our eyes. We poor humans are so frail, and born so fallen, and so far removed from God and truth, that we scarcely understand the ways of eternal love; we have no way of measuring its magnitude. Unaided we just cannot comprehend it all and even by God's Spirit

we seem to grasp so little. How grateful we ought to be for Paul's prayers that he felt he must pray for us as well as teach us; surely love is the greatest of all abiding reality. God and Love are so completely one that when He set Himself to create a Church, He could not act in anything other than love.

On account of His great love, God is rich in mercy toward us and has done everything in the exceeding riches of His grace. The very first information given us is that God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. 'Hath chosen', what an unusual phrase — the very language he uses is in the living present. We do not normally speak like that when speaking of a past act. We would say God chose us in the past, thinking in the past tense. But Paul speaks of the choice as

though God has chosen now; Paul is thinking in the eternal present, and the exciting truth is that this is only a sample of what is to come — the whole of this epistle is written in this vein. It is the work of a man of profound understanding, whose life was the demonstration of his faith and the expression of all he taught. He spoke of the breadth and length and depth and height of love, and prayed that we, as he, should comprehend and know its immeasurable vastness. Likewise when exhorting us to understand what the will of the Lord is, he says 'be being filled with the Spirit'; according to him everything is a present progressive experience. It was always like that with Paul.

He had a marvellous understanding of the 'now' of eternity and once told the Corinthians that the ends of the ages have

come upon us. His teachings unite past, present and future into one whole. He brings all things into perspective and applies them to present salvation in the most masterly fashion; the revelations are amazing. Possibly the greatest value of his teachings to the Church is his unparalleled gift of showing all things as they were and are eternally, and shall ever be, in the heart and love of God. When he says God exalted Jesus to headship over all things and gave Him in that capacity to the Church he reveals that heart; how exalted the Church is in the eyes of God! It seems He regards us exactly as He regards His Son; this is more than wonderful, it surely is nothing other than the genius of love, the nature and habit of God.

The persons of the Godhead think and behave towards one another as though each

thinks the other better and greater than Himself. Each delights to do the will of the other, to seek His pleasure, perform His works, be His servant, treat Him as God, exalt and honour Him above Himself. Each of them honours and builds up the other in love, and such is our privilege that into this unique personal virtue and practice God has brought the Church. O the wonder of being given Jesus Christ as our Head. What a privilege for the Church; we are His body of people, no-one else's. Paul writes this epistle in such vein that we wish to do nothing but, with him, worship our exalted Head; so honoured, so unimaginably exalted, so privileged are we that the wonder of it humbles us to the dust.

Eternally Chosen in Him

The formation of the body of Christ is one of the greatest mysteries revealed for our

understanding in scripture. God wants us to have a thorough grasp of this mystery. The apostle had written a short letter to the Ephesians about it earlier, but regrettably this is lost. In it he explained how he received the revelation, and if we had this letter in possession perhaps much that we do not now know would be clear. Its loss leaves a great gap in our knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church. Thank God that, despite the loss, we can still know Him, and that is greatest of all; but undoubtedly the possibility of knowing the mystery to the greatest degree is impaired. For instance we have no direct statement about the method God employed or the process He followed in creating the Church to be the body of Christ, but then we have very little information of the creation of Adam's body either. Likewise David's statement about being curiously

wrought in the lower parts of the earth is most mysterious and does not help very much; it is information and no more. It may not be unwarrantable presumption to believe that some of the information supplied in the missing manuscript is hinted at in this present letter though, so let us be content. To have an enquiring mind is good, but to be possessed of a spirit of inquisitiveness is evil; we will not therefore mourn our loss but rejoice in what we have; as it has been said, knowledge puffeth up, love edifieth. So much has been granted us, more than we shall ever fully comprehend here, so let us with grateful hearts gather as much truth as possible from the text graciously preserved for us. We may be sure that as we do so, in answer to His servant's prayers the Lord will enlighten our hearts and open the eyes of our understanding and

we may with a degree of certainty humbly expect Him to guide us into all truth.

Here is mystery: (1) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose us in Him before the foundation of the world; (2) we are the workmanship of God; (3) He created us in Christ Jesus. This information is marvellous, but no specific time period for any of these wonderful activities is mentioned; 'before the foundation of the world' was before time, as we know it, began. We are told 'who' was chosen, 'where' we were chosen, and also 'what' He chose for us, but not 'when' we were chosen or 'how' God created us; and except Paul had included his prayer in the epistle we might never have known in this world just how and when it was. That prayer interjected between these two striking pieces of information supplies the key we need to unlock the mystery. A

passage from this breathtaking supplication runs, 'what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead'. The clues we need to help us unravel, at least in part, the 'how' and 'when' of the Church are at hand.

Originally at some point in eternity past it was decided in God that there was to be a Church. Father chose it in Christ, and because in Him it was possible to do so in utter perfection, He chose the kind of Church He wanted. It was kept a closely guarded secret; nobody even heard of it until the day Jesus declared His intentions to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi. Even so God did not commence His new creation then; He did not do so at any time throughout the length of time covered by

the whole of the Old Testament, nor yet at any time while His Son was on earth. He created the Church in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies; that is 'when' He did it. This being so, the miracle of the resurrection is far greater than we have ever realized. He did it by the working of His exceeding great and mighty power; that is 'how' He did it. It commenced from the deepest depths to which He had descended and finished at the right hand of the throne in the heavenlies.

At that time the unique and singular Jesus became the multiple Church; it was one of the mightiest of all miracles He wrought on the cross, indeed it is its complement. Jesus Christ and the Church were then made as one together as head and body belong to one another and are part of one another. As

in natural procreation a complete body is first formed as a whole and then born altogether at once as one unit, so also in new creation God, by His mighty power, brought forth head and body as one.

This is exactly what Jesus prayed for following the institution of the communion between Himself and His disciples in the upper room before going to the cross. Above all else His concern then was that we all should be one as He and His Holy Father are one; unless this should be so it did not seem worth dying. He expressed the oneness He sought in a twofold way: (1) 'As thou, Father art in me, and I in thee', that is by personal, singular indwelling — one in one. Only one Father dwelt in one Son and one Son in one Father; every individual person in the Church must know this blessed relationship; (2) 'that they may be one as we are, one; I in

them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one'. The oneness of this Father/Son relationship is a head/body unity. Paul had earlier put it to the Corinthians quite clearly, 'the head of Christ is God'. God was the head of the man Jesus Christ who was the Son of (the) Father. The revelation that Christ is the head of the Church is perhaps no greater than the revelation that God is the head of Christ.

When Paul opens his epistle he refers to God by His full title in relation to the Church — 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'; then later, in course of his prayers, without explanation he touches on a mystery in connection with His being and person and function. The first prayer he addresses to 'the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory', the second to 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The change of form of

address is significant. Both prayers are to the same person of course; the form of address is changed quite deliberately because it is proper to the particular emphasis he wished to make, and he is praying with the understanding.

In the first prayer Paul draws attention to the power of God which worked exclusively in the man Christ Jesus at the resurrection. In the second he points out Father's love for every member of His family who was wrought in Christ during that exclusive operation. In the first, Christ is seated in heaven, the head of the body into which we have been inwrought as members of Him. It was a creative work of God, greater than when in the beginning He made Adam. In the second Christ is dwelling in hearts that He may be inwrought into the life of every member of the family begotten by the

Father. The power at work in both cases is stupendous; the former is only possible by the power of God and the second is only possible by the mighty strength of the Holy Spirit. In both cases our attention is being drawn to faith. We are in the heart of our Head and our Head is in our heart. Here is mystery: we are in Him; He is in us.

To understand this properly at this point we need to borrow from Paul's letter to the Philippians. He says there that before coming to earth and being found in fashion as a man, Christ Jesus 'emptied Himself', (in his famous hymn Wesley says, 'emptied Himself of all but love', beautiful thought). Although we know He did not empty Himself of sonship or of Godhead, we have no means of knowing all that took place in that mighty act, but surely the Church-body must have been included in that self-emptying, for

the Church was not born at Bethlehem. God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, but when He came into the world He came alone. We had to be inwrought into Him again and this was the miracle that took place in the resurrection.

When God elected us to eternal life and being in Christ it was only a beginning — having exercised His good pleasure He had to lay plans to fulfil it. His was a costly choice and a dreadful decision; it cost Him everything to make it good; we needed redeeming. Adam's later crime added to Lucifer's former sin was so immeasurable, sin so great, that in order to fulfil His Father's desires Christ had to die. He could not die with us in Him though, He had to empty Himself of us first. He could die for us and as us, He could substitute us, but not take us with Him to His redeeming death; to

be effective it must be first of all substitutionary. We were not His body on the cross. He died alone. He was self-emptied at birth and God-forsaken at death; one lonely man, humbled and obedient; He had made His choice, vowed His vow. Precious Jesus.

The Wondrous Cross

How wonderful is our Lord! In the very beginning what but uttermost love possessed Him to volunteer to be the Christ? One of the persons of the blessed three had had to consent to be the Christ; we needed to be chosen in Someone — He volunteered and so the great cycle of activity commenced. He was elected to be the Christ in whom we should be chosen, the Lamb in whom all fulness dwelt, slain before the foundation of the world, who emptied Himself to be made in the likeness of man by

God. At birth He was found in fashion as a man, named Jesus and took upon Himself the form of a servant. It was on the cross though that He discovered to the full the dread implications of such nobility. Not until then was He fully made in the likeness of man. In the manger He was made in our bodily form and physical likeness, but on the cross He was made sin, conformed to our true inward spiritual likeness. We were not His body then. The Church did not die for its own sin, we had to be excluded entirely from the expiatory act or we should have been our own saviour. Yet here is the miracle (and who else but God could have done it?): we were included in that crucifixion in order to live; we had to be crucified with Christ.

How wonderful in mystery is the Lord of the cross, what compensations were His there; everything was to be gained. Despising the

shame, He endured it for the joy that was set before Him, for He knew that when finally He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high all would be accomplished; His Church would sit down with Him. He was laid in the tomb whole, ruptured but unbroken; there was no schism in Him there. His heart was broken, but not a bone of His body. His flesh was torn and bruised and pierced and broken. His wounds gaped pitilessly, each a mouth to His deep humiliation. His torturers were experts — the flesh hung from His bones and great areas of it were missing, but He was whole; thank God He was whole. Pain wracked Him, His disjointed bones stared at Him, He could count them all, strong bulls of Bashan roared at Him ceaselessly and raging unicorns tossed Him about mercilessly, but His spirit was undaunted and His soul remained

untainted. Everything was so undeserved, yet He hung uncomplaining between the living God and the dead people till all things predetermined by God were accomplished. His natural strength drained away, His blood ran from Him in a hundred places, His mouth dried out like a potter's shard, not a drop of moisture remained in Him. He entered into darkness, death was on Him, the grave was a haven of rest inviting Him, soon He could lay down His burden and lie there in peace. He was determined to take His body whole to the grave.

The offering had to be complete. He could not go to death as His cousin John before Him, his head on a platter and his body in the grave or in the fires of Tophet; His head must be buried with His body, He must be whole and one. God's plans required it, His Father wanted it, the scriptures foretold it,

righteousness demanded it, the Church needed it, He had determined it and He did it; by the Holy Ghost He accomplished it. Nothing deterred Him from fulfilling all the requirements of that eternal purpose. In Himself He made one new man; by His cross He reconciled sworn enemies to God and to each other in one body. He did it with streaming blood and heartrending cries while Jew and gentile joined with satan to crucify and break Him and tear Him apart; they failed. There God crucified the old man. 'Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father'.

The Fulness of Him that Filleth All in All

The triumph of Jesus on the cross and in death enabled God the Father to fulfil His own wishes and accomplish His own works also. Into that man who had emptied Himself to the extremity of barren, pain-filled loneliness, God poured all fulness. Raising Him from the dead, He wrought into Him in the act every single member of the Church, creating the body of the Christ according to the eternal plan. The resurrection is the proof of it and the body which walked out of the grave is the symbol of it. The unseen miracles of the death and resurrection of Christ though are far greater than those which were then seen or perhaps at present thought of. Rejoice O ye heavens, make a joyful noise unto Him all ye ends of the earth, for the Lord has been raised to headship over all principality and power and

might and dominion and names both in this age and in that which is to come.

Everything is under His feet, and He is utterly given to the Church; it is His body, so this is not surprising. More than that, it is His fulness, His precious treasure. The Church is the fulness He resigned in heaven and regained as He left death and the earth and cleft the skies to the throne. O He was alive; He felt so full of life, He thrilled with exultation and love, it was wonderful. He was blessed beyond measure, His body was filled with it. He was whole, healed, one, complete, all His parts and members were together, not one was missing, hallelujah! Every one of His joints and all His faculties were working perfectly, normally; this was glory. He rose from the dead filled, and ascended up on high intending to fill all things with His fulness. He reigns in the

heights, and from those heights His purpose is to fill all with His fulness, even hell: He will fill it with His wrath in great fire.

For His Church He purposes to fill everything in two ways: first He intends to fill all His members personally, and having done so, to fill everything with that fulness. Seeing this is the purpose of God, and the latter depends upon the former, it is therefore of great importance that every member of the body secures this fulness of Christ unto himself or herself this very instant.

Whatever his or her experience to date, every member of the body of Christ must know the sealing of the Spirit; if this be wanting it is insufficient for God. This sealing is nothing other or less than the gift of God the Holy Spirit from God the Father to take up eternal residence in His children. It is: (1) the only valid seal of sonship; (2) the

absolute proof of being in the body of Christ;
(3) the unqualified guarantee of the inheritance bequeathed to each member;
(4) the personal certification of being included in the final ingathering and summation of all things in Christ scheduled to take place in the dispensation of the fulness of time.

Membership in Christ's body is in itself such a privilege that any man might at first be excused if he felt need of nothing more, and was fully content to rest in that knowledge for ever. But what a selfish view this would be. Lest this carnal thought should grip and hold us, before even telling us of the privilege granted us, the Lord enlightens us as to His purpose for us, and tells of His own good pleasure and His will to perform it. Poor, small things that we are, we all too readily and selfishly refuse to seek for

anything not primarily and directly related to our own benefit. But we have to be filled with His fulness, not our own; that is the plan, and Christ is filled with determination to please His Father and do His will, not ours. It was His Father who raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies, and Jesus feels He owes Him everything. Having once commenced on the course of redemption He could not draw back and committed Himself to it utterly. From that epochal moment He became totally dependent upon His Father for everything. Being so faithfully and fully provided for, He feels Himself eternally indebted to Him.

Beyond, far beyond anything we can know in this world, the eternal ages roll out into the unknown future filled with God's hopes. Equally they are filled with possibilities yet

unrevealed to the whole Church. Coming ages are stored with promises and blessings for us; with these are bound up the realisation of the vast inheritance laid up in heaven for us all. In view of this, God is expecting each one of us whom He has chosen in Christ to show our gratitude to Him by receiving and being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is absolutely necessary; everything depends on it, for only by Him can Christ our Head fill all in all. All possibilities — breadth, length, depth and height; all potential — powers, might, strength and dominion; the whole personality — mind, heart and spirit. He who knew that if He saved His life He would lose it, says to us also 'he that will save his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it'. He knew — He did so Himself.

The Fellowship of the Mystery

Paul was very desirous that we should know the mystery of Christ. He was equally determined that we should also know the fellowship of the mystery. He saw it to be his calling. We are all fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the same body, and fellow-partakers of God's promise in Christ, he says. The first has to do with the inheritance; we all share it. The last has to do with our sealing by the Spirit; we all partake of it. The central statement has to do with our birth and family; we are all in it; these three are of one. The first and last have been dealt with fairly expansively earlier, but the central one, though alluded to before, is now being newly introduced and accorded a special section on its own. Being concerned with birth, it is of very great importance. Like Peter and John, who when dealing with the

Church lay stress on regeneration, Paul finds it equally necessary to do so. The fellowship of the mystery above-mentioned and classified in this threefold way subsists in this form only as family truth. The inheritance can only be shared by the family of God; to be true children the members of that family must be of one body begotten only; proof of that birth and the one sign of membership of the race is the seal — it is the entitlement to inheritance.

God inworked both the roots and the pattern of this in His ancient people Israel. He laid the roots of it in Abraham the father of the race, and inlaid the pattern of it in his family, the succeeding race. When Abraham complained to God that he had no heir whereby he should know he would inherit the land, he was told by the Lord, 'he that shall proceed from thine own bowels shall

be thine heir'. Paul says that by that time Abraham's body was dead and so was his wife Sarah's. Yet God said Abraham's seed must come forth from his own bowels. It was not humanly possible, yet Abraham never even staggered at the promise; he believed God and was accounted righteous in doing so. Whereupon God gave him the sign of circumcision, 'a seal of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised', and without delay Abraham circumcised himself and all the males of his household. Soon after that, Sarah herself received strength from God to conceive seed, and in process of time Isaac was born of Abraham's own body, begotten according to the promise. Isaac was born into a family already circumcised, and he himself received the seal which proclaimed him heir both of his father and of God. Thereafter every man of

the untold millions of Israel, Abraham's seed, had to receive the seal; he was not counted a member of the race unless he bore the sign; it was the seal of sonship. Without it he did not belong to God's people and was not a member of His family; far from that, he was cut off from the family and the inheritance.

Paul not only had great insight into the mystery and its fellowship, he also had great knowledge of Israel's history. He knew that what happened to Abraham was only a figure of the truth that had been revealed to him. Circumcision was only a prefiguration; it was an aspect of the work Christ accomplished on the cross. The apostle was not adapting Church doctrine to Abrahamic lore; on the contrary he saw that what happened to the patriarch was a kind of predestinating adaptation of what Christ

later did on the cross. Circumcision was to Abraham and the family of Israel a predestinating factor; it was a predestination to all the fulness of the blessings of God in the promised land. The Greek word translated predestination means 'to mark out beforehand', and that is precisely what circumcision was; it was a mark cut into the flesh. Similarly all God's children must carry this mark of spiritual circumcision — it is inward, of the heart, in the spirit — it is applied by the Holy Spirit by the cross.

With Jesus, Paul knew that Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day. What happened with Abraham and his family in the dawn of Israel's history was something like the enactment of a vision seen in a glass darkly, a shadowy reflection, later revealed to Paul much more clearly, though not fully. It was related in principle to part of the mystery of

Christ and of the fellowship of that mystery which is the Church. It was in the midst of the great message of love in his letter to the Corinthians concerning the Church that Paul said 'now we see through a glass darkly'; how truly he spoke. Nevertheless he had great understanding in the mysteries of God. He saw that Christ is the Son of the Father who chose the great body of seed in Him before the world was. He also saw that we must be of that body begotten and to that body belong. The method and the frankly admitted difficulty of accomplishing this was worked out among the members of the Godhead, each of whom is God co-equal with the others. All is bound up in the mystery of God and of the Father and the Son.

Light is cast on it dimly however by God's dealings with the patriarchal trio —

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Though not in clearest light or fullest perfection, in these three to a remarkable degree we may trace the relationship of the Father, the Son and the Church. Abraham was told, 'in Isaac shall thy seed be called', and he saw that not only was Isaac his only begotten son, but that all the seed according to the promise was in him as well. Through Isaac, Abraham was the father of all Israel, the new race which sprang from the twelve sons of Jacob, and so it is with Christ; through Him, God His Father is the God and Father of us all.

There is a parallelism between the Church and Israel. They are different of course, belonging to God under two different covenants. Like the nation of old, the present spiritual Israel of God has, in the twelve apostles of the Lamb, twelve patriarchal heads or fathers of the churches;

from these the new race has sprung. They are foundational, and upon these, as being next in order and time to Christ, the Church is founded. So great is their importance and so necessary their work that to them a whole book of the New Testament is dedicated. This obviously implies that the unfinished work of the Lord on earth was being continued through His apostles and Church. Those apostles were indispensable to God's plan and through them we trace our ancestry back to Christ and God.

With each of Israel's three earliest patriarchs a famous woman is associated, namely Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, without whom Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — that trio of famous patriarchal husbands — the race could not have been begotten. In their combined continuing motherhood these three wives suggest the idea of God the Holy

Spirit, apart from whom God's Church could neither have been born nor could it continue to exist. In an eternal union stronger than marriage Father, Son and Holy Ghost lived in complete unity, one Spirit-Being to bring forth the Church, and the part borne by the Holy Ghost is to bear every son whom the Father begets into the body of the Son. To Sarah is accorded a statement worthy of the Holy Spirit, 'she judged Him faithful who had promised'; so it was that by faith Abraham begat Isaac by Sarah. The Holy Spirit judges God the Father to be faithful to His promise. Indeed He is now come as a result of promise and is the Spirit of promise by whom the Father presently begets the seed He originally chose and then created in the Son.

As it was the Holy Spirit who in the beginning came upon Mary and

overshadowed her that Jesus may be born, He also comes upon us that we may be born; the fellowship of the Church is a family fellowship. We are begotten of the same Father as Jesus by the same seed and of the same Holy Spirit that we might share with Christ the vast family riches. They are unsearchable, says Paul, and his prayer for the family is that the Spirit who seals us may also strengthen us, that Christ the Son should dwell in every one of us that each should have equal rights and an equal share in the family wealth. There must be no doubt in any heart about this, for all is by faith. God does nothing automatically; it is essential that we believe or we shall not receive, even though all is bequeathed. Everything has been done perfectly by God; there is no difficulty on His side and no doubting His will; the same Spirit who seals

us God's sons and strengthens us for Christ's indwelling is the one and same Spirit by whom every one of us has access to the Father.

There is no need for any of God's children to live in spiritual poverty, and there is no excuse for shortcoming or failure because access is freely granted to all of God's wealth. Since we are God's children and walk in His will there is no limit to what we can have — all the unspeakable wealth of the nature, character, personality and powers of Jesus are willed us. All the fulness of God is entirely open to our desires. We must not stagger at the prospect through unbelief; it is not greedy to want all, for in having all none can rob another; those riches are infinite.

The Boldness of Faith

The height of every person's ambition should be perfect manhood in the body of Christ. Peak of achievement is to arrive at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Selfishness is utterly impossible, for the purpose of this is edification of the body of Christ till everyone in Christ arrives at the same fulness. God's method of distributing this wealth is absolutely fair; the presence of Christ in us is the basic factor governing all right to inheritance, and the stature of Christ in us governs the amount of the riches we actually possess. This is the eternal, unchanging principle of absolute righteousness and equality with which God our Father treats all the family; He has made all His wealth equally available to us all. The decisive factor determining the amount of this wealth possessed by every member of the family is faith. He did not choose with

partiality — there is no preference in this realm; favouritism is utterly unknown to God. He is Love to every one of His children and too wise to be partial.

All shortcomings and limitations are on our side; we must determine not to remain babes in arms or we shall remain in impoverishment, for how shall babes handle vast riches? We must grow up and learn to walk and think and come to understanding. Babies cannot think; they do not desire or seek after true wealth but are satisfied with common things. To them these seem treasures, for them they cry and to them they cling and with them play, while adult treasures lie unwanted within reach. If we persist in refusing to walk, and insist on being carried, we shall find ourselves being carried away by men. Let us be warned, there are those, filled with cunning

craftiness, who have infiltrated the churches and are working deceitfully to destroy them; all these must be recognised and cast out.

We must be spiritually strengthened, powerfully indwelt, firmly rooted, properly grounded, constantly built up, steadily walking, united in faith, fully comprehending, knowing the Son of God.

We shall not then be empty, tossed about by winds of doctrine, moved off our ground, without understanding, constantly collapsing, 'the odd one out', ignorant of the truth and of the Son of God. When God has performed all the basic things in us, since He has established the way and granted us all free access to this vast treasury, we must have boldness to enter in. He bids us welcome; timidity is not modesty, it is cowardice. Though all this unlimited wealth be willed by God and given by the Father;

though perfect love and absolute impartiality be shown to every child equally, only those who believe these things and boldly approach their Father with intent to possess them shall have the riches to which they are heirs.

It would be impossible to list or even categorise all this super-abundance of love and gift. Indications of its vast fulness are scattered liberally throughout the New Testament though, many of them in this epistle. To name but a few of these: — exceeding greatness of power, comprehension of immeasurable love, all the fulness of God, the panoply of God. All this and so much more is prepared and laid up in heaven for God's bold and confident children. Paul's prayer must be answered in us — he prayed it for that reason. Every child of God ought to be able to testify in these

terms: 'I am a member of God's family, I am strong with the Spirit's strength, Christ lives in me, I am rooted and grounded in love, I comprehend and know the love of Christ, I am filled with all the fulness of God'. All this is available to us 'by faith of Him', which simply means that we have faith in His faithfulness and ability to ask and think and receive all for us.

Indwelling us in fulness, He will fill and engage all our powers, fusing them with His, using them as His to ask and think and believe far beyond our own human capacity. With His power working in us, new dimensions of faith and love and power will unfold to our understanding, and the greatness of Christ will fill us. Breadths, lengths, depths and heights of love will open to us, comprehension will dawn upon us and develop into eternal knowledge of Christ

and God; nothing will seem impossible. This is the mystery in which Father and Son had fellowship for our redemption both in eternity before the world was and also in time. The dispensation of grace is a dispensation of glory too, glory to God in every member of the Church through Jesus Christ now and throughout the endless ages of ages to come. The prospect is exceedingly wonderful, passing knowledge. Let us all attain to it for His glory.

The Obedience of Faith

Having taken us away out into the endless future, the apostle brings us back again to earth and the needs of the present time. Returning to his opening theme he commences another section of instruction about the body. His dominant insistence is oneness, unity, togetherness, wholeness; as members of the body we all must minister

to it as one. Every member of it is a minister of Christ to His body; we all are workers together. No-one is saved by his works but by God's grace and as a result of His works, He created us in Christ and ordained a path of good works for each individual to walk in. Progress can be made by the Church unto full operational power only as we develop unto full stature and are able to do these works. The works themselves, good though they be, have no power to make us Christ-like; it is always only the obedience of faith which accomplishes that. Doing the work manifests the fact that a person is obedient, which proves he is humble and in turn shows he is faithful and is there in power with God.

Of all works done by the saints, the ministry to the body is one of the most vital. This blessed privilege called edification or up-

building is purely a labour of love and a work of faith and except Christ dwells in the heart of the inner man is entirely impossible.

Before any person can help build up the Body of Christ, Christ must dwell within the body of that person. If he does not know how to live in his own body, how shall a man know how to upbuild Christ's? For this reason, when writing to the Corinthians, before dealing with their place and function in the body of Christ, Paul was careful to tell them that their bodies were temples of the Spirit. Whether it be the Corinthians or the Ephesians, men have to learn that this body into which they have been baptised is a body of selfless Love.

Love Stronger than Death

The correct mental attitude and approach to this theme is surely that in which the apostle himself introduces it, 'the Church which is

His body'. How this should influence our whole attitude to the Church. The man was very greatly affected by this knowledge, 'the Church is the body of my Lord', he thought, how wonderful that is; His body. How precious it is to Him; how precious also it was to Paul. He perfectly understood Mary Magdalene; he knew how she must have felt that resurrection morning, weeping over the loss of His body; 'Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence tell me where thou hast laid Him and I will take Him away', she said. She loved Him, loved Him. To her even His body was precious. She couldn't bear to think His body had been lost, perhaps brutalized more still; O how He had loved her; how He had loved everybody.

Poor mistaken Mary, she did not know He was alive. To her at that moment He was dead, but she loved Him still; death could

not break that. Stronger than death, her love yearned to hold His body, to bear it away somewhere, it did not matter where; she would tend it, honour it, re-inter it somewhere, somehow. It was His body, that was all that mattered. It did not matter that she would surely be put to death herself if she was found with it; she loved Him and made her desperate appeal to the gardener: 'Mary' He said, and she knew He was alive — 'because I live ye shall live also'. To Mary loving Jesus and loving His body was the same thing.

So it was with Paul. To him the Church and Christ are one, the Head on the throne in heaven, and the body on mission on earth. This is why his epistles are so full of exhortations and admonitions to give ourselves over utterly to the Lord and His service. He considered it to be a man's

reasonable service to present his body wholly to the Lord. He wanted us all to be living sacrifices, for that is what the Lord was. A man should account himself to be a sheep for slaughter, nothing less, he says. He reasoned that because by the blood of His cross the Lord reconciled us to Himself 'in the body of His flesh, through death' he and everybody else should give his own flesh for His body's sake, for that body is the Church. That body can have no flesh on earth now, except men give themselves bodily to Him for that purpose.

The Indwelling Christ

Men must commence to reason by the Spirit with understanding. Not only is each of us a member of Christ in our inner man, our bodies also must be surrendered to Him and function for the common good of the Church, for they are members of Christ.

Conformity to the world will surely result from wrong thinking in this area, for it will lead to incorrect behaviour. Mental renewal will work great transformation in the behaviour of any man who presents his whole self to the Lord. His body of flesh must be given over so completely to God that He believes it to be sacrificed to Him and accepts it for His body's sake. We must live and serve the Church and give ourselves for it as Christ did — 'no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it; we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones'. Flesh and blood and bones, we are to consider ourselves part of His body. We must give ourselves physically to it and for it without delay and without reserve. Redemption is total; we are not our own; we must glorify God in our bodies as well as our spirits.

The Lord loved the Church as a whole and gave Himself for every member of it as though each was His very own flesh. As any normal person washes his body with water for the sake of cleanliness and health, so He wants His body washed and sanctified — it must be clean and spotless, without a wrinkle or even a blemish anywhere. He gave Himself for that and we must give ourselves to it. We must love His body, make it glorious, prepare it for future presentation. Beyond a woman's tears in the house of a hypocrite, we all must wash it with the word as by the tears of the Head; the Church must be perfect. Perfection is an individual matter; it is achieved by attention to detail. To accomplish it the Head indwells each member as his or her personal head; His design thereby is to make each one perfect, that by that member's perfecting He

may perfect His whole body. This is the reason we must all be filled with the Spirit. We must wake up to what it is all about and go singing to the work. Fulness of the Spirit is not for personal enjoyment only; it is to fit us for service also. Singing in tune with the melody of the heart is not a terminus; there is more to singing than tunefulness. We must sing in time as well as in tune and in harmony as well as in part. A harmonious being is a person prepared for a ministry. Beauty for the body of Christ must be our aim — we must love it and give ourselves for it.

But health before beauty; a body cannot be beautiful if it is not healthy. Paul talks about beauty almost last of all; almost but not quite; finally he talks about the battle. We are made beautiful for the battle. This may seem strange, for battle fields are not

usually the places where beauty is either promoted or protected. We think of theatres of war as places of ugliness, wounds, cries, tears, anger, hostility. Savagery abounds there, bestiality, death and disease are abroad, anything but beauty of form or face. But this is only because we all too easily think of cosmetic beauty acquired in scented parlours. When God speaks of beauty He has in mind the loveliness revealed in scriptures like: 'He has no form or comeliness'; He is like 'a root out of a dry ground; His visage is so marred, more than the sons of men ... when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him'. He won the battle though, and He will only 'divide the spoil with the strong'.

Beauty in God's sight is purity of nature, sweetness of disposition, strength of character, equability of temperament,

faithfulness to take up the battle and willingness to suffer for His name's sake. He has provided every protection for that; His own armour in fact. Clad with this, all His warriors on the battlefield will find full salvation. If we gird ourselves entirely with truth and are righteous in heart, if thoughts of salvation helmet our head, if we are prepared to go on the march with the gospel army, advancing into enemy country with God's word, covering all with faith, our beauty will remain unspoiled. Contrary to all human expectations it will be enhanced. The most beautiful person in heaven returned home from the war covered with scars from head to foot. He is the Head; how then can His body be unmarked? Some scars are the marks of victory; His body must be covered with these or it will not be like its Head. But before beauty and the battlefield must come

health and strength. Paul applies himself to this with the words 'ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Every saint must be perfected for this work, he says. With this in view, every one is given grace by the Lord. The gifting for this ministry is from Christ, and according to the purpose for which the gift is given; this is an individual matter and takes place when we are baptised into His body; He does everything with purpose and care.

Giftings for Ministries

He is very concerned about this, so in order that these gifts should function properly the Lord gives further gifts also; these are men with special offices. He names five: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

Seeing that pastors and teachers are spoken of together it has been thought that perhaps Paul meant that the pastoral and teaching

office is one, and therefore the gifts may be combined in one person. Though they often are, this is not necessarily so; the offices are quite distinct as the scriptures show. Luke says that in the church at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers, and Paul says of himself that he was an apostle and teacher. In both cases the grammatical structure is the same as in the Ephesian text. It is therefore to be assumed that as there are prophets and teachers, there are also evangelists and teachers, and just teachers. But whoever he may be, it is the business of each of these men so to fulfil the purpose for which he is called that he fully discharges his duties to the saints. Each one must be perfected in the use of the particular gift given him or her by Christ, for everyone must work without ceasing. Everyone must be made to feel needed and see that he or

she is a minister; the body needs every available ministry. Each one is as important to the body as any of the special men and their ministries, and must be taught the sevenfold doctrine Paul is so careful to include in the letter.

The ultimate measure and power of the gift in function is governed by the stature of the man and his devotion to the Lord and his ministry. A man's position in the body is governed by God's love and grace and choice, and his gifting to the body may be gauged by his usefulness. Function is designed and granted according to the member's capacity, and usefulness in the body is governed by his faithfulness in the ministry. Full development of the body according to God's will is to a great degree, though not entirely, dependent upon the contribution of every member, not the

brilliance of a select few. Therefore it is the duty as well as the privilege of each one of us 'to grow up into Him in all things', and as He is 'Head over all things to the body' there is opportunity of continuous and almost limitless growth in all things. The Lord is expecting each one of us to apply ourselves to this zealously, without ceasing. No chance is to be missed, we must buy up the opportunities. Our attitude to life and time must be redemptive; every passing day is crammed full of 'things', bringing ample opportunity to build up self and the body in a proper manner; we dare not let them go without using them for the Lord.

Time is for this; of themselves 'days are evil', men full of hate are filling them up with evil practices, some of them too shameful to speak about; more zealous than they, we must fill the days with good. God, who has

made us good and ordained good works for us to do, insists that we walk in them, for only thus may we become perfect. The power that worked in Christ when He was raised from the dead will work effectually in us and we shall be effectual in His hands according to the measure of our gift. How we live and work is important. Together we must fitly join in for the common good, compacting our lives into one. This is the aim and delight of love. The whole of this section is conceived and constructed with these words: grace, gift, fulness, perfection, unity, growth, compactness, edification, love. Vain thinking, darkened understanding, ignorance, blindness and callousness marked our walk and work before; now we must be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving, loving, Christ-like, His body in all truth. There is nothing in this passage to encourage

individualism — individuals are to excel at compacting into one body.

It is quite impossible to properly grasp all this except it be fully understood that before the world was God chose the Church in Christ to be one body. Before any individual was chosen to be a member of the body God decided that we should be members of one another in a whole body. That is election. God made up His mind, purposed something in Himself, decided upon a course of action and fixed His will to achieve it — that is sovereignty. Election works out in the area of personal being in Christ and that election is final. When God calls people He calls into this. How we respond to His call determines our salvation — that is selection.

Called and Chosen in Him

The grace of salvation is one of the most precious jewels of Bible doctrine in both testaments. It has many aspects, each of which catches and reflects the light of God like one of the many facets of a well-cut and polished diamond. Not the least of these aspects of truth is this call of God, 'ye are called, ye are called'; the apostle reiterates it. To the Galatians he states it more fully — 'God separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace'. It is an intervention in the life and a vocational calling; God is expecting us to commit ourselves to a lifetime of work also. The call demands response. God chooses to call us, we choose to answer the call. Since the coming of Christ and the publishing of the gospel and the scriptures men may call on God before He calls them; God is not a despot and never issues a despotic

summons. In earnest souls desire responds to desire, faith answers to faith and the transaction has taken place. we have been selected to become a member of the elect body. When we responded we did not know all that had gone before, nor what was intended by the call and involved in the calling — we sought salvation. We learned of Calvary but knew nothing of God's decision that reconciliation to Him by Christ should only be made 'in one body by the cross' and could not be received outside of it. We were not reconciled to God individually to remain exclusively individualistic; everyone was reconciled at once by that one act as members of one complete body. The reconciling act was not only inclusive, it was comprehensive.

True it is that each of us needs to be personally saved — there has to be a point

in time when we are born of God, but on God's part our birth was the end of a long process which commenced way back in Him in eternity. He chose to do it this way, despite the enormous cost to Himself, and He accomplished it without contravening His own laws of eternal life or in the least degree sacrificing or compromising His own position as God. First He made us nigh by the blood, then He reconciled us to Himself in one body by the cross, then He inwrought us in Christ at the resurrection. It could only be done by God in the Son and only this way. It is as logical as it is miraculous; the body is one; we cannot make or create it one, it is one; our charge is to keep the unity of the Spirit in mind and practice. God is the Unity of the Spirit, three persons — that is three centres of conscious existence expressed as three distinct personalities in one being

which is Spirit. Now it is quite impossible for us to preserve that unity in its unique original form; we cannot keep God, on the contrary He keeps us. But we have to keep that unity in the form it has been adapted by God for the creation of the Church. But what a wonderful way to describe the Church; — 'The unity of the Spirit'; no-one but a Paul would have coined a phrase like that; it is superb.

The Church is a unity of spirits in one Spirit; each of those spirits is a human spirit regenerated into one body in that Spirit to become one spirit with other human spirits. We have 'all been made to drink into One Spirit', Paul tells the Corinthians as a church body, and tells the Galatians 'I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live' (as an individual). He had drunk into One Spirit, Christ's, and had become a member of His

body, yet he still retained his own conscious personality. He had and has eternal being, the astonishing gift of God; but sheer grace and astounding though it is, it is nevertheless exactly true. God has adapted His eternal life and being to His own desires and requirements for us all. He deliberately purposed to do according to His own good pleasure; and who shall doubt His wisdom and deny His power or disbelieve His love?

O great and high and noble God who hast dwelt in splendid and unapproachable glory from all eternity, how wonderful Thou art. Far above and distinct from all other beings Thou art God, there is none like Thee, Thou hast not made another like Thyself, none is equal with Thee or can share Thy glory. Of all that Thou hast created there is none to be compared with Thee. Yet Thou didst make man in Thine own image to bear Thy likeness

and have fellowship with Thee. O Lord, great in mystery and perfect in holiness, long before Adam fell Thou didst choose to share Thy life with the sons of men. We worship Thee who didst purpose to bring men into Thine own life. Thou wast angry and hurt by sin, but turned not back from Thy purpose, nor altered Thy choice; what Thou hast promised Thou hast done, and we praise Thee. Thou hast formed Thy body O Christ; of many spirits hast Thou formed it.

Multitudes have drunk into one Spirit and share Thy life to dwell in one body as one being for Thee through all eternity.

God's whole aim in grace is to bring us into His own eternal state of life. Expressed in trinitarian form, the Holy Three live one life, God is a unity, a body of three persons in fellowship in one being. The Church's form of eternal life is based on the same principle

— it is a multiplicity in unity — millions upon millions in fellowship in one life in one body. In keeping with this, the great event to which the centuries are moving is the summing up of all things in Christ under one Head. The unity will be openly seen then; as Paul says to the Romans, all the sons of God are going to be manifest and the secret now revealed to the churches will be manifest to all. To the Corinthians he unfolds the future eternal kingdom wherein even Christ Himself will yield up everything to the Father so that God shall be all in all. The great One and His one-ness will then be openly revealed. How precious it is now to all those who live in it in sacred predestiny.

Male and Female Created He Them

In all three epistles he writes of the Church as His body; to the Romans but little; to the Corinthians at greater length and in more

detail, under the figure of a human body; to the Ephesians most comprehensively and in variety under changing figures suited to his theme. In the Corinthian epistle he most surprisingly reveals the head / body relationship in God, and propounds it as the basis and pattern for the relationship between Christ and the Church, and man and woman. The head of Christ is God. Christ, it appears, is God's 'body' and man's head, and the man is Christ's body and woman's head. What the apostle is trying to teach us is the vital union and necessity of the one to the other. As far as humanity is concerned it is as impossible for the man to be without the woman or the woman without the man in the Lord, as it is impossible for the Father to be without the Son and the Son without the Father in the Spirit.

Although the Lord created the man first, in His thinking and indeed in His creating both are one, for she was in Adam when the Lord created him: it is a stunning thought that God created the man because He wanted the woman. All God did was to bring forth from him what was in the man; Eve was made first in Adam and secondly from him; she had as it were a second birth. She was 'chosen' in Adam first, created in him next, made from him third and joined to him fourth. Somehow this is all vitally connected with God's eternity of being and His headship. Man is head of woman because he actually existed in form and life before woman, yet when he was created she also was made. God obviously followed a prearranged plan in this, for He did not take her from Adam while he was still a dust-heap on the ground. First He breathed into

him the breath or spirit of life and Adam became a living soul. Then, after a period of life as a monad, God put him to sleep and from him, the living one, God made another like him. This 'new creation' was made from the 'new creation' to live with him in the 'new creation'. So like him was she that they were called man and woman (Heb: ish and isha) she only differed from him slightly in figure, but in image and likeness and form she was almost identical. It may actually be true that they were so alike they looked like male / female twins.

Now all this is symbolic; man and woman were created according to the pattern first revealed in God on mount Sion in the heavenly Jerusalem and to this mountain we have come. On its heights we are able to discern the same pattern which Moses transcribed into Tabernacle / People, Ezekiel

into the frame of a City / House, and Paul into a body / Church and John into New Earth / New Jerusalem. From it too we see the first creation, the first birth, the death and resurrection of Christ and the new creation/generation of the Church/body.

Adam was both a creation and a generation. By creation he was formed. God was his Artificer and Maker, he was 'fearfully and wonderfully' made: then God breathed into him the breath of life; He inspirited him and by inspiration he was generated. It was the same also with Eve, although made from a different substance; she was first formed and then inspirited by God. It is of real significance that the word used for 'made' in connection with Eve is 'builded'; God 'builded' the woman from man. When the Lord stated His intention concerning the Church He expressed Himself in almost the

exact terminology, certainly in the same ideology: 'I will build My Church'. Building, creating and begetting or generating, when thought of in connection with the Church, must be understood as different aspects of the same thing. Though they are not cognate words, they are one cognate truth and combine in God's mouth to present one revelation only.

How carefully the Spirit has compiled the scriptures. Although given over the centuries, everything is a transcription of the principles of eternal truth as it lay originally in the heart of God. It was worked out therefrom into history by a succession of acts, all designed to exhibit the oft-repeated testimony of His unchanging and unchangeable being — 'I AM THE LORD, I change not'. All historic events and God's methods of working in them at that time

have been expressions of His will and skill according to His eternal purpose, and the patterns and principles of the various operations have invariably been the same throughout. As Adam and Eve were one, so is Christ and His Church. Adam was Eve's head on two counts: he was not her literal head as being created upon the shoulders of the woman as is a head upon a human body, but as: (1) preceding her in order of actual creation, and (2) being the one from whom she was created. That is how Christ is our head.

In the Image of God

Although Paul uses the figure of an actual body when teaching the truth of unity, we must not apply this too literally either to the Church or to God. Because the physical form is designed upon the principles of God's being, it is a most suitable mode from which

to teach the greater divine truth, but we must not attribute human form to God. Moses was most clear and very strong on this point to the Children of Israel before they passed over Jordan, 'ye saw no manner of similitude' whatever, he said. He went on to command them under penalties not to make any kind of image or likeness, male or female, whether human, animal, bird, insect, vermin, reptile, fish, or any kind of body, real or imaginary, earthly or celestial. God is not like any of them, nor is any of them like God. It is most natural that human beings should think God is like them because they are, so it is thought, 'likest to the form divine'. But God is SPIRIT; He has no set form. He has power to appear in any form and has manifested Himself in various ways throughout time, chiefly as a human being, the Man Christ Jesus. However we must

avoid the error of thinking that God was born at Bethlehem. He was not. A man was born there and God was thereby manifest in the flesh. We must think of God's being only in terms of the sum total of highest moral virtues, the greatest spiritual values, the most excellent personal characteristics and the sweetest imperishable graces in their united perfection and glory; these are His 'shape', 'bulk' or 'mass'. He has no body of flesh and blood and bone, although He could and did manifest Himself on earth as such when made in the likeness of sinful flesh. Found in fashion as a man physically, Jesus was still in the form of God spiritually. He did not empty Himself of Godhead. Indeed all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily, which is to say that within that human body the complete God fully dwelt. He was not part of God, He was all God; He

was also all Man — Jesus was both combined; this is why and how we are both complete and one in Him.

Jesus' real form was moral. The hidden man of His heart was Adam unfallen, virtuous, upright, perfect, sinless, holy. He was really the first Adam. He virtually said so — 'I am the first and the last'. When Adam was made he was fashioned spiritually on Christ. He was not bodily fashioned on Him, for He had no physical form then. When He was formed a man He chose to be fashioned as a man — by choosing this He became known as the second man, or Adam. He is now the Man as well as the God. The Spirit of God and spirit of man combined and fused in Him; physically He was man, bodily He was God. Within the visible body of Jesus of Nazareth was the invisible body of God, the sum total of perfections in which He lives and which

constitute Him God, by which also He is manifest to the spiritual senses. The soul is the manifestation of the spirit; it is the 'body' of man's spirit within his physical body in his inner man. The human form was only vital to this manifestation of God because He loved man and wanted to save him. It is to be presumed that if God had wished to create man in a form other than what we now know to be and call human He would have done so. But to make him thus as being best suited to display His own being was His good pleasure.

The God / man relationship is not to be thought of as God in man's image, but man in God's image. This being so, the idea of a literal head / body relationship between Christ and the Church ought not to be made fundamental to body teaching. Nevertheless with this understanding we should approach

the subject with gratitude that our very make-up and constitution the better fits us to grasp Paul's spiritual meaning. With the wisdom and understanding to be expected of a man taught and inspired of God, Paul leads up to his subject in a masterly way.

The Bread which we Break

His approach to the presentation of this truth is by way of the Communion — 'the bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' That is his first reference to it, to be followed shortly by, 'the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed took bread and when He had given thanks He said, take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me'. Without entering too deeply into the controversy which has for centuries schismatically divided theologians and churches on this

matter, it seems the key to understanding the issue lies in these verses. Mystery is here, but we need not allow religious mysticism to bemuse us or sectarian dogma to confuse us.

In one of the statements bread is likened to Christ's spiritual body, the Church; in the other it is likened to Jesus' literal body. In the first instance it is we who break it, in the second it is broken by the Lord; in both cases we eat it. In the first case the bread is likened to a mystical body — the local church; in the second it represents the actual body of Jesus Christ. Except the heart be bound by religious dogma, in neither case does anyone believe he is actually eating human beings. We no more believe we are eating church members than we believe we are eating Christ when we break and eat bread, even though it be called 'the bread'.

The bread only represents the body in both cases; it is not the body, whether of the Church or of Christ. The closing phrase of the latter passage proves it beyond doubt or controversy for ordinary people: 'this do in remembrance of me'. The Lord did not say, 'do this to me', yet if the view be taken that the bread is actually His body, He should have said 'to me', for it would have been the logical thing to say. If it had been His actual body, He would have been commanding us to crucify Him afresh, which surely would be the most dastardly deed of all time. The action would have perpetuated His murder, thereby constituting every one of us a murderer; worse His words would have been incitement to murder, so He did not say it. We do it in remembrance of a past act of breaking, He broke it to symbolise His self-breaking, (see pamphlet on 'Communion').

If the bread is ever only bread, to invite us to an act of remembrance is the logical thing to do and that is precisely what He did.

It seems therefore that transubstantiation is not proven from the text. Neither the actual words of the Lord nor the logic of the Holy Spirit, nor the teaching of the apostle support the dogma. On the contrary they destroy the ground of the error and dispel the mysticism of the priestly rites associated with it. These extend the error into the blasphemy of a spurious sacrifice, more harmful and obnoxious in practice and effect than the dogma itself. It would be possible to sacrifice the actual body of Christ again only by crucifying Him afresh. This is not only a horrible thought, it would also be a terrible crime, the like of which has never been dreamt up by anyone in history; thankfully it is impossible. On the other

hand we act correctly if, when we break the bread, we do so with understanding that we typify the breaking of ourselves for communion with each other. He broke Himself, that He might commune with us and we with Him, and following His example we must do the same. At once we demonstrate both the basic act of present communion and show forth the Lord's past death till He come. The first lays emphasis on our communion, the result; the second lays emphasis on His death, the cause; we do the obligatory former, He did the necessary latter.

Much of the error which is being taught about the Communion arises from assumption. It is assumed that Jesus' words 'eat my flesh and drink my blood' were spoken of the Communion; they were not. The meal at which He spoke was an ordinary

one. It was not the communion of the Church but the feeding of the five thousand. Eating and drinking His flesh and blood has no more to do with the Communion than with any other meal. It is not something done once a week; it is a continuous feast. Whether the Romish or the Protestant dogma be accepted it is erroneous to assume that the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood only takes place at a service of the church. If it be thought that the elements are the actual body and blood the error is confused and the participants worse confounded.

Understanding all this aright, we are prepared for the apostle's following teaching about the body. He no more expects us to think that he is talking about a literal head / body relationship between Christ and His Church than we should believe that the

bread is the literal body of Christ. As bread is the most suitable medium by which to express both His body and the Church body, so also is the human body the most suitable medium by which to teach unity and oneness. This is the note on which he finishes the section of instruction on the communion — 'discerning the Lord's body'. With this phrase he brings together both parts of the figure, we must discern the bread as being symbolical of the Lord's own physical body and also the company of people who partake of it, or the local church, which represents the universal Church.

The local church is the body of people in which the Lord dwells and through whom He expresses Himself most fully in any area. By His Spirit the Lord works worldwide in and through individual members of His Church as well as in the local body. He also works

universally in various ways on those not yet in the Church in order to bring them into it. But though this is so, the local church will always be the body in and through whom the Lord most fully dwells and works. This is the kind of thinking the apostle seeks to stimulate in each member of the body.

One Body — Many Members

It is probable that if asked questions about the gifts of the Spirit most knowledgeable people would correctly enough turn to 1 Corinthians 12. However, the chapter is really more a treatise on the body of Christ than on the gifts of the Spirit. With this in mind the apostle is at pains to tell us that although there are diversities and differences of gifts and administrations and operations within the body, the body itself is one. Differences and diversities there must be in any local body, but not divergence or

division, and he takes up the figure of the human body to illustrate it. His major reason for doing so is to show the necessity and the indispensability of each member to the body as a whole, and to each other individually.

Paul is particularly careful to point out the necessity of the feet to the head. He does so because these are of diverse size, shape and service, and are set at furthest extremes in the body and therefore are the least likely to be thought of as being one; nevertheless they are. They are not exactly or identically one; they are different in fact, but that does not prevent them from being one. They are flesh and blood, they have one life and are units in one system; with their fellow-members they constitute one body and will endure and exist together for life. Each member is ideally suited to the function it fulfils, and although certain members are

capable of adaptation to a function other than that for which they were made, this can only be accomplished with extreme difficulty. Imagine for instance trying to walk everywhere on our heads! The thought is ridiculous, but with much practice some expert may manage to walk on his hands; even if this were achieved however, in this position no-one could feed himself properly with his feet. Life is possible of course even though some members of the body be missing but not without some degree of handicap to the body.

The apostle therefore bases his teaching on a normal body fully functional with all its members present in place and whole. He had already dealt with all the causes of diseases and distemper among them when taking up matters of contention and disorder at the Lord's table. Therefore he embarks

upon his teaching about the Lord's body with the expectation that there should be no spiritual weakness, sickliness and sleepiness among the members — each one must be strong, healthy and wide awake. In Christ's body every one is vital and absolutely necessary; each has been purposely set in position; all are carefully tempered together, individually honourable and equally important. This is the picture he paints of the body, striving to bring home to our hearts that, as the human body is a unit, so is a local church. We stand or fall together, succeed or fail together, are honoured or suffer together; we all share one life, have the same Spirit and live in one body under one head. Because this is so, we 'should have the same care one for another', he says; this will greatly help prevent schism. Every company of God's children should

believe of themselves, 'ye are the body of Christ and members in particular'; think of yourselves in that place as being Christ's body. It is a marvellous concept — do not shrink from it; be it. The most excellent way to achieve this is to have love — God's own love — for one another.

The Greatest of These

The body will be one body of love when we all love as He loves. Love is the only thing that can prevent abject failure on the part of the Church in God's sight. It is His good pleasure to give us miraculous gifts and wonderful powers, but even though all these operate effectively and successfully, none of them count for anything if love be missing. Love is greater than all else. Faith appears to be all-powerful, removing mountains; coupled with prophecy and embracing understanding of mysteries and all

knowledge, it is just about the most effective and spectacular of all gifts, but without love, whoever has it is exactly nothing. The generous heart and noble mind, willing to give to the point of self-impoverishment is rare, and most highly regarded everywhere: the martyr spirit is prized above all, but however lofty and altruistic the reasons and motives inspiring the acts, apart from love they all are entirely worthless. Without love all speech is jangling noise, all gifts in operation are a misuse of power, all works are banal, life is useless and self-sacrifice is the last act of a misguided zealot. All is absolutely nothing, entirely valueless and profitless except love be the substance of it. There will be times, cases and situations when everything fails and only love will succeed; to be found without it then is calamitous. Faith is indispensable, hope is

vital, but apart from love nothing is of eternal worth.

Paul is not propounding two contrary positions here, but is referring to himself as an illustration of a dreadful possibility should the schism disturbing the church continue unchecked. The churches need faith and hope as well as love; without these and the gifts of the Spirit and the generous heart of the self-sacrificing martyr spirit, love would be valueless too. What Paul is doing is showing that love is more important than anything; it must be basic to all we do. He is also teaching us that all schism dividing churches commences with the failure of love in the heart. As we well know, probably the worst of the killer diseases presently afflicting civilized societies are heart troubles of one sort or another. No less with the Church than with society, failure of heart

love, whether to Christ or the Church, or church members, or the truth for the truth's sake, or neighbours, or friends, or enemies, is the root cause of all division.

First of all the heart becomes devoid of God's love and therefore ceases to love the Lord first and wholly as it ought. All the disaffections rising from that source then follow in train, bringing their predictable results. Unification lies as much in love as in Spirit; that is why Paul dealt with the secularizing of the Lord's supper before he turned to the operation of spiritual gifts. There can be no unity of the body without communion, and communion can exist on no other basis than universal love and particular care.

The gifts, of whatever sort, must operate from that same source. The motive for using them must be utterly selfless, namely the

edification of the body in love; the use of any gift must be with the aim of making contribution to the common good and be made in personal love to build up the aggregate of love in the church. The criterion of every local church must be ever-increasing love for an ever-growing body. To become ever-increasing lovers, using ever-developing gifts for an ever-precious Lord in an ever-growing church should be every member's desire. Less than this is ethical shabbiness. So, in full communion and true love let all members of a local body, as one, covet earnestly the best gifts that it may grow thereby.

It is not sufficient to desire the sincere milk of the word only; we must strongly desire these gifts for ministry to the body as well. Paul lists the gifts and then gives directions for their controlled use in the church

gatherings, but not before he has made sure that people are secure in love. As branches form the vine and sheep the flock, so do the members of any body comprise that body; they are of far more importance than their gifts. The redeemed of the Lord are not just sheep or branches or members, they are persons greatly loved, each one dearly bought and baptised into the body of love.

Thoroughly Furnished

With His body Christ wants to serve His Father, and purposes to make all His members useful to this end. As may be expected, He wishes each one to function to utmost capacity, so with loving care He selects gifts for individual members according to His knowledge of their ability. He does not scatter them about indiscriminately for the more industrious or widely awake among us to snap up to their

own advantage and other people's loss. Of His bountiful grace He gives in love to everybody; but when speaking of this kind of giving He uses the word riches — 'riches of grace', 'riches of wisdom', 'riches of' glory' — not gifts. The gifts of the Spirit are for service; they are working powers bestowed extra to those riches for specific ends.

Two things Paul wrote to Timothy are helpful here, 'I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who hath enabled me for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry' and 'the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'. The Lord also gives everyone assurance on these issues by revealing a more fundamental principle of gifting, 'He gave to every man according to his several ability'. How reassuring all this is. The Lord wants to perfect us and will therefore thoroughly equip us to do His

works, but He will not overburden us with talents or gifts we are unable to handle. He will completely equip or furnish a man to function fully according to: (1) the several ability he already has naturally, and (2) the degree of faithfulness He counts him to have by grace. Gifts in the body of Christ are distributed for present purpose according to the known past and the unknown future, and they are given without repentance.

The two factors governing the distribution of gifts are God's knowledge of our abilities and our faithfulness. There is also another factor governing the giving of gifts, namely grace; 'to everyone is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ'. When gifts are bestowed, whether singly or in plurality, grace is also given with them that they may be administered and operated properly. According to the kind of gift, the

Lord also gives grace so that the manifestation of the Spirit is not hindered. The Lord will only bestow gifts upon those He knows will be faithful to use them. An unfaithful servant will bury his gift, not realising, as he ought, that with the talent he was given grace, that is power and authority to use it. It is his Lord's gift and must be accounted for, 'dug up' and presented at his Lord's coming. In the parable the servant was called 'the unprofitable servant', and was cast out into outer darkness — he refused grace. 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth', the Lord concludes. Dreadful! A faithful man is profitable to the Lord.

We all, without exception, should be most desirous of giving the Lord pleasure and bringing Him profit, and should view with pleasure the words 'covet earnestly the best

gifts'. This word does not imply that some gifts are better in quality than others; they are all of highest quality. Paul is speaking comparatively, as when he compares love with faith and hope, and places it highest of the three; when doing so he was not examining quality but stating importance. Because he gives leave to classify some as being of less importance than others, he does not thereby encourage anyone to refuse or despise any of the gifts of God. He is really saying 'seek for the highest, go for the greatest, keep reaching out, do not be content with anything less than the highest in any realm'. We are not to despise the lesser gifts or minimise their importance as some do, nor pretend to seek some while rejecting others. It must be remembered that when writing to the Corinthians Paul was aware they already had the lesser. What

he was urging upon them as a whole was that having tongues and interpretation they should seek the higher gifts also.

In his usual manner, and as he himself set the example, the apostle is emphasising a principle of gospel grace; if the subject is fruit, bring forth more fruit; if it is fulness, be filled with all the fulness of God; if it is labours, labour more abundantly; if it is love, then know breadths and lengths and depths and heights; if it is tongues, speak in tongues more — he did, he said. Always it is the same, this man's appetite for the uttermost and the perfect is insatiable.

The Holy Ghost Sent Down from Heaven

It seems an unavoidable conclusion that if in any church the greater gifts are not functioning in love in the greatest 'way', something is fundamentally wrong and must

be put right. Seeing that these are the gifts of the Spirit, it is highly likely that the deficiency may be with regard to relationships with Him, for it is He who works the gifts and is manifest whenever they operate properly. His purpose thereby is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth through the Church. He does not wish to do this alone, but would enlist men's genuine powers also to assist Him. He came forth from the Father with the specific intention of filling men and women with Christ. Given as a gift to men Himself, His commission is to fill them as individuals and as a company with life and virtue and love and power and gifts and works. More than that, His purpose is to fill the world with the gospel.

Following Pentecost, the Church filled Jerusalem with their doctrine as a direct

result of being filled with the Spirit. Peter says they preached the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. From the accounts of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, the major works of power with which they are filled did not take place within the Church, but among the world of men. The Church did not exist on the earth in Jesus' day and being formed on earth following His ascension, it quickly spread throughout the whole civilized world. No-one was called a missionary in those days — it was the Holy Spirit's commission to evangelize the world, and He fulfilled it through the whole Church. Being baptised into Him, men were simultaneously imbued with an urge to go into all the world and preach; the martyr-spirit of Christ possessed them, they left all to follow Him and to continue as He; the zeal of God's house ate

them up. In them was fulfilled the words John expressed for them all — 'as He is so are we in this world'. So Christ in heaven employed them to build His Church on earth, and they gave themselves willingly to the task, risking death, suffering the loss of all things.

Paul, typical of many, says he was made all things to all men if by any means he may win some. Those people owned nothing, built nothing, achieved nothing but the will of God in this world. Therefore Father, Son and Holy Spirit were pleased with them and gave them the greatest gifts and ministries that people may be redeemed and the Church built according to plan. When the churches regain compassion for them that are out of the way, become concerned for the lost masses, preach the gospel of the 'whosoever', and are the true body of Christ

on the earth, they will again be filled with the best gifts, for they are given for these purposes.

There has been a resurgence of emphasis in these days on the so-called five ministry gifts of the ascended Lord. This is a needed emphasis in any day, but the assumption that they are given to the Church is incorrect. The scripture plainly says they are given unto men. This is a far wider emphasis than the more selective word 'Church'. It is surely more correct to say they are given as from the Church by the risen Lord. The very context in which Paul speaks shows this most clearly. He says 'every one of us is given grace according to the gift of Christ', who 'when He ascended up on high led a multitude of captives and gave gifts unto men'. Christ Himself is the example of His giving. He was given to the world of men to

save them from perishing. The direct result of that gift quoted here was a multitude of captives released and led up on high.

Christ was given from His Father in heaven to men first, not the Church; in order of time He was given to the Church second; this is the order revealed in the Church also from the day of Pentecost onward. Immediately the Church was inaugurated and formed, the apostles were given to men as from the Church without reserve; the result was the same — multitudes were saved and/or healed and added to Christ and His Church. It was the same also with Paul; he was first saved into the Church, after which he was soon given by Christ and sent by the Holy Spirit as from the Church to the world of men; the particular company from which he went out was the church at Antioch. This was all part of the outworking of God's plan

to fill all things with Christ. The Church is included in this; it holds a unique place in God's overall plan for His Kingdom, and plays a special part in the establishment of that plan, therefore it must be built. This is why the five ministries are presently given by the ascended Lord as from the Church to men.

In the final analysis all men are given grace according to the measure of God's gift of Christ to them, rather than Christ's subsequent gift of a gift or ministry to them. In the end everyone must realize the gift of grace is given to them in order that they themselves should be given. The five named ministries are no more given to the Church than are the ministries of all the other members of it. That they do have a place in and ministry to the Church is plain, but unless the degree of exclusivism underlying the above statement be eliminated from our

thinking, the true intentions of Christ by these gifts will remain unfulfilled.

'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel', He said 'and lo I am with you always' (presumably to build His Church); this was His parting request, according to Mark.

Perhaps His very last words before leaving the earth were, 'ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me ... unto the uttermost part of the earth'. To witness to Jesus properly we must go under His command and preach the gospel as He did. He was not given to the Church, an exclusive company of men, for it did not then exist, but to men at large to call out a people from among them and build His Church. To be true witnesses to Christ we must do as He. Men have to be saved before churches can be built.

Labourers into the Harvest

That the five gifted men with the enumerated ministries should be given to the Church is inevitable, for Christ is building it. It is His body, and everyone born again is born into it and therefore added to Him and it; that is unavoidable. But when these men are first added to the Body / Church, save in the mind and will of God, they are not ministers in or to it, but ordinary members like every other member. Becoming normal members of no more importance than any other, they are then equipped by the Lord according to His will and sent out on their special ministry. They may then be regarded as being given by Christ, and they have a function in and to the Church that it may fulfil its ministry among men.

However, their greatest ministry is to Christ Himself, and they function for Him for His

purpose of Church-building. It may truly then be said of them that they are gifts for the Church and are given as from the Church to the world of men for the Church. Unless this be clearly understood and firmly believed and acted upon, present day apostles will behave as though Christ is an introverted person, only concerned about Himself and His own body. Instead of occupying themselves with already established churches, let the apostles go out to the unchurched and minister among them until churches are established. Most of the world is heathen; civilization is not Christianity but a self-worshipping society of humanists or agnostics or downright atheists; there is plenty of scope.

It is probable that the nearest present-day approach to New Testament apostles is to be found among our missionaries. These are

men and women who still have the same pioneer spirit and urge to go to those who have never heard the gospel. Sadly it is true that some, perhaps many of them, do not have the same spiritual equipment as those men and therefore would not have qualified for apostolic status in the early church; nevertheless their zeal is commendable. Whether or not their labours are fruitful in terms of living churches is very doubtful; this being so in most cases, perhaps in all, despite eulogistic or adulatory praise, they would repudiate any attempts to name themselves apostles. 'Labourers sent into the harvest' they may be, or perhaps they wish to become 'ministers by whom ye believed', perhaps even 'workers together with God' or 'your servants for Christ's sake', but to be called apostles, no.

Every born again child of God resists flattery, however sincerely meant; apostolic equipment is given with apostolic calling and brings apostolic results. Churches are the seals of apostolic calling and ministry. They must be springing up everywhere and remaining in life and power as testimony to true apostleship, or names and claims are invalid. To have care of churches already established is part of apostolic calling, and revisitation of them is also part of the ministry, but to mistake care for charge is fatal to an apostle's ministry.

Paul was too wise to fall into this kind of error lest he be entrapped, lured from his ministry and side-tracked from his calling. His dealings with his well-beloved Timothy, whom he regarded as his own son, are the living testimony to this. He loved the young man dearly, and seeing him as profitable to

the ministry took him with him on his apostolic journeyings, in course of which they eventually came to Ephesus. As a result great blessing abounded there, which was undoubtedly of incalculable benefit to the young man, as well as to Paul. However, when Paul felt he should leave Ephesus, there still remained much to be done, so he left Timothy behind to finish the work. It was no easy task, but it needed to be done, so he put Timothy in charge and departed. Later, because of his great concern, he wrote to Timothy and gave him a personal charge.

Paul still had the care of the church at Ephesus, but he did not stay in charge of it; Timothy took charge under Paul's commandment according to prophecies formerly given, with gifts already received. The apostle did not stay; local need did not deter him from his world-wide calling — he

abode faithful. Therefore he could at the last write a letter to Timothy with joy and much affection, saying 'I have finished my course . It may be that, as with Jesus the great apostle of our calling, though to a lesser degree, he functioned in all the ministries, for they are bound up in the apostolic office and calling. Therefore Paul could quite successfully have continued at Ephesus in the capacity of pastor. If he had done so, it would have been at great personal risk, but he saw beyond the alluring prospect and departed after two years, amidst great uproar, to Macedonia — he kept on course. Like Jesus' love, the calling has breadth and length and depth and height beyond measure; it is one of the unsearchable riches of Christ. The whole family of the body is included in the calling. Whether as individuals we are called saint, believer,

child, member, apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, elder, deacon, or collectively the church, the building, the priesthood, the family, the body, the company, the bride; whatever be the name or title, we all are 'the called'. Every one has a calling to fulfil, a work to do, a ministry from God; individually we are members of the body and collectively we are that body. Paul makes this clear to the Romans, 'we being many are one body in Christ and every one members one of another'.

The apostle can never get away from the central theme of his message, 'present your bodies', he cries. God wants your bodies presented to Him 'a living sacrifice'. He is speaking to the whole Church, 'ye are the called of Jesus Christ', every one of you 'present your bodies' right now. God must have us completely — all we are is inside our

bodies, if He does not get those He does not get us. Your body for His body, you owe it to every member as well as to Him, it is only reasonable service to all concerned. To withhold is to become conformed to this world; that is inevitable. Live sacrificially or you will not live holily and acceptably unto God. To be spiritually baptised into one vast spiritual body is vital for spiritual life; to present your physical body is necessary for service in that body for the salvation of men. The head did so without reserve, so also must the body. To have His life and rob Him of our service is ethically wrong; we must present our bodies and yield our members or we shall live in total spiritual contradiction. His body is the most important body in the universe.

Chapter 5 — THE BRIDE

Perhaps to the heart of the people of God the dearest of all scriptural concepts of the Church is that she is the Bride of Christ. Every concept is necessary and has been carefully chosen and is presented by the Lord because of its importance, and each brings its own special message to our hearts. None of them must be neglected because each one emphasises a particular aspect of the whole truth, highlighting certain things we need to know and could only learn under that figure. Yet wonderful as they are, all the others would fail of God's highest purpose for the Church if this one were missing, for although we appreciate them all, none of them appeals to the heart with quite the same power as the Bride.

The very way the Bible is compiled seems to allow the suggestion that its original editors felt much the same way about the Bride as do many of its modern readers, for they placed the book which reveals her at the conclusion of the Book, and called it the Revelation, which it undoubtedly is.

Apparently they thought that this revelation satisfactorily sums up the entire Gospel of God to men and that her appearance completes and crowns all His works throughout both old and new testaments.

This is unavoidable of course; it is a demonstration of divine planning — John unfolds the vision of her at the latest point of the book of Revelation, and those who decided the order of the books placed his prophecy last in the sacred writings. It was a perfectly logical and absolutely correct thing to do, for no other book could more fittingly

have been placed at the end of the Bible. It is right in every way and perfectly natural, for it concludes the message of the whole Book; God ended the Bible in the same vein in which He commenced it.

A Virgin Bride

Almost as soon as the book of Genesis opens we read of the creation of the man and the woman and that God planted a garden in which they should dwell in ideal conditions. The book of the Revelation closes with the vision of another entirely new creation of God in which John sees New Jerusalem coming down on to a new earth from God out of heaven; it is the garden city wherein God and man dwell together in perfect righteousness. So right at the beginning and also at the very ending of the Book, God presents the ideal of perfect love which lies forever in His heart. God wants us

to understand that He is primarily a lover — The Lover. He is Love and cannot refrain from revealing that love in every way possible to Him. The whole concept is idyllic; it is the ideal of true marriage as it is in God's Spirit, and is a revelation of the sacred bond of the Trinity — they are not only organically one, they are wedded one.

Paul reveals God's great love to be the primary motive for all creation; he declares it to be the fundamental reason why He first chose and later generated us in His Son that we should be formed into the body of Christ. The apostle loved that particular truth; he knew he was raised up to present it to men as a revelation and a demonstration of love. Wonderful as that is, this great love of God is revealed in yet another figure — one of exquisite beauty — Christ and His Church joined as one in marriage union. By direct

revelation, in every detail as true as that of the body; the Church which is His body is also His bride and wife. This is an amazing fact, scarcely tenable to the human mind, for although by marriage male and female may become one flesh, they cannot become one body. Beside that, everyone knows it is entirely impossible to marry one's own body, yet undoubtedly this is what the apostles teach: the immensity of the truth is that the body and the bride are one, not one flesh but One Spirit. What is impossible to man is possible to God. Amen.

This prospect is wonderfully appealing and positively true; the Bridegroom / Bride relationship, though, is not such an intimate and indissoluble union on human levels as the union of body and head. God Himself even allowed Moses to include a divorce clause in the laws of conduct he gave to

Israel: He knew He had to grant permission to divorce. By the very laws of nature, head and body can only be one unit; they can never be two; they are the outward, recognizable form of one complete person, but bridegroom and bride are two separate persons who have always been known as two distinct entities, and they only become one flesh by marriage. Although they then and thereby become a union, within that union they remain for ever two; they are truly united in one by vow, but they never become one as head and body are one. Their union is not, and never can be, organic — as it were inevitable and involuntary — it is a created union, a covenant arranged by desire and made by promise because of love, and sealed by vow before God. The distinct difference between these comparative unions is very great, but

although they differ to this degree, their comparative likeness is powerfully emphasized by Paul when writing to the Corinthians. He is first concerned to show them their organic relationship with Christ, and having succeeded in that, he proceeds to mention the other less obvious head / body relationship implicit in the true marriage union between man and woman. Ideally the unitary head / body relationship of each person to Christ should become fully developed in unison within the voluntary bond of marriage between those two persons. The physical head / body unit is exclusively by birth. Being born, each individual's life and form are exclusive to him or her self; this life is neither produced nor developed by union of two different persons by promise and vow, however great their loving endeavour. This being so, in order to

achieve union, two people engaging in marriage and wishing to develop a common life together should from that moment regard their wedding as a new birth. At first this may be an altogether new concept of marriage, but strange though it may appear it is the only one fitted to the wonderful truth and purpose of God in joining men and women in the bond of indissoluble wedding. Indeed it is, and can be, no other, for it is the only truth; there were no human birth(s) of fellow human beings until marriage union had taken place. Before the voluntary head / body union could be established the unitary head / body union was manifest in truth. Because of this, when marrying both persons should regard themselves as partners joined together by God to achieve His purpose. This is the proper concept of

marriage and each should help the other to a clear understanding.

From the moment of marriage man and woman ought to regard themselves as being dead to their former manner of life and begin to build one new life together, he being the head and she the body. Each other's individual identities and personalities must be recognised, revered and carefully maintained, but all individualistic tendencies must be put to death for they are separatist and divisive; if this is accomplished a new united common life will emerge. Marital love desires what marriage law demands, viz. that each partner sacrifices his or her virginity to the sacred union; this is the immediate, natural, vital and expected result of the wedding. This being fulfilled, a new, inviolable virginity, special to them, is created and at all costs

must be preserved, never to be adulterously broken; the marriage must be kept virgin pure. Love is not only the uniting bond, but also the guardian of the mutual trust invested in each other.

An Everlasting Love

The Lord God knew that by His mysterious power He could create us anew in Christ and this He did. Long before He created the world He set His unbreakable will in sheer determination to choose us in Him. He did so because it was His good pleasure to do so, knowing that in the end His action shall be proved to have been absolute wisdom and in time all, whether good or evil, shall confess it to be so. But although acknowledgement is unavoidable, He did none of these things in order to gain praise. He did all for love's sake. Worshipped by the unnumbered hosts of heaven, all three

persons of the ever-blessed Trinity dwell forever together in one. They are as one body, a unit, the unique, original ONE over which Father's headship is gladly acknowledged. From his knowledge of this eternal life Paul naturally develops the whole idea of the Church and Christ as one body; it is marvellous in our eyes. Beside this, Paul saw that quite naturally Father, Son and Holy Spirit also live together as a group of lovers. The secret was plain to him, the uniting bond of the union of God is love — perfect love — they love one another. If this were not so they could not have been or be or remain one. Although God's eternal being is guaranteed by righteousness, the form and unity of the three persons is secured by the voluntary marriage of their hearts, minds and wills in love. It is righteous to love.

We mostly conceive of marriage in terms of two humans, male and female, wedding each other; we do not at first normally think of marriage in God, or that He can be in any way connected with it. But if we broaden our thinking beyond the human species and cease to think of different sexes, we should not have any great difficulty in embracing the truth of marriage in its far wider sense and greater meanings. God reveals some of these when He cried out to Israel, 'return unto me for I am married to thee', and again, 'thy maker is thine husband'. Once, of a particularly decadent generation, He asked the question, 'where is the bill of thy mother's divorcement, and to which of my creditors have I sold thee?' By these and other similar words He declared His marriage to Israel. On His part it was an unbreakable union; He loved them. One of

His assurances of love to them has been the ground of hope to thousands of hearts throughout the centuries, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love', and His following words have brought unimagined sweetness to many a fearful, doubting breast, 'therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee'.

This is the God who loves us. He has chosen to include us in the vastness of love that binds those three persons together in unbreakable union, one wonderful, eternal being, incomprehensible to the human mind and adorable above all. Human design, embracing the concept of male and female, with the glorious idea of human marriage, was born in Him. It was He who thought of and created the original bride and bridegroom; His delightful ideas and

creations kindle and inspire all hearts but the dead.

God lost no time introducing His designs for the human race, but brought them in right at the beginning of creation. To crown His work, on the sixth day of creation He made man and with him entered into rest, but He had not thereby completed His intentions. Recognising Adam's need for fellowship and love from his own kind, as He with His, the Lord one day put His man to sleep and from him made his woman. Waking from the operation at God's call, the man opened his eyes to see the one his loving God had given him; she was beautiful, as lovely as he had imagined and hoped. He had expected someone beautiful but could not quite have imagined what she would be; when he saw her she was an almost identical reproduction of himself. Of all he had seen

in the whole of creation this latest workmanship of God was most like him. Naturally and expectantly he took her to him; she was his, his obvious counterpart. So it came to pass that Adam was first created by God from the dust of the ground and then given life by the breath of His nostrils on the earth. He was the first human being and he was alone; if he had not fallen to the earth and slept he would have remained alone. There was no human equal or likeness to him anywhere, but when he slept God made Eve from him, and when he awoke and rose she was there by his side. So also was it with Christ and the Church. He was the new creation of God and lived on the earth one lone heavenly man until the day He lay on the earth and slept in death. He did so in order that in resurrection His Church / Bride should be formed from Him.

Pleased with Adam's good pleasure at His handiwork, the Lord planted a garden for the man and his bride in Eden, and there they lived together in a paradise of love and beauty. They were not called bridegroom and bride then; the phrase has been coined since, but they are the original human pair created by God's hand directly from His heart. We know little about them, but by creating them to live together in paradise God revealed His purposes for mankind that they should represent His ideals for Christ and His Church. Although we are not told so, it is to be assumed that Adam and Eve loved one another. Much we would like to know and may have expected to be told is missing from the account. There is nothing of romance in the record, no word of love or tenderness, no affectionate endearments; we know nothing at all of their conversation

or of their habits.. God, it seems, did not think fit to have it recorded. It may reasonably be taken for granted that they loved one another for there was no sin there, but love is no more the absence of hate than righteousness is the absence of sin or peace the absence of war. Adam and Eve typify certain aspects of the ideal relationship of bridegroom and bride, but by no means all. True and lovely though the story is, in their original perfection they are too classically remote from our world, and sorrowfully were all too tragically shattered by the fall. But we are grateful to God for this insight granted us into the original marriage as created by Him.

A Resurrection Bride

The bridegroom and bride we of the new creation look for are two persons mutually attracted to one another, full of warm

affection, marrying in bliss and living together in a perfection of marital love, maturing steadily from that day forward throughout life and going on for all eternity. This is the ideal and so satisfying to our hearts, but it is not to be found anywhere in all secular literature, and only in the Bible at the very end when the Lord reveals His bride to His readers. God all the time wanted it like this, and although sin destroyed the original creation of it, He never departed from the ideal. It is evident from His remarks about Israel that He had kept it in His heart, for He wanted nothing less than a husband / wife relationship with them; He said and felt He could never give them up or let them go. He told Jeremiah that when He brought Israel out of Egypt He was a husband to them, and when He spoke to Hosea about

the covenant He made with them at Sinai He described it as 'husbandly'.

He could never forget; Israel were holiness unto Him then, He said. At one time, recalling it all with pleasure, He said, 'I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness in a land not sown'. 'Go and cry this in the ears of Jerusalem', He said to His servant. He wanted them to know with what sweetness He recalled those days. How tenderly He remembered them: they lived on in His memory long after Israel had forgotten them. Days and weeks of love crowded His memory still, filling His heart with joy and sustaining Him in His sorrow. Though they had broken their wifely covenant and forgotten the promises made to Him at Sinai, He remained a faithful husband. They meant

their vows at the time doubtless, but so soon forgot and broke their word to Him. Not so with Him though; His vows are everlasting and His love is eternal. 'How can I give thee up?' He cried; He was heartbroken. Moses had been a witness of God's love there when He came down to the people at Sinai, and reflecting on all that happened there He said 'yea He loved the people'. He had borne them to Himself to give them His law for righteousness that He and they should be able to live together in the land of promise.

He loved the people dearly in Egypt when He went to espouse them to Himself by mighty signs and wonders; He loved them at Sinai and all the way to the land. He provided for them so that, once there, they should enjoy His love to the full. Bringing them in to Canaan He gave them of His

bounty in such unprecedented ways that Israel became renowned among the nations for her beauty. The nation came into being through love; it was woven into the very fabric of the nation, an undeserved inheritance, a gift from God passed on as through founding fathers. Through them God's love was worked into the nation from the very beginning; they were a people specially chosen of God and brought into being to be the medium through which He could display that love. Firstly through Abraham and Isaac He unmistakably showed the love of Father and Son to perfection, and then with Isaac with Rebekah, and later Jacob and Rachel He displayed two complementary aspects of Jesus' love for the Church. Both these have to do with a Bridegroom and Bride and bring out most beautifully the love story of the Son of God

and His Church. The accounts of the marriages of Abraham's son and grandson are included in scripture to display two different aspects of the marriage of Jesus.

In each case this is most clearly seen in the way the bride of each man was found: in the first instance the father sends his servant to his own country to choose a bride from his own people. In the second instance the bridegroom went Himself to win his bride. When Eliezer was sent by Abraham to Chaldea he was put on oath that: (1) under no circumstances must he take a bride for Isaac from among the Canaanites, and (2) when he found her he must not take Isaac to Chaldea to marry her, she must be brought to him. The father insisted that the bride-to-be must be willing to forsake all and be brought out of her own land and be married to Isaac in the land of promise. The story of

the servant's journey and his return with the bride-to-be is familiar to Bible lovers and is full of the remarkable providences of God and of answers to prayer. These were so miraculous that with such powerful indications of God's will Rebekah was fully persuaded and responded to the father's invitation without demur; accepting his conditions she immediately left everyone and everything for Isaac and returned with Eliezer to the promised land to meet Isaac. He knew neither the day nor the hour he would see his bride and was resting content in his father's choice for his future when he went out one evening to meditate in the fields under the eye of 'Him that liveth and seeth me'. Imagine his surprise when, lifting up his eyes that day he sees her coming and with what anticipation goes to meet her. Learning from Eliezer of her ready response

and willingness to come without hesitation, he takes her at once to himself. She was his father's provision for him; he had been waiting for this moment; he saw her and loved her, she was beautiful. They married. Until he wrote this story Moses had been very sparing with his use of the word love. It only appears once before when God used it to Abraham one night years previously. On that occasion He commanded the father to offer up his son to Him on an undisclosed mountain in Moriah, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest'. God introduced love into the story of man at the point of the sacrifice which best displays His own great love. Until this, power, creation, light, judgement, war, seem to dominate the book, but now love. The love story He wished to emphasise above all is being introduced. In a figure the only begotten son

of the father, his well-beloved, was offered up in a sacrifice of greater love to God the heavenly Father and was given back to him from the dead, that later he might be married in love to Rebekah the bride who was herself chosen from his native land and given to him by his father. In the picture too we see that Isaac, the beloved son himself, like his father, became a great lover, so that when Rebekah came to him she came home to love.

Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, became a great lover too. As Isaac his father he too was forbidden to marry a local woman, so following family tradition, back to the original stock of Abraham he went seeking a wife. In this he differed from Isaac, for, unlike his mother, Jacob's bride was not brought to him, he had to go to her. The story of his journey to Syria, the night he

spent en route at Bethel with his head on a stone for a pillow (was it one of the stones of Abraham's original altar there?) and the vision of the ladder reaching to heaven, is known to us all. His determination to find a bride over-rode all other considerations; personal discomfort and bodily hardship he despised and drove himself on to his desired end; Jacob's amazing love for Rachel is without rival among men. Twenty-one long years he laboured for her. So grateful was he to have her that times and labours were as nought. In his eyes nothing and no-one could be compared with her; she was his exceeding great reward; what was life without Rachel? He wanted no wages, sought no reward; she could not be valued; he wanted her only as a gift because she was beyond price. He bought her with himself, nor complained at the cost; he loved her,

she was so beautiful and well-favoured he had heart and eyes for no-one else. When at last he took her to himself did she know how blessed she was to have such a husband?

Between them these two men and their brides set forth two aspects of Christ and the Church His bride. Isaac, the only begotten of Abraham by Sarah, reveals Christ the only begotten of God the Father by the Spirit, crucified, risen, ascended and glorified, waiting for His bride, On the other hand, complementarily, Jacob shows the humble Jesus labouring for His bride in the far country, laying down His life for her. In the first instance the bride was chosen by the father and sought by the servant-spirit, by whom she is brought forth to the son. In the second the bride was chosen by the son himself, who went and laboured for her in selfless devotion of unspeakable love.

The Heavenly Bridegroom

At first glance the order of these two marriages seems to be the reverse of the true order in which it happened in Christ, but this is not really so. The first lays emphasis on the eventual outworking of the plan decided upon in a past eternity by the Father and the Son and this is the most important aspect of it. Although not precise in detail, Isaac's life foreshadowed the virgin birth and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, His ascension to His Father and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit to bring His bridal Church home to Him. More, it links the past with what John in vision on Patmos saw of the future — New Jerusalem appeared to him descending from God out of heaven, for fair Rebekah was Abraham's choicest gift to his son. All this was planned before creation — the choice was made

then, the bride was known then, the Lamb was slain then, and it was also decided then to send forth the Holy Spirit to seek her.

It is interesting to note that Rebekah, the bride-to-be is first referred to by name in the chapter which records the 'death and resurrection' of the bridegroom-to-be. She was the daughter of Bethuel, the eighth son and last child of Nahor; that is significant, for in Bible numerology eight represents resurrection and newness of life. Rebekah then was the child of resurrection, begotten by the 'dweller in God' — for that is the meaning of her father's name. She was born to be the bride of the lamb, the man who had lain utterly yielded to God on his father's altar. He was the only begotten son of his father by the special mother, the first and last and all he had begotten of her; it seems also that Rebekah was the only

daughter of her father, that there was not another like her either. Although not the only begotten child, she was the only begotten daughter of her father, first and last and all he had. How fitting then that these two 'only begotten children' of their respective yet related fathers should be destined to become bridegroom and bride. In the second instance, as we have already seen, it is the son himself who does the seeking and finding. Again this is absolutely right in relationship to the revealed truth of the Man Christ Jesus — it is also in order. Having settled all before the foundation of the world, time came when Jesus had to set out to seek His bride. Time and again in one form or another He expressed the fact that He had come seeking sinners, sheep, children, men and women, pearls, treasure, a bride. In many ways Jacob was a suitable

person through whom to reveal yet more than could be shown by his father. Indeed in some things he was the only man who could be so used. Naturally he was the second born of a twin pair of boys, sharing one birth with Esau, and he was destined to represent the spiritual man while Esau became the man of the flesh. Jacob was the one who gained both the birthright and the blessing because God loved him.

The methods by which Jacob gained these are reprehensible, but they are not our concern here; they reveal Jacob the man, as unfit as any of us would be to typify the Lord. Jacob was chosen by God, not because he was better than Esau but because he would later in life become the type of the heavenly bridegroom. The important thing is that he received the father's treasures and blessings which Esau despised. In order to

portray the Lord he had to be in possession of both, yet although he must have them in order to fulfil this part of the type, he must also be the second born. Isaac fulfilled the role of the only begotten and the firstborn. Jacob's part was to carry the truth further and show Jesus as the second man and the firstborn from the dead. At the resurrection His Father said to Him 'Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee'; further to this, Paul speaks of Him as 'the first-begotten from the dead'. Jacob's part was to display this great truth.

Since then, with birthright incomprehensible to men and blessing immeasurable from His Father He comes as a bridegroom to seek His bride. Directed to do so by His Father He comes personally to seek the bride He desires and the Father has chosen, wanting a people of love who will leave all to marry

Him. He had hardly begun His ministry among men following His first coming when John Baptist said he could hear the bridegroom's voice and in relationship to that felt compelled to refer to himself in a most unusual way — 'the friend of the bridegroom'. 'This my joy therefore is fulfilled', he said — the herald was right on course and fulfilling his mission, 'He must increase, I must decrease'. The heavenly romance had now been announced as planned and he knew he must get out of the way; the Bridegroom had come and He must fill every vision; love for Him must fill every heart. Someone said to John, 'all men come to Him', perhaps expecting John to react to it with jealousy, but if they did they did not know John. John immediately thought he could recognise the nucleus of the bride. 'All come to Him? That's it. That's what it's all

about, He is the heavenly Lover, that's the attraction!'

John knew his mission was fulfilled. He had formerly announced Him as 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world', the heavenly Isaac, God's human Lamb.

Within a few hours John's declaration was confirmed by the voice of God Himself, 'this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased', and as the words echoed from the waters and died away in the distance, John's heart was assured within him. This indeed was the only begotten Son of God. On both counts Jesus fully met the requirements for the fulfilment of the Son / Lamb type revealed on Moriah. One more announcement yet remained to be made, and with blessed anticipation the herald awaited the opportunity to make it. This came one day at Aenon near to Salim where

he was baptising: without hesitation he declared to his informants, 'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom'. So saying the herald indicated his own departure; the Son of the Father had emerged into full view, He was the heavenly Jacob seeking His bride. John had reached his goal.

Aenon was just the right spot for that departure to take place; the occasion could not have been better staged — Aenon means fountains and Salim means completeness. What a wonderful place for John to finish his course. Not so very far away in Judea Jesus was baptising in this same Jordan and all men were going to Him; that to John was completeness. Though he did not recognize it, like some Eleazer he had, as it were, brought men to his Lord, Isaac, who like Jacob had come seeking a bride. The baptist could not finish his

ministry to Jesus and God with an announcement about Calvary, and by his baptism signify a death, burial and resurrection and leave it there. He had also to declare Jesus to be the bridegroom who baptises people with the Holy Ghost and fire. Fire is warm, devouring, purging, transforming — it would fuse men to Him in a way water could not; fire is the element of sacrifice, the all-consuming flame of love.

Everybody baptised with fire by Jesus would belong to Him completely in a way they had never belonged to John by baptism in water. They had belonged to John by discipleship only, but as he well knew, beyond discipleship (whether to himself or to Jesus) lay a new and better relationship — marriage. John saw it all so clearly, discipleship by water, fusion by fire; by discipleship attachment, by marriage union

by fusion. What a world of difference; yet the one ought properly to lead to the other; 'He must increase, I must decrease 'He that cometh from above is above all'. He was destined to become greater in people's eyes than John; He was to be preferred before him. He was before him; He was above him in every way and to every degree, not the least in that He had the bride. The marriage relationship by promise and vow and affection and love must take precedence over every other relationship, whether it be contracted between man and woman or man and God. According to God, although all other relationships may be broken, this one must be kept inviolate.

A Chaste Virgin

The bride is a most remarkable and privileged body of people indeed. She is a far more privileged person than either Rebekah

or Rachel and has a much more wonderful role to fill. Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was at first barren like his mother had been, but when he entreated the Lord for her she conceived twins who struggled within her for priority of birth, fulness of blessing and supremacy. Upon enquiry she was told by the Lord 'two nations are in thy womb two manner of people'. How remarkably she prefigures the Church in this, for that is exactly what happened in the early days. Within her Jew and gentile struggled for priority and for the birthright, with the blessings this brought. The saying 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek' was often heard in the early days of the Church, hence the constant dialogue and constant contention about circumcision between men like Paul and zealous patriotic Judaisers.

It was being taught by the Jews that, except the Church embraced circumcision, the blessings of Abraham could not come upon gentiles. This was so obviously wrong that ultimately the Church, with Paul in the vanguard, rejected it; God disapproved of it completely. Unlike Rebekah, the Church, though it includes both Jew and gentile, brings forth neither. The Church is not of the flesh, it is entirely spiritual; it is not composed of Jew or gentile, bond or free, male or female. The Church is an entirely new creation. She embraces all into one new undivided whole; every person in the bride company is compulsorily a new person belonging to a new nation; the bride has to forsake all.

Rachel, Jacob's wife, strangely enough like her mother and paternal grandmother, was also barren. The discovery was very grievous

to her, a great swelling sorrow she could not contain, and one day in her bitterness she cried out to Jacob, 'give me children or I die', but he couldn't — he wasn't God — and she didn't die. Rachel was purposely restrained by God from bearing until, as a result of direct intervention by God, she should bring forth Joseph and Benjamin, the two special sons of Jacob. In achieving this she departed this life, calling her last-born Ben-oni, 'son of my sorrow', but Jacob renamed him Benjamin, 'son of the right hand'. Rebekah sets forth the bride as the Church in which Jew and gentile are one. Rachel with her motherly cry sets her forth as the Church of the 'whosoever' and the Lord adding to the Church daily such as were being saved. Bridegroom Isaac entreated God for Rebekah and lo two nations are involved and included in one birth; bride Rachel entreats

Jacob and God, and lo the sons of God are born.

So between them these two bridegrooms and brides set forth two different aspects of Christ and the Church in bridegroom and bride in present relationship. Through them also the note of love is introduced into scripture, for not until their marriages do we read of the love element in marriage. As commented earlier, it may be presumed that Adam loved Eve, and that all the other contracted marriages of those days were love matches, especially Abram's and Sarai's, but we are not directly told so. It is, however, plainly stated that the father (Abraham) loved the son, and that the son loved the bride, and that is most significant and suggestive.

Writing to the Corinthians of things concerning the body of Christ, Paul was

inspired to make the greatest declaration about love in the Bible. The sublime words lead us to believe that the body of Christ is a body of love — it ought to have been an obvious conclusion anyway. A loveless church is nothing, has nothing and can do nothing; it certainly does not belong to the true Church of Jesus Christ. Writing to them again he strikes the note of love in a different way, 'I have espoused you to one husband', he says. His desire was to present the church 'as a chaste virgin to Christ'. His first epistle had been a chastening rod to them; he had applied it because they needed correction. But when he visited them again he did not wish to apply the rod to anybody — that was not his attitude — he wanted to go entirely in love and in the spirit of meekness.

When he first visited them he had certainly been in that frame, and they should think of him as a wise master-builder laying for them the foundation of eternal life. He was a father who begat children, a steward of mysteries, a minister by whom they believed, a planter of churches. Beside all that, he was also a special servant sent to them from God (as though he also was some Eliezer sent by the father), come specially about the business of His Son's matrimony: he was looking for a virgin, a spiritual virgin for Him. There were none in Corinth but that made no difference. He had not found one anywhere; he did not expect to find one. The question was, did they want to belong to Him who was crucified and raised from the dead for them? If so, the blood his Lord had shed would cleanse them, the grace of God would forgive them, and in Jesus' name

they could be washed, sanctified, justified, made new creatures. More, they could be baptized in Holy Spirit, made to drink into one Spirit and receive another spirit in process; in short they could all be made absolutely new and virgin unto Jesus.

This is the loveliest and simplest thing about Christ. He is virgin toward us; He had never married or wants to marry another; He is absolutely pure unto us, and has remained so from all eternity. While on earth He kept Himself as virgin as He was in heaven; spirit, soul and body He was true and faithful unto His Father whom He loved for the sake of those who were His as yet uncalled bride. She did not know that; she was ignorant of Him and of her own identity, neither did she know she should have a virgin husband, a bridegroom of purity and eternal love from heaven. Paul's great commission to

apostleship was very strong and clear in him, though — he knew that Jesus was not only the heavenly Isaac and Jacob, he knew that He was the heavenly Adam also. His business was to call to men and women and invite them to become the second Eve. His emphasis was always on the simplicity of the love-union between Jesus and His chosen bride. He had been caught up to heaven to see and hear wonderful things, and although he could not speak them out fully, he does make clear that the spirit we are to receive is the Spirit of love. He sought without ceasing to espouse men and women to Christ in virgin condition of purest righteousness and perfect love. He also knew the serpent was at work still, though, and was as active to beguile Eve in Corinth as in Eden, and he bade them keep true and faithful; stay in love, he said, deeply in love with Jesus.

Whatever else we talk of and aspire to, we must never forget that the greatest of all is love; there is nothing in heaven or earth greater than this, nothing at all. But was it not failure to do this that brought about the downfall of Adam and the fall of man? Did not Eve move away from her loving devotion to Adam and seek knowledge of banned subjects instead? Love cannot exist of itself, it must be given, love must have an object, it must move toward someone with the purpose of inducing reciprocal love in that person. The object of our loving devotion is Christ Jesus, the heavenly Adam; we must seek nothing and no-one other than Him and His love.

The Spirit of Love

Wherever he went Paul pressed Christ's suit on everyone; his letter to the Romans is a prime example of this. He had always

wanted to go to Rome to preach the gospel, and being prevented for so long he wrote a letter full of precious doctrine and practical instruction to the saints there. Among the many things he said to them he included an outstanding exhortation to marriage with Christ: 'ye should be married to Him who is risen from the dead'. He had previously outlined the glorious gospel of justification by faith, making clear that it is accomplished by baptism into Christ's death — we must be buried with Him and planted together with Him in His death, that we may be also of His resurrection life. To the apostle's mind the next logical step to this is marriage to the one who did all this for us. God wants us freed from sin completely, utterly dead to it, that each one of us personally may bring forth fruit unto holiness; this alone is proof of God's gift of eternal life to us. It is by love

originally, by gift initially, by righteousness fundamentally, by fruit continuously and through Jesus Christ wholly. He is the one man alone through whom everlasting life could be given to us.

It is no wonder then that we should be expected to love Him and choose Him for our husband. Paul cannot see why anyone could do any other than wish to unite with Him for ever in matrimony. But no-one can love Christ upon demand, no-one marries just because it is expected of him or her to do so. Love, to be love, must be voluntary and spontaneous, it is something a person discovers within, a dawning consciousness of attraction to someone, an inner awareness of kindling desire for a person, a wish to bestow affection upon and devote all to him or her and to be with that one for ever; unless it is freely bestowed with all the

powers of the being it is not love. If under some sense of obligation we attempted to love Him with all the love of which we are capable, and succeeded in doing so, it would be quite inadequate and not the love He wants.

Human love in its highest forms is very wonderful and has been commended by writers and poets throughout time, but even though it rise from the best of motives and be bestowed for the best of reasons, human love of itself is not capable of all God demands and is an insufficient basis for marriage with Christ. The eternal union between God and man, planned and proposed by God, is only possible upon the basis of divine love, and to make it all possible God Himself had to enter into humanity. The gospel story proclaims that He accomplished this by coming to earth as

a bridegroom to contract marriage with human beings in perfect love, but that is only part of the story. The gospel also proclaims that, in order to consummate His desires, God also entered humanity so that He could produce a suitable bride for His Son; He could only accept a people who were a perfect match for Him.

This is the specific reason God gives the Holy Spirit to men. It is His privilege to prepare the Bride of Christ for her Lord by shedding abroad God's love in hearts. Everyone who receives this priceless gift lives rejoicing in hope, for he or she can then love the Lord with all the heart with a love worthy of Him. Love of the same quality as His own, expressed to Him by humanity, is what God requires; less or other than this is not acceptable to Him. This is why Jesus so much wanted us all to receive and be filled with

the Holy Spirit. He pointedly prayed for this on His way to the cross. Out of all the dozens of things He might have prayed for, He prayed this: 'Father ... Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world', and requested 'that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them'. Jesus wants to abide for ever in eternal love in human hearts; all who want to belong to Jesus for ever must receive the Holy Ghost for this purpose.

Jesus has always dwelt in love, and when in grace He visits and ministers to people who have no love for Him, He does so in order that ultimately perfect love may be shed abroad in their hearts, for He can only stay with those who love Him. This is why, whenever possible, He stayed in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany; they loved Him and He loved them. The last

few nights He spent on earth preceding the last supper He spent with the twelve and His three dear friends in their home. During those days He travelled to and from Jerusalem, the temple city, teaching, making His last declarations to men — what did they all talk about in that Bethany home of love at night?

The Temple City

Many years later the Lord revealed the marriage He visualised and the events leading up to it to the apostle John in a series of visions on the Isle of Patmos. John wrote a book there as he was commanded, and of all the things revealed in it the most wonderful is surely this — the Bride, the Lamb's wife, is a city. To the uninitiated this must be the most surprising thing of all, and Nicodemus' question may not seem at all out of place in this context: 'how can these

things be?' How can a city be a bride? A city is so impersonal, it cannot under any circumstances be confused with a bride — it is not a woman. It is a place of business, of commerce, of industry, the seat of government or majesty, or of the arts and sciences, but not a bride surely? It is a place of dwelling, full of buildings, palaces, houses, offices, factories, streets, parks, prisons: a place where people live and work. It has no life or personality of its own; if people were removed from it, it would be an empty shell. How then can it be called a bride? It seems a misnomer; yet John is emphatic; moreover by his own confession he is not passing on his own ideas but recording the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him.

It is not only a revelation to us, it was also a revelation to John, and more surprisingly, to

Jesus who gave it to him. We may only surmise that it was a revelation also to the angel whose business it was to impart it to the apostle. Though deep in tribulation, John was in the Spirit and recorded it for us all, as being the scribe of God in the priestly kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

At the commencement, by a remarkable combination of symbols related to the universe and the temple, he reveals the high priest, King Melchizedek Himself, standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. In vain we look for a temple; there is no temple in view here, or city or heaven or earth either, just Jesus all in all; He appears and fills the vision and from that moment is central to all which follows. He is the new universe; this present one and all things therein has faded away and we are in the kingdom of God, the sphere of the new

creation of God. Later John goes on to unfold events which were at that time still future, many of them yet to take place in this present material universe before it is finally removed to make way for the new universe.

God's revealed programme for this age is not fully completed, but before dealing with all that, He introduces an entirely different creation in which Jesus Christ is the first and the last. He appears like unto the Son of man that liveth and was dead; 'behold I am alive for evermore', He says, 'Amen, and have the keys of hell and death'; He is speaking from the real world beyond death and the grave. To receive the revelation the apostle himself had not only to be in the Spirit but become as one dead and alive again also. It was the Lord's day and under His power he passed that crisis into the all-embracing kingdom of

God and lived and saw into the spiritual world of the Church.

While giving this revelation of Jesus, John does not introduce body truth; the theme so beloved by Paul is not even being considered; John's concern is with the bride only. In keeping with this, it is noticeable that in his vision of Christ the body is obviously there but it is unseen, it is completely covered. The glorious High Priest's garment reaches from shoulders to feet, hiding His body from John's eyes and ours; his business is to present for our benefit an entirely different view of the Church. The churches are a group of lampstands shining in a dark world to light it through the succession of tragic events shortly to break upon it. According to the Lord's interpretation the lampstands are placed here and there in the world; they are

certainly not within the fabric of any temple or tabernacle but right out in the darkness. Borrowing truth suggested by a statement John made when he at last saw the city — 'I saw no temple' — it is almost certain that the apostle would have been surprised at the discovery that candlesticks should stand out in the open.

The vision probably either anticipated the historic destruction of the temple at Jerusalem or was given as a sequel to it — and now John hears that the churches are separated by great distances geographically and yet sees that the lampstands are grouped together around the Lord as one ensemble and therefore give one light. If they had been shown to him in their own location he would have seen seven patches of light, but in this concentrated setting he sees that their function is to give one perfect

light only. Christ, the Light of the world, gives them light that they may show the way into the holiest of all, where Christ the Lord God of the universe stands revealed. Right at the beginning of the revelation the seer of Patmos has passed far beyond any national concept of the Church; at Christ's bidding he has become His amanuensis of greater things. His love is vaster than the universe and His dealings with mankind are universal. Church election is based on redemption through God's love by blood poured out beyond degree, and the universe is the scene of operation. The theme of John's revelation is not entirely new; he has been brought into the same visionary understanding of God's workings as the prophets David, Isaiah and Ezekiel. King David was the man raised up of God to receive the plans and to prepare the

materials with which his son should build the temple, but long before that happened David had a greater revelation from God. By the Spirit the royal prophet saw the whole heavens and the starry firmament as a tabernacle created by God's hands for the sun. To him every day was a poem of love: the sun was as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, traversing the heavens on a fixed circuit, warming everything with his presence, and all nature was as a bride waking at dawn to respond to His love.

Isaiah, the great prophet of redemption, speaking to a people of limited vision, declared forthrightly 'thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto me and where is the place of my rest?' Israel could only see that earthly temple

built by Solomon. They thought the earth and a house built here by their hands and they themselves specially were the centre of the universe; they were utterly deceived. Their prophet was saying, 'do you really know how great your God is? Have you realized who it is you are dealing with?' It is time we all wakened up to His greatness and majesty. Although Israel's scriptures recorded Solomon's own almost incredulous awe when he built the holy and beautiful house, they had either completely forgotten or willfully ignored it; they had lost touch with reality.

The temple was a singularly beautiful building, erected specially for God, but Solomon who is credited with building it was almost overcome at the incongruity of it all, 'will God indeed dwell on the earth?' he said, 'behold the heaven and heaven of

heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have builded'. Solomon was the great king of peace, wealthier and wiser than all men; he was also privileged above all others to have had a father like David; even more, he had been chosen to build the temple. In common with all his people Solomon had heard and read his father's psalms, but it is doubtful whether Israel grasped their meaning, even if he himself did so fully. Both these great kings had a proper grasp of the incomprehensible greatness of God.

Ezekiel was raised up years later to revive captive Israel with a fresh vision of the throne and the temple city. Caught up and carried away in the Spirit, he saw its position and frame and where and how at last it should be built. As he wrote, throne, city and house seemed to merge into one; he did

not see it as the bride though, all was incomplete without John's revelation. The Jerusalem of Old Testament fame was a wonderful city: David spoke of it rapturously as the city of the great king, which it was. But whether prophet or seer wrote of it, it was always earthly, though with spiritual implications and overtones. The New Jerusalem revealed to John of the New Testament is the city of God; it is eternal, heavenly and spiritual, with earthly connotations; from its basic patterns God drew up and adapted plans for His former residence on earth. Like the Lord who lives there, New Jerusalem is the original city of God, the first and the last which finally comes down from God out of heaven on to a new earth. It is the capital city of the universal kingdom of God. John was caught up to heaven to see its splendour of love

and glory; with patience we await its coming. Meanwhile we are to see the revelation through the eyes of the Lord and learn the truth of it all from the Spirit who gave it through John.

Our Great High Priest

The first appearance of the Lord to John is as the King and High Priest of the new order, pure and holy. Fire and flame seem to be His substance. He stands at the centre of the churches of light. He is bent on prosecuting God's plan for the ultimate reconstruction of the universe: whether past, present or future, all things must be reconciled and ordered to that. No matter whether they be good or evil, material or spiritual, of God or of satan, all things must be brought into conformity with the overall plan; what will not conform must be eliminated.

Characteristically enough He commences

with the present manifestation of the new creation, the churches on earth: He must first have the churches in order, otherwise He will remove the lampstands; in other words He will spue the apostate churches out of His mouth.

Being High Priest He has come to attend to the light; He is very concerned about that — it must be absolutely of the right quality. According to the practice set by God for Aaron, His duty is to attend to each lampstand and see that all seven lamps are properly trimmed, fully supplied with oil and set in proper position for continual light-bearing during His absence. The priests under His charge must be able to see to conduct their business in the sanctuary. Each church of the new creation is as a lampstand intended by God to bear light to men and women of this creation, and every one of

them is of identical shape, size and composition. Each of them holds seven lamps, all exactly the same, that without exception they may shed an unvarying sevenfold unity of perfectly balanced light. Every church must be a reservoir of the Holy Spirit which is poured into it by the High Priest, for the light is derived only from Him. The Lord makes this abundantly clear, for without fail in each message to the churches He draws attention to the Spirit, His presence, His voice, His word, for these are absolutely essential to them all. Churches can no more exist apart from Him than they can without Jesus; so very forcefully the Lord constantly draws attention to Him.

There is no escaping His intention that between them the Son of Man and the Holy Spirit purpose to keep the light of the sevenfold doctrine shining clearly

throughout the entire age. There is 'one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all', and only one. This is the light that should be given out from all the churches and not any other; the seven lamps give one light on one lampstand and it is Christ's intention to keep it so. He insists that purity and unity of doctrine is as essential in days of darkness as are pure lives, therefore He comes to each church to order the lamps; He overlooks none — each one is necessary to the clear testimony and must bear its own particular light.

Doctrine is a very important and decisive matter for the churches, but though it is a decisive factor, it must not become or be thought of as a divisive factor in the Church;

on the contrary it should be a unifying and binding force among the members. Doctrine proceeds from the mouth; it is the word of God. John emphasizes the fact that it is a two-edged sword. He commences the revelation with the information that the Lord who walks in the midst of the churches does so with the sword proceeding from His mouth and it is unsheathed. This sword is an instrument of many uses: in this connection it may be thought of as the sharp, cutting implement with which He lovingly trims the wick, but however good that may be, no-one can disguise the fact that it also a weapon of war. The Lord does not hold the rod of chastening; it is the sword of justice and of warfare. He knows that in the end it is impossible to preserve unity in the Church on experience alone.

In common with the Lord, every honest person of true spiritual experience knows that on the vital matters mentioned above, common belief about fundamental truth is as essential to fellowship as is common experience. It is utterly impossible for people to continue together in the worship and service of Christ unless they discuss the truths they believe. It is the consensus of scriptural teaching that two cannot walk together except they be agreed. Jesus Himself knew and taught that; although He loved unity and taught it to His apostles, He often found it necessary to divide the people on the point of doctrine and belief. These were they who had followed Him and had enjoyed common experience under His blessed ministry, yet they were suddenly confronted with as dogmatic a statement from Christ as can possibly be imagined:

'except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood ye have no life in you' He said. It would be hard to think of a more controversial issue than this; throughout the centuries it has probably involved and embroiled more souls in doctrinal conflict and schismatic division than any other, but Christ did not therefore suppress it. The common experience of eating the miraculous meal was no excuse for suppression of truth.

Because He deliberately raised the point and forced the issue the Lord lost many followers that day. He even forced His chosen apostles to face it — they could leave Him if they wished. The light must shine clearly, the truth that unites also divides — to be saved people must come to the light. Jesus did not keep His tongue quiet for the sake of unity. His was not a policy of peace and unity at all costs. Sacrifice of truth, hiding of facts and

avoidance of controversial issues is no ground for fellowship; agreement may be found with some on those terms but not fellowship — fellowship can only be known in the light. God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all, and true fellowship between believers is only possible in the same light in which the Father and the Son have fellowship. The only possible answer to the question 'can two walk together except they be agreed?' is 'no'.

Further to that, Paul gives the uncompromising command 'be ye all of one mind' and further says 'all speak the same thing'. With Christ, and every other sensible person, he knew that in the last analysis experience and doctrine issue and flow from the same source — they are nothing other than different forms of truth and life, applications of the same thing to the whole

man. All churches must agree and every member of each church must acknowledge that doctrine is very important indeed. More than that, we must all agree about basic doctrine, especially about these seven simple statements of eternal truth written so plainly in scripture. The scripture is equally plain that no-one's soul is saved merely by believing anything other than true doctrine. Should persons do so their spoken witness will be faulty and their light defective to that degree.

The importance of this is all the more clear when it is considered that New Jerusalem is said to be the city of light and glory, and that the lamp thereof is the Lamb. In its relationship, importance and function in the new universe soon to be created, New Jerusalem is to be compared with a lampstand. She is the city of light because

she holds the Lamp, the great shining Light-giver, Jesus the Lamb. In reality He is being held by God central to all — or if we may adapt John's words — He is 'the only begotten Son (who is) in the bosom of the Father'. Every lampstand on earth is an adaptation of this marvellous truth. That each of them bears seven lamps is only another instance of the fact that God always adapts eternal truth to present need. The one lamp of New Jerusalem becomes seven lamps on one lampstand for a church. Jesus the eternal light is central to all — one light shining by reason of seven lamps.

The rainbow is a well-known example of this very thing. It is common knowledge that the seven colours of the rainbow are nothing other than white light prismatically split up into the seven colours from which it is composed. All seven are needed; they

cannot be changed nor can one be left out or white would no longer be white. Similarly the one great white Light of the new covenant, analysed intelligibly to the mind of every spiritual man, is the sevenfold doctrinal statement of truth Paul so faithfully recorded in the Ephesian epistle. Put together with understanding in the heart these seven are Jesus; they present Jesus to us in a doctrinal form. There is nothing outstandingly remarkable in this discovery; the fruit of the Spirit and the whole armour of God, in their particular fields, also accomplish the same.

This Lord Jesus, who is both the fruit of the Spirit and the whole armour of God, is also the doctrine of the Church. He stands central to the lampstands, the common light of the churches grouped around Him; He must be seen to be their light, they must be seen to

be the light-bearers — it is an amazing combination. The duty of the high priest of old was to order the lamps from morning to evening. As he did so, the lamps shed their light upon him; it was unavoidable. They also gave light over against themselves — all the marvellous details of the lampstand were revealed by the golden glow as well as the raiment and features of the high priest. This was a daily function, it was an hourly function too — from morning to evening — he had to attend to it constantly and only he could do it. So it is with our blessed High Priest — He supplies the oil for the light, pouring it into the lampstand; the oil is through Him and from Him and when consumed into Light it is Him.

The seven churches in combination must give forth one light and the seven lamps in every church must give one light — it is

impossible for it to be otherwise. Light is oil consumed in flame; the flame lives off and is fed by the oil; it is fed in only for that purpose. The risen Lord says, 'I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore', He is the One who must be seen. This is precisely what He meant when He said, 'ye shall be witnesses unto Me'. Therefore He pours the Spirit into the churches as He did into men to form the Church in the beginning and trims the natural life of every member and orders the lamps on the lampstand. He handles each lamp with care, making sure each one is in its correct order on the lampstand and properly set to receive and hold the flow and fulness of the oil. Each one receives His personal attention and He is very particular, for each has its own distinct ministry among the seven and only when each is in its right

place can the whole seven give one perfect light as He requires it.

The Lord intends that in its function in this world each church should be a reproduction of New Jerusalem, an adaptation of the heavenly light to the darkness of this age, an outpost of the 'mother' church John saw in the heavenlies. It was Paul who said

'Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all'; he did so when in course of correcting the doctrine and hopefully the behaviour of the churches of Galatia. Their light had not been true, they were showing wrong things to the people. Wrong doctrine leads to wrong beliefs and wrong practices and wrong churches; the churches were being harmful to the Galatians: what a tragedy. Precisely stated, wrong doctrine inevitably becomes a perverted gospel in the end; it is a most serious matter. There are

those who think it does not matter what doctrine is being taught as long as the Spirit is present and people love one another. Some say it does not matter much what you believe and that doctrine is unimportant, while yet others refuse to have any teaching at all if the Holy Spirit is in evidence in a manner acceptable to them and everybody is happy. Doctrinal preaching is contentious and divisive, they say, and will have none of it.

Presumably when the high priest went into the tabernacle and temple of old to order the lamps there was enough oil in the lampstand to keep the lamps, but that was only the residue of yesterday's fulness. He did not regard that as being sufficient though; he was not instructed by God to leave well alone: in any case he was not allowed to; it must be filled again. It was his

routine duty to visit and inspect the lampstand at least twice every day to handle each individual lamp, correct it if necessary, check that the oil was flowing and set it properly to burn efficiently and constantly. However well it burned and shone, still he tended it again to ensure that each lamp was being constantly filled. There must be neither over-emphasis nor under-emphasis given to any of the seven; each was kept in perfect order or it would impair the perfection of the whole. The Lord by this is ensuring that there must certainly be no neglect of any aspect of the whole doctrine. No-one else was allowed to handle the lamps but the high priest; God ordained that only he could attend to the light. He had sons but they were not permitted to minister to the sacred light-bearer or promote its light. In whatever covenant they

serve, the priests are not allowed to trim, set or supply either the lamps or the oil or the light and they were certainly not permitted to alter them. What anyone thinks about the importance or the unimportance of doctrine is quite irrelevant. It has been set in scripture by Paul our Bezaleel, and men's opinions about it do not count. If our teachers are misguided they are all the worse for being sincere. As long as they are not allowed to touch the lampstand and the lamps it does not matter though, we still have God's word. 'Let there be light' God says, but He did not say 'anyhow'; it may only be by His word and ministry; the light is both ordered and orderly because it is supplied and regulated and kept constant by Him.

Each church must regard itself as a lamp shining in a dark place; in it is a sure word of

prophecy, which did not come by the will of man. A holy man of God wrote it under dictation from the Lord; it is an expression of God's will. That is why the letters from the High Priest were addressed to the angel of each respective church and through him to the congregation. He must be very watchful and they must be very careful not to try and alter the light, they must not attempt to interfere with it at all. On the contrary they must together believe — and teach it. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'; the living Christ was speaking on Patmos; He wants the universal truth to shine forth as He inspired it, not as men may choose to believe and preach it. He is the truth and what He says and the way He says it (that is to say both the form and order of expression) are the only proper form and order of truth.

Precisely because Jesus was born and lived and died and rose a man, we know that man has always been in the present form and his parts have always been the same in number, order and shape since creation. Because Jesus came in that form we know Darwin's evolution theory and more recent modifications of it to be wrong. In the same way we must let Jesus' order of truth, as Paul reveals it to the Ephesians, stand unaltered; in form, number and order, it is truth. It cannot be that the order in which the Lord spoke to the churches was chosen at random. Like the number of lamps on the lampstand, there were seven churches and the Lord spoke to them all in turn. They are all clustered together in the book like a constellation of heavenly light, so that each of the churches should see both the light each gave and the light they gave together.

They also could see the state of the churches as it then was and how they appeared in the Lord's eyes. The general need for attention was obvious; each should have been bearing exactly the same kind and amount of light without variance.

Take Heed unto the Doctrine

It is sometimes difficult for a church to assess its own effect on its neighbourhood, so the Lord steps in to reveal its efficiency or deficiency in His eyes. This is most needful, for the cumulative effect of the Church in the world is incalculable. Not only does one church affect a district, the combined churches of a country together affect that whole land, and that country affects the world. That is inevitable. The Lord said we are to go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature and teach all nations. The message was so revolutionary

that it was said of the early church, 'they that have turned the world upside down have come here also'. It is absolutely important therefore that the light in the churches be correct.

This is the reason why the Lord commences His letters to the churches with the message to the angel of the church at Ephesus — they were the people who received the fullest attention and longest period of ministry from the apostle Paul. To them he committed in writing the revelation of the sevenfold statement of truth which he called the 'unity of the Spirit'. 'Preserve it in the bond of peace' he said; let there be no controversy or argument or doubt about this. He not only sought identity of spirit and experience for them, but unity of thought and teaching too, so he set down the basic scheme of apostolic doctrine. It became the

sevenfold lampstand of divine order in the early churches. Although, along with the other six, the Ephesian lampstand has long since been removed, the knowledge of the truth they all originally embraced and by which they existed, remains with us to this day. The true light remains, though the ministry of each has long since disappeared from the earth.

Despite the devil's attempts to eradicate the Book, he has failed; the Lord, who overrules all, has preserved this original order of doctrine so vital to us. We can be sure, as the early churches in their day, that in this our day also, we have the original form of truth. But although we may be most thankful for that, we must beware, lest having the form of truth in the epistles, we break the spirit and power of it in our teaching and lives; this was the folly and sin

of Israel. We must all have the same mind and speak the same thing on these matters. The apostle spoke with such tremendous authority and immeasurable weight to the Corinthians: 'though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel'. He makes this the ground of appeal to them to turn from their instructors, whoever they were, and listen to him: 'I beseech you, be followers of me; for this cause have I sent Timotheus, who is my beloved son'. He was gravely concerned about their doctrinal position — he knew that doctrine affects behaviour; despite the voice of the disclaimers it is of utmost importance.

Paul wrote his letters for many reasons, not the least of which was that people may be brought into remembrance of his ways and

teaching everywhere in every church. That is the measure of importance Paul put upon doctrine. How then can it be thought that what we believe is of no matter? Whether we understand what has happened to us and can state it properly is not the point. Many of us do not have proper understanding even of natural light, but that does not disqualify or in any way prevent anyone from walking in it and enjoying it. On the other hand, if a scientifically trained man does understand and can explain light, he is not thereby prevented from walking in it either. It is true that God did not inspire and authorise a scheme of doctrine or affix a list of dogmatic theology to the Bible, but that does not mean that either is unimportant. The wisdom of God restrained him from doing so because millions might (almost certainly would) have thought their salvation

assured because they accepted and believed them.

The gaining and teaching of knowledge for the sake of it is destructive of the unity the teacher should be promoting, and is to be avoided. Paul was an apostle and teacher of the gentiles; like his Lord he was a 'teacher come from God'. He says that the risen, exalted Christ has given teachers to men; he also set down what those teachers should be teaching. Therefore every would-be teacher of the churches must read his epistles carefully to make sure that what he himself is teaching is correct. All church teaching must be of the same truth and order as Paul's and his contemporary apostles'; every present-day apostle and teacher should be tested with this in mind. It is not sufficient that a company be gathered together calling themselves a church,

claiming to have Jesus in the midst and shedding around some kind of light in its locality. Nor is it enough for the Lord that because love is there people should persist in their belief and say everything is all right, even though their doctrine is not right as it should be. Correct knowledge of doctrine is not necessary to salvation, but it is as vital to full maturity as it is to proper radiance, hence the Ephesian epistle.

Behold the Bridegroom Cometh

The Lord, the great I AM, complete and perfect in Himself, is in the midst of every true church every time it gathers. He not only comes as the High Priest to tend the light, He also comes as the Bridegroom-elect to prepare His espoused bride for marriage with Him and to fit her for her joint eternal calling with Him in the new creation. At present she is fulfilling her predestination

and is called the Church, but she is destined to be called New Jerusalem, the heavenly city of God in that creation. She shall shine like the great sun of light in the new universe then, though she herself will have no need of sun or moon to shine in her, for she is lighted entirely by the glory of God radiating through the Lamb. He is the one and only lamp in New Jerusalem, and by His love and skill she is now being wrought into the one and only lamp-holder; how privileged she is! It is with this in mind that our High Priest tends the seven lamps — they are nothing other than the perfections of Himself. Each one, when fully operational, radiates light by emphasising one particular aspect of the whole, and in doing so radiates the whole through itself; the light consists of seven lights which are one — not seven but ONE. Science declares that light is vocal and their

united voice says 'He is everything, He is all in all'; the body and Spirit and calling and Lord and faith and baptism and God and Father are all His and Him, they are all one and only one, and by them we become one with Him. O wondrous grace! Each lamp must say so, each church must say so, every individual in the Church must say so.

The ideas suggested by the use of the word unity when describing the sevenfold doctrine are an advancement by Paul upon the more fundamental ideas inherent in John's use of the word fellowship. They neither improve on them nor differ from them in any degree but are an extension of the same truth into a different area.

According to their calling and commission the two apostles teach identical doctrine in their own way from the same source of inspiration. So whether Paul or John writes

to the Ephesians, the message is about true love as well as correct doctrine and pure light. 'Christ loved the Church' says Paul 'and gave Himself for it that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish'— that is a statement of fact and intention as well as of love and desire. 'Thou hast left thy first love' says John, 'thou art fallen', 'repent'. This is the voice of heartbreak calling with words of love; it is the Bridegroom calling to His bride.

No bride preparing for marriage affects to take no notice of her appearance, but prepares for the day with the greatest attention to detail. And shall she who is the bride-elect of the King of the universe be less concerned about correctness than an earthly bride? This royal marriage for which

she is preparing is to be the greatest ceremony of the new creation; and shall a shoddy approach to truth best fit her for it? How can she pretend to love her Lord and believe it does not in the least matter how she appears or what she thinks? Unless she is lamentably irresponsible she thinks as He thinks, namely that she must be perfect. It is the dearest wish of her Bridegroom's heart and she desires to please Him who wants her to be perfect as He is perfect.

So she wishes the full light to shine upon her and through her that in fellowship with Him she may be light as He is light and walk in it with Him. Is she perfect by that light?

Anyone living in the half light or some subdued and defective light can appear to be what they are not, perhaps even beautiful. Spots, blots, blemishes, wrinkles, deformities, discolourations can easily pass

unnoticed where the light is faulty; there is no kindness nor sense nor love in that. Are we to stay in partial light so that imperfections may not be seen, or must we hide from truth or cease from preaching it for the sake of unity? Unity first of all must be with Him who is the Light and can only be fully achieved as we come to Him and walk fully in the wholeness of light.

Unlike Adam, who accepted his bride's fall in paradise, Jesus refuses to accept His bride's fall. Failing to stand firm and call Eve to repentance, Adam also fell and joined her in the transgression, and together they lost paradise and fellowship with God. But not so with our Jesus; He did not, cannot sin, He will never fall to our level, but constantly calls us up to His. But whence came the church's fall? The clue is perhaps to be found in the contents of the letter — even in those

early days there were those who said they were apostles and were not. Thank God that the church did not fear to try them and find them to be liars. Perhaps the basic law by which they were tried was the sevenfold doctrinal unity committed to their trust by Paul, as well as various other scriptural tests: the result was exposure and denunciation. We too must be alert; false prophets and false apostles are on the increase, they seem to abound everywhere; all claims must be tested by the word of God. Is the sevenfold light upheld? Is its light fed by their ministry, or is it confused? Is each lamp clear in its shining? Is its presence distinctly seen? Is it there? It is impossible to love the Lord and not love the truth, He is the embodiment of truth, 'I am the truth', He says.

The Call to First Love

The main emphasis running throughout the seven letters of Jesus by John is the need for clear perception of the true states of churches with a view to repentance and return to first love and first works. The Lord is insistent that the churches must recognise false claims and false teachers and false doctrines and reject them. Whether they be apostles, Jews, Nicolaitanes or Jezebels, whoever they are makes no difference to Jesus; all must be examined and if necessary rejected. If their teachings have reduced the churches to states of sin or ignorance or lukewarmness, that must be repented of and rectified. If you accept the wrong people, believe the wrong things you will lose your first love and suffer the loss of light and life — this is the message Jesus sent to Ephesus. The Bridegroom is in the light calling us to live in the light and to love Him, love Him in

the radiance of the eternal light of the truth concerning Himself and us. We are to be married to Him who is our first real love; we are to be married to Love, the original Lover of mankind.

We never knew love, we never loved, nor could we love with true, pure love, until we loved Him. Because His is the first love, He is the first true Love of our lives. We did not know this nor would we have believed it; we only discovered it because He first loved us; He loved us with everlasting love from His Father's bosom. When this love reached John he found out the truth that God loved the whole world of men. John did not know this until God gave him His only begotten Son; John lived through Him. When John discovered Jesus' love for him it was so wonderful and he desired it so much that he lay his head on His bosom and he wished to

abide there for ever and ever. Increasingly he had come to realise the immensity of the sacrifice lying behind it all. However had His Father been able to give Him up for us all? And O the love that moved Jesus to leave such love in order to come to us; dimly John began to understand. This love amazed him, and the manner of it filled him with wonder. He came gradually to think of himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved — to him that said it all: and when he was chosen out from all the apostles to receive the revelation of Jesus Christ he was absolutely overwhelmed with love. For him it was bliss beyond all he had ever known when he heard the Lord call the Church His Bride.

Glory upon glory — he saw her; he saw the Bride of Christ's heart, all was being opened unto him; he saw into heaven, into God's kingdom, into the new creation, into the

Bride's heart; best of all, by it he saw into the heart of Christ Jesus. Right there in the centre of the bride's heart — at the centre of the universe — lay the manifestation of FIRST LOVE: he saw what had never before been revealed to mortal man, it was an open sight. The original love was laid bare before his eyes — God and the Lamb. They were seated on The Throne at the head of the river of water of life; he found the source of the river — First Love enthroned.

It is absolutely essential above all else that every member of every church has this same great love flooding his or her own heart. The first love of the universe is the strong eternal love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father; it is the bond of perfectness, the blending of two persons in one by the Spirit, the wondrous bliss of having eternal being with those whose thoughts and

feelings and powers and desires and purposes are one with your own. This, and so much more than this, is the quality and manner of that first love which Jesus seeks and must have in the churches, it is the all-enduring quality which gives New Jerusalem its everlasting life and strength. He never found it in anyone while He was on earth; though He longed for it He never sought it in men for He knew it was not there. He knew He had to go back home to His Father for that, so on His way to Gethsemane and prison and judgement He prayed for it.

He was conscious that up until that moment of time He had done everything His Father wanted Him to do and He broke into prayer about it. His mind ranged over the past three years and He poured His thanks into His Father's ears for all of it. Then He committed His disciples to God and

sanctified Himself unto what more remained for Him to do. He knew what it was, He needed not to ask anyone; the work He had to do next was the real reason for which He had come into the world and He must do it by Himself. It was unique and would require all His attention and occupy Him to the full for the next few days. He was determined to give Himself to it completely, so freeing Himself from His immediate responsibility to His eleven apostles He handed them back to His Father. He Himself must now assume responsibility for the redemption of them and many many more. He wanted them all to be one, one as He and the Father were one.

He knew that if He should accomplish that, it would of itself be a most marvellous miracle, but He was not interested in miracles or fame; exhibitions of power meant nothing to

Him. The knowledge that He had power to do spectacular things did not mean so much to Him as the awareness of the love welling up in His heart, and He burst out with prayer, 'Father I have declared unto then Thy name and will declare it, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them'. His prayer was finished; He had asked that original love should be shed abroad in the hearts of His elect ones; there was nothing more to say. He had reached His objective, He was ready to go now. He knew His prayer would be answered.

To Him real love was Father's love. He knew that love long before He knew any other or ever He asked for Peter's. It was native to Him; it was His life, the Spirit He was, the nature of eternal being, reality. In heaven or earth,. whether in this creation or the next,

whether in God or the Church, in city or bride, body or priesthood, time or eternity, past, present or future, Jesus knew He could not for ever stay with anyone except in that first love. There could be no marriage contract between Him and anyone except that same love which was in Him was in them also. The basis of espousal between Him and any heart is that it should be redeemed and sanctified, cleansed and made alive in the Spirit, who sheds God's love abroad within it to make a home for Jesus the Bridegroom.

Peter visualizes the new creation as being a place of righteousness; Paul says it will be a place of rest for battle-weary warriors; John sees it as a place of love. All three are right, but unto John alone was the privilege granted of receiving Jesus' revelation. With mounting wonder he recorded all the

miraculous events he saw and the things he heard: it is a preview and a prophecy covering all time from Pentecost to eternity. Events of earth and happenings in the heavens come into view and merge into one; through his pen the invisible becomes as real and open to our gaze as the visible, and eternity dawns. This is the world of the Spirit where only the spirits of men see. John was in the Spirit and it was the Lord's day; spirit forces were at work, he saw spirit beings, spiritual events, souls of men, angels, demons, gehenna, satan, heaven, God.

The Bride ... the Lamb's Wife

On goes the vision of the Lord still unfolding until a new heaven and a new earth come to sight and at last New Jerusalem and the throne of God. The holy city was coming down from God out of the new heaven on to the new earth — it was a most glorious sight

and the only way he could describe it was 'as a bride adorned for her husband'; 'I John saw it', he said, and whether or not he had known it before, he knew then that the Bride is a city. Its coming was accompanied by a great voice out of heaven announcing 'Behold the tabernacle of God is with men'. What a moment, God was about to pitch His dwelling-place among men on the new earth to live with them for evermore, and John understood. Past events and words became clear to him; all that Jesus had spoken in the upper room about His Father's house now became plain. It sounded so very mysterious then, but now he knew, he could see; the house, the city and the bride are one.

This holy city is Father's house of many mansions, all of them built upon the foundation of the apostles; so much he had never properly understood before was

clarifying to him. Now he knew what Jesus meant when He had told the mystified Judas, 'if a man love me he will keep my words and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him'. This New Jerusalem was builded as a city compacted together, many abodes compacted together, each one of them a living person, a house of God; God filled the city, indwelling each He indwelt all; 'all in all', became a phrase of new and wondrous meaning to him now. Each person included in the city and indwelt by God is also part of the Bride and previously espoused to Christ for the purpose of this marriage union with Him. New Jerusalem is the Bride of brides, the aggregate of all those who love Jesus and have already married Him in heart; since then they have looked upon their time on earth as a period of espousal and have given

themselves to the task of preparing for the actual marriage.

The first thing that struck John about the Bride was her glory and light, then it was her purity, then it was her transparency; everything was most precious and crystal clear. From his mountain-top viewpoint he could see right up through it from the very foundations; to its highest point the city was complete and fully functional. Nothing needed doing, everything was in place, not even a stone needed laying. The earth had been prepared for it; there was no digging, no sound of work, nothing but the voice of the angel in his ears; he was amazed. God's words came back to mind, 'Behold I make all things new, it is done'— it was complete to the smallest detail. The foundation stones attracted him, they were studded all over with precious stones, full of colour and

flashing with light. There were names written on them: his eyes ran over them in wonder, he was reading the familiar names of his fellow-apostles, his own was among them. They were all there, the twelve apostles of the Lamb; what a testimony to them, their lives had been clear and their examples true. Some of them were dead, but only scarcely, yet he was being shown the net result of their lives and work — this vast city. He had been carried to the end of time and saw what God had been able to build on them — it was marvellous; everything was pure, solid gold.

The city stood foursquare, a perfect cube, the length and breadth and height of it were equal like the Holy of Holies; the voice had said this was the real tabernacle of God in which He was going to dwell among the nations of the new earth and be their God.

The gates specially attracted his attention — each was a pearl and wide open to receive the peoples and kings of earth with their gifts; the city was full of splendour, honour and glory abounded everywhere. He could not but specially notice these entrances of pearl; whichever way the nations approach the city the gateway is a pearl — there is no other way into it whatsoever. An altogether different aspect of his great and beloved theme of regeneration lay open to his wondering gaze, one he did not normally emphasize. In common with his fellows he knew and rejoiced in it, but he did not mention it in his Gospel. Matthew and Luke had given much space to the human side of Christ's birth, but in common with Mark he had ignored the human instrument altogether, speaking only of the Logos becoming flesh and never mentioning Jesus

being born. But in the vision the place and function of the pearl is magnified in a twelve-fold way, laying an emphasis and highlighting a point of major importance.

The pearl, John knew, is the Church, for in company with his fellow apostles he had been given this understanding by the Lord Jesus, yet now he sees it as the only way into New Jerusalem which also is the Church. The Lord is revealing to us that the only way into the Church is through the Church. At first this may not be readily acceptable to the devout mind, but it is true; this is a great mystery, only explainable in terms of Jesus' birth. The only way into humanity for Him was through humanity — there was no other way. In order for Him to be born, God had to find a human being, a woman, willing to co-operate with Him for His purpose; only then could He overshadow her and endue

with power from on high by the Spirit, and bring forth His Son.

It could be done no other way; an angel would not do, there are no female angels, they do not give birth and are not multiplied thereby, they are individually created. God could only become a human being by a human being — she was the instrument. So likewise, in order to bring forth His spiritual children and build His Church, the Lord endues the spirits of His people with power from on high, that through humanity human beings may be born of God. The only way for men to become sons of God is through the Church; the Church is His instrument. The daily flow of population through the gates of New Jerusalem is continuous demonstration of that fact, and John sees it; this Bride is through the pearl. Paul saw and said it another way; we should be married to Him

who is risen from the dead that we should bring forth fruit unto God. All men of God say the same thing.

The Eternal Reality

It seems that all the great themes of love and grace are headed up and fulfilled and in some way demonstrated or illustrated in this great capital city of the new creation, and no wonder, for it is the City / Church / Tabernacle / Temple / Bride of God. Truth is that, except sin and its grotesque forms and all it has wrought, there is nothing of or on this earth or in the whole universe which did not originally come from God. Everything made by Him was produced by His own power from His own self, an expression of His person; especially is this true of things to do with our salvation. We read more than we comprehend when we read the profound words of John: 'In the beginning was the

Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God; the same was in the beginning with God, all things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made'. The inspired John is speaking from understanding gained on Patmos when he was caught up to heaven and the throne.

Except he had been commanded to write, he, as Paul before him, might have found it unlawful to utter all he saw and heard, but in obedience to God he wrote down by the Spirit what otherwise he would have found impossible to express. It was altogether too great for him; the opening words were like the notes of a trumpet and the accompanying vision was completely overpowering; overwhelmed he fell down as though dead at the burning feet of the one like unto the Son of Man. Except he had

been raised up again he could never have written the revelation, and when he did write it was as one brought back from the dead. How greatly then we should treasure this book, for it is a word as from beyond the grave, a message to us from the throne.

Seeing into New Jerusalem, and especially its inner heart, John understood perfectly that 'without Him was not anything made that was made'. Whether the original creation, or produced from that original creation, God never made anything without the Logos, indeed He could not, it would have been quite impossible. Everything created was a projection from the Father and an adaptation of the Son, the Word spoken forth in the Spirit and formed into whatever God wanted. All was made with a view to the ultimate expression of the relationship of the Father and the Son. From

Spirit to matter God made everything through the substance of the Son. If He desired a bride-like city, it should all be based upon the love relationship between Himself and His Son; if a head and body Church, it should be an extension to others of their own union; if it should be a shepherd and sheep relationship, He should be the Lamb and the Father the Shepherd, and so on. As all originated from God, so all was based on and developed from the eternal life and relationship of the members of the Godhead.

The Marriage of the Lamb

In the hands of God everything is moving to a fixed point in the future when everything in Him, whether in heaven or on earth, shall be summed up under the headship of Christ, then all the secret wonders and fulness of Him will be manifest. Blessed indeed in that

day shall all those be who for His sake have forsaken all others to become members of the Bride company, who cleave only unto Him, determined to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Truly espoused to Him, they are already married to Him in heart and regard all life as an opportunity to prepare for actual marriage to Him, whom having not seen they love. This whole creation is moving on toward the marriage of the Lamb, the bride with eagerness, but the Lord is not quite ready for that yet; when He is He will be ready also to bring in the entire new creation.

In prophetic preview John, who heard and saw it all, tells of the great events which directly precede the announcement of the Lamb's marriage. Before the bride is mentioned or brought into view the great whore is judged and punished. Bursts of

alleluias from a vast host of grateful hearts filled all heaven, wanting nothing other than to praise God. To John it was almost beyond description; it sounded like the pouring of many waters and rolling thunder. 'Alleluia', they said, 'for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. For so long it had seemed that Babylon, that great whore, was reigning, but not now; she was cast down. John was thrilled; it was a time of fulfilment for him as well as for the Lord; the Lamb's wife had made herself ready and he knew he had not laboured in vain. Gladder still, he heard the guiding angel say, 'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb' and blessed indeed they were, for they too were saying 'Alleluia'. It was wonderful.

Everybody he could see and hear was overjoyed that the marriage of the Lamb

was come and that His wife had made herself ready for it. He that sat on the throne granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; it was her righteousness, her very own, the righteousness of the saints. It was John's first glimpse of her and as he watched the investiture his rapture knew no bounds; he was overcome completely by the sight, all he wanted to do was worship, and he fell down at the feet of his informant and guide intending to do so. 'See thou do it not' he said. He was a heavenly being and had a lot more knowledge and power than John, but he was only a servant as John was; he said he was actually a fellow-servant of John's and also of all those that held the testimony of Jesus; 'worship God' he said.

Jesus was testifying to John of the revelation His Father had given Him, the angel was

showing John the Lord's revelation not his own, he was only obeying orders. 'The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy', he said, and although much had been revealed to John already, the testimony was not yet complete. The Bridegroom was not yet ready to marry His bride, there were other things to be done before that. He must fight His last battles, defeat His ancient enemies, raise the dead, set up thrones, provide the marriage supper, open the books, check the names there, banish the devil and all those who have his mark and worship his image together with him to final death. When the Lord marries His bride all the old will have been already finished by Him for ever, so that together they can apply themselves without distraction to the business of the new creation.

John's eyes are now chiefly upon the Bride, wanting to watch her as she proceeds to her final destiny, but the angel directs his attention to another company who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Who these are is not disclosed to John, but it is certain they were not the Bride company; they were evidently special guests invited by God to join in the pre-marital festivity, and perhaps only to observe the ceremony. We cannot be certain who they are, but it may be correct to suppose that all the Bridegroom's friends (of whom John Baptist was a very special one) will be among them. Whoever they are they are very special and very blessed indeed, for they shall for ever live in the company of the Lamb and His wife on the new earth to behold His glory and the glory of the city of God. They shall have right to enter in

through the gates of pearl and walk up the golden street of their capital city and drink freely of the water of the river of life flowing down the crystal road and eat the fruit of the tree of life and pluck its healing leaves. Best of all, theirs is the freedom of the city and they shall be granted audience with the King of kings, whose throne stands at the head of the waters in the midst of the city.

By tribe and nation, each with its kings and great ones, all the peoples of the earth shall come and go at will in the service of God and the Lamb in that new world. They shall bring their honour and glory into it as when of old thrice a year the sons of Israel went up to Jerusalem laden with gifts for their God. They shall see the face which Moses was forbidden to see, His dear name shall be in their foreheads, and they shall live and serve Him for ever and ever. Amen.

But the Bride, she abides constant with the Lord God Almighty and His Lamb as immovable and unchanging as He. All is mystery still. She is the city of God, Father's house of many abiding places; she is also the Tabernacle of God where He alone is worshipped and by whom He shall dwell among men for ever on the new earth, the great lampstand bearing the one true everlasting light of men and angels. The wondrous lamp through which the one eternal light shines is the Lamb. John sees the Beloved One held securely in the bosom of our Father, the Lord God Almighty, Lover and Redeemer of men. He had always held Him there, even when He was in the manger and in the tomb when He came to this earth to abolish death and bring life and immortality to light. In Him is life and the Life is the Light now shining in the native

darkness of men in this world. In that universe it will shine in its native Light. The blessed Life of God, Father, Son and Spirit dwelling together in Love is true Light, and throughout all eternity the pure gold city / lampstand is the Bride of that Love.

No wonder Bezaleel of Israel was filled with the Spirit of wisdom and skill to make that first lampstand for the first tabernacle — it stood there for Christ in the holy place — it still stands for Christ now and shall stand only for Him for ever. It is the stand for His Lamp as the body is for the head — they are one.

The Time is at Hand

The revelation of Jesus Christ has been delivered, His testimony to John is ended and the vision is complete. The apostle is brought down again to this earth and

Patmos with the admonition to worship God ringing in his ears; 'seal not the sayings of this prophecy', he is told, 'for the time is at hand'. John recognised the phrase: it took him back to the beginnings of the gospel; his attention was caught the very first time he heard his namesake John using it — 'repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. He had not quite known all that it meant then, but it sounded like the gospel he was wanting to hear and he knew he wanted it, so he attached himself to John Baptist and became his disciple. From him he learned many elementary things, chiefly that it was vitally important for him to repent and be baptised for the remission of sins and to learn to pray for and await the coming Messiah. The Lamb of God was coming to take away the sins of the world and to baptise them in the Holy Ghost; truly the

kingdom of heaven was at hand. When Jesus came He immediately took over John's position and repeated his words, 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand', but the change John expected did not immediately take place.

Whatever John may have understood by the phrase, there were no immediate or gradual changes in the structure or order of the universe; all material elements continued the same as before. But a great change came over him and many others with him; spiritually, mentally and in many instances physically also — he and multitudes of other people entered into an entirely new realm which could only be described as 'heavenly'. Therefore when he heard the angel's statement that the time was at hand he knew precisely what was implied by it. There was to be no immediate cataclysmic

fulfilment of all he had seen, the churches would have to shine on in this dark world longer yet without seeing all the changes he spoke of, but believing hearts could begin to enter into all the spiritual blessings and benefits of the revelation now. Let things be as they are, especially spiritual and moral conditions, do not try to alter them, he is told, these states are irremediable; men must either be saved from them, or go deeper into them, but do not try to lessen or improve the conditions by giving them other names or calling them problems instead of sin, or religious virtues instead of spiritual qualities.

'I come quickly, I am Alpha and Omega, I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things in the churches'. In them all was exactly the same as when He stood outside Bethany and said in John's hearing to

Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life'. It was not the time for the general resurrection, but it was the time for Lazarus to rise from the dead and enter into newness of life on this earth. In the same way it is granted unto spiritual men to enter into the golden city of God and eternal light, to marry the Lamb, to drink of the river, to eat of the tree of life, to come boldly to the throne. Dogs and sorcerers and whoremongers and murderers and idolators and lovers and makers of lies are still, and except they repent shall for ever remain, without the city.

The Spirit and the bride say 'Come'. How inviting is the prospect to the thirsty, those who seek light and love and life and union with God. The vision and testimony was granted to John to create thirst. Unless a man is made thirsty for something better, he

will not want to change his drinking habits.
Let us all live like brides-to-be, then the
waters will flow, and the invitation will be
meaningful and men may come and drink.
The river of water of life of New Jerusalem is
flowing down on to this earth, the gates of
pearl are open here, the golden street lies
just beyond for every man, let the nations be
invited to enter, the time is now and the
kingdom of heaven is at hand.