

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

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Chapter One

“AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING...”

There are probably few fragments of liturgy more subject to repetition than that from which the above first part is taken. At the same time, it may be an example of the ignorance and meaninglessness with which many phrases are constantly used in Christianity.

What is the *IT* that was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be? The only true answer would be in changing the “it” to a “He” - “As He was - so is He now, and ever shall be”.

For the rest, there are few, if any, things that can carry this declaration. It is just this change from the beginning that is causing an immensity of concern and consideration in Christendom, and especially in evangelical Christianity. The beginning is the basis of a very great amount of review, reconsideration, recall, and effort to recover. For, as to Christianity, it is just not true that “as it was in the beginning, it is now”. True, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever”, and the foundation truths of Christianity are the same but for the more part Christendom is very much astray from “as it was in the beginning”.

This is not a new digression. The declension and departure began before the apostles themselves had finished their course, and their later writings are marked by correctives, recalls and reforms.

This had to do, not only with the character, words, and ethical standards, but primarily with the spiritual principles upon which Christianity *AT FIRST* rested and by which it was initially constituted. It is therefore the fact that the very spiritual constitution, the very essence and nature of the “beginning” has changed, or been lost, which accounts for the deplored change, and - what is no less than tragic - loss of impact, authority and accountability.

It is to some of the elements of the beginning that we shall draw attention here. When we say “elements”, let it be understood that we are not meaning the “elementary” in the sense of being just the simple rudimentary rules of Christianity. Rather do we use the word in the sense of “elemental”, which carries with it what the dictionary calls “like the powers of nature, great, tremendous, uncompounded, essential”.

Not only is it the first *FEATURES*, but the elemental, inherent, concentrated essence and vital potency of spiritual principles behind the outward expression. To this we shall seek to give attention, for we are convinced, after long and wide contact with Christians and Christian affairs, that it is here that the real key to the situation lies.

The mistake in most efforts to recover the original impact, dynamic, and authority of the first half-century of Christianity is in the point at which attention is applied. Such things as doctrine, form, procedure and work are the points of attention or debate. While these things *MAY* be seriously open to question in various respects, to start with them is to start at the wrong end, and to do that is either to add to the confusion or to come to deadlock. The best that might accrue would be compromise, and compromise is *ALWAYS* failure to face and deal with root causes honestly and courageously. We live in an age of compromise in every realm, and we are in an age of “confusion worse confounded”. We Christians know that the world situation will never be right and straight until He comes whose right it is to

reign, but He will have no compromise, no middle course. He will go to the root of things and deal with them *THERE!*

For *ANY* measure of recovery of lost power we have to get behind results and effects, whether it be in doctrine, procedure, form or work and get our finger upon causes. There was a reason and cause for the world-upturning or overturning impact of Christianity "in the beginning", and, as we have said, this lay with the eternal, heavenly, and spiritual principles or "laws" which lay within and behind what happened. It did not lie with a fully-fledged doctrinal knowledge. That was still in process of being made known.

When God is in the way of initiating or forming, He acts first and explains afterwards. The explanation is the "teaching" or "doctrine". This is the safe way. The teaching is the explanation of experience. It is only the reverse order when the teaching has been given and forsaken. Then, as in the case of the prophets, God says what He is doing or going to do, and acts accordingly. Initially, just enough light is given for God to act upon. This method and principle of God can be seen in both the Old and New Testament. It is always of value to have God giving light on what He has *DONE*, so that we come into *UNDERSTANDING* of His ways, rather than have a lot of teaching without experience. We should put ourselves in the way of God's dealings and acts, if this was so.

The original impact did not lie within a fixed and established form of procedure. It certainly did not rest upon organization and institutions. These hardly existed, if at all. We repeat that it is folly to start toward hoped-for recovery of power by dealing with such things as the effects rather than the causes.

Let us then excavate through the accretions of Christian tradition and history, down to the bedrock principles.

The writer, over a period of nearly forty years of personal contact with evangelical Christianity in many parts of the world, has been terribly impressed with one basic weakness or defect. This defect undoubtedly is indicative of a whole set of deflexions from what was the conception in the beginning. While the *DOCTRINE* of the Holy Spirit is well known, and a great deal of teaching on that doctrine has been received, both from expositors personally, and through an immense amount of literature on the subject, there is a great deal to make real the question as to whether or not, after all, multitudes - even the majority - of Christians know anything about the Holy Spirit as a positive, active, indwelling presence. This question is supported by conduct, conditions, and ignorance which glaringly deny the teaching of the New Testament.

Jesus said of the Holy Spirit that "He shall be *IN* you", "He shall guide you (as within you) into all the truth", "He shall take of mine and show it unto you", and so on. John, by the Spirit, said (to all true Christians, not to special ones, or leaders or teachers): "The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but... his anointing teacheth you concerning all things..." (1 John 2:27). While this related to a specific matter, i.e. Antichrist, the principle, according to Jesus - is of wider application, and is just that the Holy Spirit is an arbiter *WITHIN* making believers aware of what is of God and what is not. It is something that is not for an advanced point in spiritual life, but relates to the very beginning: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). The law of the Spirit of life is of constant growing reality and application as the very law of spiritual progress. It is no less a matter than that great factor of spiritual understanding and intelligence with which the New Testament is so largely occupied.

Let us say at once that this principle does not make the Christian independent of instruction through anointed teachers, neither does it by any means create an above-the-Scriptures position. The Holy Spirit will always work according to the Word of God, and *NEVER* on any account make us superior thereto or independent thereof. Nothing but the utmost peril of deception could come from such an interpretation or "enlightenment" or "leading" (?) that makes for such independence or superiority. Nevertheless, the *INWARD* government, enlightenment, and witness of the Holy Spirit is a primary factor in that which "was at the beginning". Indeed, it goes to the very root of the very nature of the New Testament Christian life; the essential *BEING* of a true child of God. This both determines and defines what we may call the new and distinctive "species" which Christians are intended to be.

When the apostle Paul uses the phrase: "he that is spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:15), he is describing the very difference of two distinct categories of people. Not only is he dividing them but he is describing them. One category, he says, is deficient and defective in certain faculties, endowments and qualifications, relating to knowledge, discernment, judgment and understanding. The other category is distinguished by this very ability and qualification. But it is not an endowment given subsequent to new birth. Rather is it inherent in new birth, and a constituent of the new life. It is "he that *IS* spiritual"; he that is a certain kind of being. This being is said to have been born of the Spirit as differing from born of the flesh, begotten of God, as differing from by the will of man. This difference is the result of an advent. It is the advent of the Holy Spirit *INTO* the spirit of the committed believer. Surely, it stands to reason that the indwelling presence of such a one as "the Spirit of the living God", God the Holy Spirit, is meant to be more than a passive, inactive, unenlightening, unendowing power and intelligence.

It is a very gratifying thing to see people changing and adjusting their lives, their conduct, their manner of speech and dress, their habits, their attitudes, etc., not because the law has been laid down to them by others - be he preacher or some other person - but because the Holy Spirit within has spoken and made His mind known to them concerning such matters. There are numerous matters in the Scriptures concerning which there are most flagrant contradictions in so many Christians that we might well ask the question, "Where is the Holy Spirit in them?"

This is the *BASIS* of everything "as it was in the beginning". This is what came in with the advent of the Holy Spirit. This is what was intended and taught to be the very nature of the new dispensation.

Not that it was universally and perfectly lived up to, even in those times but it was truly there, accounting for very big and drastic changes in lives, even in the apostles themselves. This, more than the outward happening, was the true nature and power of "The Acts of the Holy Spirit"; which is a truer title to the book called "The Acts of the apostles".

This bedrock principle worked out in every connection and direction, as to Christ Himself, the church, procedure, function, work, and so on. And it is our purpose to show this, as we are enabled by the same Spirit, for we are convinced that this is "as it was in the beginning".

Sometimes we hear people say, "Oh, don't look back to the past and to what has been. Look on to God's new thing"; and they quote Paul in saying, "Leaving the things which are behind". This is very superficial talk, to say the least of it. It can be very dangerous and misleading. Provided that there has been no departure, no

forsaking, no loss, no relinquishing of anything that was of God, and that the foundation "principles" still obtain *WITH WHAT THEY MEAN*, there is room for the exhortation: "Let us go on to full growth, not laying again the foundation..." (Hebrews 6:1-6). But the New Testament, the risen Lord, the Spirit, have strong things to say regarding "repenting and doing the *FIRST* works" (Revelation 2:5), and the Lord has to sadly remind of a position from which His people have departed, and call them back to their beginnings.

There *WAS* that which - grievously - is *NOT* now.

Chapter Two

“AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING...” (continued)

We have seen that the “beginning” relates to the earliest part of New Testament times, not even to the latest parts of the New Testament. The latest writings are characterized by correctives, recalls and appeals for recovery, showing that all too soon in apostolic times, things began to deviate from the first principles and to change in both nature and form. These changes will be given more detailed consideration here as we go on.

For the present we confine ourselves to one more general and basic factor from which all else takes its rise. We have already pointed out that the possession of the Holy Spirit within the spirit of the believer produces a new and different “species” or genus, a new kind of person, the kind referred to by the apostle Paul as “he that is spiritual”, which he differentiates from “the natural [soulical or psychical] man”. This is the new man which is the subject of all New Testament concern.

It is not just that an element called “spirituality” has been taken on, but a fundamentally different kind of man has been born by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Albeit, the natural or psychical man remains, and remains a force to be reckoned with. On one side, spiritual education consists of the growing realization and understanding of how utterly different from the Spirit of God the natural man is. The tendencies, proclivities, directives, conceptions, etc. of the natural man work in ways that are just the opposite of those of the Spirit in the new man. This is one of the most obvious things in the early chapters of the book of Acts. In those chapters we have the essence of what came in on the day of Pentecost as the very nature and principle of the new dispensation. It is an education to observe the way devoutly religious and wholly sincere men were being educated in regard to this fundamental difference between the natural, even though religious, man and “he that is spiritual”. The inclusive and all-embracing factor was the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as the executor of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus.

A strong, very strong, carry-over of the Old Testament system and mentality was present in those first responsible men such as Peter, James and John. Largely because of this one factor, this mentality, the advent of the Spirit had to be “like the sound of a mighty rushing wind”. Not only a sound, but the force. The one initial necessity was that those concerned should realize that things were taken altogether and absolutely out of *THEIR* hands; that whatever their hands might imply - e.g. mentality, predisposition, reasoning, tradition, conception, interpretation, etc. - the Spirit of God was above that, either as contrary to it or as having a meaning which they had never seen. That is the first factor in the practical meaning of “As it was in the beginning”.

It would seem that, while those concerned realized the force of the happening, they had yet to learn the meaning of it, for from then onwards the conflict between the natural man and the spiritual man, *IN THEM*, was the way of their education. The transition from Judaism to the full implications of the new dispensation of the Spirit was fraught with some hard and painful battles and revolutions. Repeatedly we see a crisis presenting itself on this issue and the balances trembling between the old order and the new. Not, let it be emphasized, between the world and evil men and Christianity (that was another aspect), but between the inheritance, training and tradition of good and committed men (“devout” they are often called) and an altogether new heavenly meaning and mindedness.

Let us repeat: the drastic actions from heaven, as in the case of Pentecost in general and of Peter and Saul of Tarsus in particular, demonstrated that the new order was new and not a carry-over of anything. It was a mastery, a domination, a Lordship!

Peter, on the ground of his interpretation of Old Testament Scriptures about eating the unclean, might remonstrate with the Lord, but Peter's entire apostleship and usefulness would depend upon allowing the Lord to know better, and submitting. It was a crisis in which Peter was on the threshold of a discovery which absolutely amazed him and left him without any explanation except: "God did it", and "who was I that I should withstand God?" The principle herein contained is the battleground of the continuous question of less or more power and spiritual fullness.

The natural, psychical, man is positively incorrigible and inveterate in the matter of crystallizing, fixing, legalizing, and putting into final forms. He just *MUST* systematize and finalize. Although he may not know what he means, he will sing with gusto, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be", because he is wedded to formulas. He resorts almost mechanically to "drawing up something" to put it into a framework and make a box for it. Never has the Holy Spirit done something but men have subsequently taken the features of it and compiled there from a manual or text-book and have sought to impose it upon the Holy Spirit and the church as binding and essential. The beginning shows that the Holy Spirit will have none of this. For Himself absolute liberty of action and method is demanded and never to be denied Him. From a consideration of historic and organized Christianity it is wellnigh impossible to realize that there are certain things that Christianity was *NOT* at the beginning.

For instance, it was *NOT* a new religion. Christianity was not set over against or alongside of other "religions", so that it would be included in "Comparative Religions". Although some of the apostles themselves were tardy in realizing that Judaism was finished with by Christ and set aside, "lock, stock and barrel"; and only Stephen, and perhaps a few with him, had seen the completeness of the break, for which he had to pay with his life, yet this fact had steadily to be faced, and its acceptance - fully or reservedly - determined the degree of their spiritual measure. Paul is to be accounted for on this one issue supremely. Their thinking, reasoning and handling of their prejudices had to be done *AFTER* the embarrassing experiences and accomplished facts. They started with "acts", not with a new religion.

Further, Christianity was not a new "teaching". There is nothing in the whole record upon which to build a theory or affirmation that the apostles went out with "The Teaching of Jesus" as a stereotyped system. They were not propagating in the pagan, heathen or Jewish world new doctrines as such or a new system of truth. Explanations, which became the teaching or doctrine of the church, were reserved for those who had responded in faith to the declaration of certain fundamental *FACTS* relating to the person of Jesus Christ and these were few. The most that they did was to support and substantiate their testimony *TO HIM* from the Scriptures.

Once again: Christianity was not originally thought of as a new movement. No plans of campaign were laid. There was no policy. Organization was almost entirely absent. The very small degree of this was subsequently forced upon them by the embarrassment of the very vitality of the spiritual life. A thought-out campaign did not exist. To set up, form, launch, or bring into being, or found a new society, sect or community, was not in their minds. Outsiders put the labels on, perhaps because of the *SPIRITUAL* distinctiveness of the believers, but they

never adopted a special title for themselves. The really distinguishing characteristic was not the name of a movement, but the presence of a mystery to all the outside world. Every attempt to explain them by a label, such as Christians, The Way, Sect, just missed the point. There does not exist a formula for or an explanation of life, whether natural or divine; and if there were, it would be like trying to put the Pacific Ocean into a bottle. So much the worse for the bottle, as Jesus said about the new wine and the old wine-skins. It was this "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" which accounted for the experience, explained it in teaching, energized the action, and produced the "form" - the *ORGANIC* form at the beginning.

Here, then, we have confined ourselves to the overall, inclusive factor at the "Beginning", that is the absolute sovereign liberty, government, mastery and direction of the Spirit of the enthroned Christ in heaven. This demanded a transcending, superseding, and subjugating of all the assertions of the natural man. This is a crisis and then a progress. As we have implied, this had an effect both as to the relationship with the world and the developments within the church. The former of these two aspects will retain us in our next chapter.

Chapter Three

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

In our quest for the secrets of the power in the church "As it was in the beginning" - that is, in the years immediately subsequent to the great Pentecost - it is inevitable that we come to its relationship to the world. This inevitability is forced upon us both by its spirit and conduct and by the large place of reference to the world in the New Testament writings. The Lord Himself is recorded as having some very strong things to say about the world. John in his gospel uses the word seventy-seven times. In chapter seventeen alone it occurs fifteen times. In his letters it is used some twenty-one times. In Corinthians it is found twenty-two times, and it is referred to in almost every other letter.

Concerning the world, it is said:

1. That it is something that Christ had to overcome, and which He said that He had overcome.
2. That in its entirety it lies in the wicked one, and has a Prince.
3. That it is hostile and inimical to God, and that to be its friend is to be the enemy of God.
4. That it is something out of which Christians have been taken, and are prayed for that, although in it, they may be kept from it.
5. That it lies under condemnation and is to be destroyed.

Many more things are said about it, but we do not propose to enter into an analysis of the word itself or the difference in Greek words translated into this one word "world".

But some may perhaps quote John 3:16, over against the above: "God so loved the world...". This great Scripture indicates the real meaning of what we are going to say. There is really no contradiction. In order to understand the contrast we have to ask the question: What is this thing that is so out of favour with God and on the other hand, what is it that God so loved?

As to the first question it can be said at once that, in this sense of disfavour, "world" does not mean the framework, the sphere, the material and geographical structure. Neither does it essentially mean the people within that structure. God does not hate mankind! "World" must therefore mean something other, and we can perhaps indicate this by certain terms such as: a nature, a disposition, a mentality, a system, a constitution, a way! It is in all this that what is alien, hostile, and contrary to God is inherent.

The "world" in this respect is outlawed by God because foreign to His own nature and constitution. It is here that this whole matter of worldliness rests. This matter has suffered lamentably from over-simplification, and has resulted in many people being put into a false position.

For instance, worldliness has been made a question of where people go (theatres, cinemas, dances, etc., etc.), or how they dress and behave and talk. It has been said that to become a Christian such things must be abandoned and certain other things *MUST* take their place. Pamphlets have been written on: Should a Christian go to the theatre? - Smoke? - Drink alcoholic drink? - Use make up? and so forth.

This is to miss the point entirely and can become as legalistic as Judaism. Really, in all this, no less a point is missed than that of the new birth itself, which, if genuine - resulting in the indwelling Spirit and life of God - will answer all such questions *FROM WITHIN*.

Let us look more closely at this term "world" in the light of the Bible.

(1) The World is a Nature

If, as we have noted, the world is hostile to God, and God to it, if it is something to be "overcome", and from which the Christian must be separated, if friendship with it constitutes those concerned "enemies of God", then there *MUST* be something *VERY* evil about it, and what is more evil than Satan himself? The Bible represents Satan as having become "the *PRINCE* of this *WORLD*" and its "god" by the *CONSENT* and conquest of man, to whom the created earth was committed as a trust.

But let it be clearly understood that this change of government was no mere "official" and formal thing, so that Satan came to rule merely from an external position. He captured mind, heart, and will and inoculated man's soul with his own nature. Man's nature was changed. What is that nature?

All-inclusively it is shown to be rivalry with God, that is:

- (a) To take the place of God.
- (b) To take God's rights from Him and not let God be everything.
- (c) To be independent of God and *SELF*-sufficient, knowing better, able to do better, or to do without God.
- (d) To be possessed of power, to control, to master, to rule, to be superior; a revolt against subjection and servanthood.

This is the nature with which, in greater or lesser degree, humanity has been impregnated. The heart of this whole issue is "selfhood", rather than "Godhood". How does it work out?

- (a) It makes much more of the material and temporal than it does of the spiritual.

With God all things are viewed from the standpoint of spiritual value. That is His very nature. God is a Spirit, not impersonal, but a spiritual person. The significance of persons in the Bible, and even after, is the measure of the spiritual effect and fruit of their lives and work.

Satan will absorb and obsess with the material and temporal in order to rob of the spiritual or to squeeze it out.

- (b) It makes everything of the present and blinds to the eternal.

What we have and can get *NOW* is the main consideration. This life is everything! This is the real; the eternal is unreal to the natural man.

This is a great point on which Satan tempted Christ and offered Him the world. On this point Jesus overcame the world! In the world the *SEEN* is what matters;

the natural senses of perception and evaluation wholly govern. The standard of success is that of what can be shown.

In many other ways the nature of this world is in contrast to that of God; its standards, its point of view, its values, its aims, its thoughts, its ways, its spirit. One of the greatest features in Christian spiritual education is that of learning how altogether different are God's thoughts, standards of values and ways from our own.

(2) The World is a Prison

The keeper of that prison is Satan himself.

The Bible represents the souls of men as in captivity, in bondage, in fetters, in prison, in the power of Satan. It represents Christ as the anointed Redeemer breaking into the world to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound". He is the Stronger than the strong man keeping his house!

The escape or deliverance of a soul from the world is fraught with very intense conflict, and forever after it is a battle to keep free of its influence, its power and its down-drag.

(3) The World is a Lie

As man was at first trapped by a lie, so he remains the victim of what is false. The more a person has of this world, the greater the disillusionment at the end. Its pleasures are a deceitful stream which will fail at last. Its riches bring no deep heart satisfaction, and the soul goes out as naked as it came in.

Jesus said that to gain the whole world at the expense of the soul is no bargain. The subtlety by which man was first captured was in the fact that the *TRUTH* as to the ultimate result was not disclosed but hidden. Jesus left the people of His day in no doubt that they were blind and demonstrated it by miracles, that is by acts which only *GOD* could do.

There are degrees of blindness. There is the natural blindness which is universal, but which can be remedied by the grace and power of God. And there is the double blindness of prejudice and pride added to nature, which is fatal. Such was the blindness of the ruling religious class of Christ's time and it cost them everything of hope.

All that we have said and all that it implies can be tested by history and for Christians by experience.

"In the beginning" the church knew all this, stood in the truth of it and taught it. Moreover, the Holy Spirit made this very real. In those days a spiritual complicity with the world was disastrous. When those who had marketable goods and properties were turning them to account for the furtherance of the Gospel, there were two who took advantage of the "going" to get profit for themselves. They took hold of the commercial element of the world and linked it with the things of heaven. It is later declared to be something put into the heart by Satan. The result was disastrous for them, and the swift visitation of judgment laid down for all time the principle that commercialism in divine things is fatal.

It was because of the allowed invasion of the world into the churches that their judgment was effected, as recorded in Revelation, and in some cases the

lampstand removed. The great deception which is costing the church so much power is, that in order to influence the world, it is necessary to be one with it, to come down to its level; to employ its methods, to use its means and to remove all distinctiveness between the church and itself. The truth is that the church's power over the world is in proportion to its separation from it. The question of attraction is to be answered along the line of a perfectly joyous and satisfied church without any of the world's playthings. This, we have seen demonstrated. There is a magnetism about the joy and enjoyment of wholly committed and consecrated Christians which makes the world's methods vain.

So it was "in the beginning" despite persecution, ostracism, and much adversity. The secret of the early power and growth of the church was the greatness of the new world which had been opened in Christ, and the church's entrance thereinto. Christ *ENTIRELY* filled their bill, and they needed no plus. What it meant was the greatness of Christ and their apprehension thereof.

Their independence of the world was their power over it. The sufficiency of Christ made that independence. It intrigued the world, led to enquiry, investigation and wistfulness, even if it did provoke the prince of this world to bitter jealousy and antagonism.

The church may have to travel a long way back to recover its power and influence, but there is no alternative and the world will prove its undoing, disillusionment, and shame.

Chapter Four

CHURCHES AND WORKERS

We have laid great emphasis upon the fact that, in the beginnings, everything was under the government of the Holy Spirit who had taken over the whole purpose of God and was its custodian. As in the case of the tabernacle of old, the complete pattern was conceived in heaven to the last detail, and shown. Then Bezaleel and Aholiab were filled with the Spirit of God for all workmanship. Nothing whatever was left to the conception of man, and because eternal, spiritual, divine conceptions lay behind every fragment, God was meticulously particular.

So it was in the first phase of things in the beginning of the new Israel. Man has a great propensity for putting his hand on things, and nothing is too sacred to escape it. The great precaution taken by God when Adam began this kind of thing was: "Lest he put forth his hand..." When that was done, as in instances like Nadab and Abihu, Uzzah, Uzziah, Ananias and Sapphira, etc., the Lord showed His disapproval by swift judgment. Man's hand is always a possessive, a controlling, an arranging hand. His way is to bring things within the compass of his own mind and judgment. There is no compromise between the hands of the Holy Spirit and the hands of man, and any attempt on man's part to compromise will result in disastrous consequences sooner or later.

There is a clamant need for a deep revision of our mentality regarding what we call New Testament procedure. The starting-point will have to be at the parting of the ways between causes and effects, that is, how and why things began, and the things themselves. We begin at the wrong end, at the place where things are in existence, and we take the things as a pattern, a blueprint, a textbook, and proceed to imitate, to copy, to reproduce. Thus we resolve the New Testament into a handbook of organization. In so doing we overlook the fundamental, elemental, and vital fact that what we have in the New Testament never came that way. Whatever there is in the New Testament which is called an "order" was the normal, natural, spontaneous issue of a kind of life which had been miraculously imparted by the direct act of the same Spirit as brought about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary: "Begotten, not created". It was the growth and formation of an organism: "*Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John 1:13). This was as true of the whole as it was of the individual parts.

Let us take:

The Case of the Churches

The most general idea is that the apostles, Paul in particular, believed that they were to go and form churches all over the world, that when they entered a province, or a city, their thought was to form a local church there. We shall look in vain for any command of the Lord or intimation from the apostles that this was to be their object. What they did know to be their business was to bring Christ wherever they went. If Christ was rejected there was no church. If Christ was accepted those who accepted Him became a vessel of Christ in that place. The one conception of a church in any place is not a representation of the Christian religion, but an embodiment of Christ. Wheresoever it may be, though it be but two or three present in the content of His name, He is there. It is the presence of Christ which constitutes a church, and it is the increase of and conformity to Christ which is the growth or development of a church. In the book of the Revelation the Lord does not hesitate to threaten the removal of a candlestick if

its essential function ceases, however much of Christian form and activity may be present. The essential function and the final criterion is the presence of Christ. The presence of the Lord has *ALWAYS* been the determining factor in eternal values. It is the Holy Spirit's supreme function to bring Christ into all things and all things into Christ.

Churches, as such, are only a means, and as earthly *THINGS* they will pass with time. What is of Christ in and through the means will be gathered in a spiritual way into the great church universal which Christ will present to Himself - "a glorious church". We are not here dealing with the full organism which comes out of the life-seed - the sowing of Christ - but just with "as it was in the beginning". Of course, a challenge is involved: How did this and that come into being?

The principle which was to be extended worldwide was inherent in the choosing and sending forth by Christ of the "Seventy". They were sent to every place "where he himself would come". A local church, then, is not *IN THE FIRST PLACE* something constituted or formed according to a pattern of procedure, but by the presence of Christ in the several or more in that place. These "baptized in one Spirit into one body" are, in effect, Christ in that area, holding that ground as a testimony to His rights, and sending forth "the sweet savour of Christ in every place". Failing this, with regard to its true function the organism is dead.

Carry on the form if you will, but a "church", as such, is no more sacred in the eyes of the Lord than was the tabernacle in Shiloh, or the temple in Jerusalem, once the glory had departed, that is the presence of the Lord.

The Workers

The principle to which we have pointed above is the same in relation to all who have any place of responsibility in the work of the Lord. It is a far cry from modern methods to the beginning. The selection by popular vote, the choosing of "likely" people to hold office, the influence of title, degree, business acumen, success in the world, money, "interest in Christian work", the choice of "novices", and giving or allowing public recognition *ON SUCH GROUNDS*, is a system which has no place at the beginning. It is usually fraught with trouble sooner or later, and is a dangerous thing for those concerned.

A simple, practical issue arose early at the beginning. It was just a matter of seeing that certain widows were not overlooked as to their daily temporal needs and the righteous ministry of money available. It might be thought that any good man or men with a little business ability could attend to that, but not so at the beginning. The prescription was: "...men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom". "And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6).

The matter was carried through with scrupulous care, and the fundamental essential was "full of the Holy Spirit", so that all might see it. In this most elementary phase of procedure the imperative was *SPIRITUAL* men, recognized by all as such. The "office" did nothing to make them that. They were that before they were entrusted with the most elementary things. Evidently they had proved themselves in the church and were approved by the church before ever they were "appointed". If this was so in the case of the first elementary responsibility, how much more so would it apply to the greater responsibility of elders or overseers.

Before the apostles had finished their course, things began to change in church order. Signs of incipient ecclesiasticism as we know it today, were showing themselves. It is overlooked that when Paul wrote his last letters - to Timothy - and said that he wrote that "men might know how they ought to behave themselves in the house of God", he was writing correctively of misbehaviour. That misbehaviour related in the main to those in responsibility, the elders. Paul's corrective was the recognition that elders are not just officials, but they are essentially *SPIRITUAL* men; men of *SPIRITUAL* measure and no novices. They *ARE* elders in character, *SPIRITUAL* qualifications and gift before they have the title of Elder. The title never makes a man an Elder. If he is not that already, no title will ever make him that! As in the churches, so in their responsible men, it is the presence and measure of Christ which determines everything.

We have done no more than point to a vital principle. Vital in that it will determine the life, course and destiny of anything bearing the name of the Lord.

Chapter Five

CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH INCOGNITO

"...the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1).

In our pursuit of this enquiry into the differences between things now and as they were in the first years of Christianity let us at once make it clear that this is no idle wish to make comparisons and just leave it there. It is always a very easy and usually unprofitable thing to find and display comparisons and it is not very clever to do so.

In our quest there is one object which governs: it is to discover whether the differences represent real gain or loss.

We may find that we are led to a more than general conclusion relating to Christianity at large. The probability is that spiritual problems in the life of the individual Christian may have light thrown upon them. But we must begin with the fundamental principle and major difference. This difference is easy to see and very great indeed.

The quotation from the letter of John (alongside of which much more could be ranged) contains a categorical statement: *"the world knoweth us not"*, and it is linked with a larger, drastic, and sweeping indictment and explanation: *"because it knew him not"*.

This is a simple and plain statement of fact; the fact that both the Son of God and the church of God could be here in this world in closest touch with its people, with all the wonder and miracle of the divine purpose, and the world be in a state of complete inability, or disability to identify them - "know them not".

That does not mean that the world was unaware of their presence. Very much to the contrary! The world was far from being able to ignore them. It had to take account of them. But as to their true identity and significance, the world could give no explanation. From time to time the world, which must reduce everything to a formula, a label, a name, made an attempt to confine this inscrutability within a word or phrase or epithet. It coined a term and dubbed them "Christians", or people of "the way", or a "sect". That is the way of the world. It must reduce the infinite, the eternal, to the measure of its own mind.

But the question which is vital to us is whether this incognito position was gain or loss. We beg to earnestly affirm that it was of unspeakable gain in the case of both Christ and His church that the real nature, virtue, power and significance of their presence in this world was in the very fact that there was a secret which was beyond all natural comprehension. Much as they desired that men should come by the way which would make that secret true of them also, it was just in the knowledge that a divine miracle lay at the heart of that experience that the strength of Christ and the church lay. The mystery intrigued, baffled, defeated, angered the world or made it wistful. Flesh and blood could not reveal that mystery, only God Almighty! *"The world knoweth us not"* was no complaint, no lament of defeat and no confession of something faulty with them. They were sorry for the world, not for themselves.

Their power lay in this fundamental difference. That the time came, all too soon, when this distinction began to be surrendered in exchange for "standing" with the world, gives the force to our question: Has the church or Christianity really gained by this exchange? Christianity now resorts to every conceivable means by

which it can gain position, recognition and prestige, and in which the world can easily understand it. For its very success it must have names, titles, designations, honours, etc. Unless Christians "conform", "belong", take a name, and explain themselves, they are suspect, outsiders, and of no "standing"; no matter what their *SPIRITUAL* value may be. "Sect" has become an epithet, an expression of scorn, as in apostolic times. On this line Christianity has expanded, become big, but the question is pressing on many honest and serious minds as to whether the *INTRINSIC* value will stand comparison with that of the beginning.

Is it not impressive to see how, whenever that which had a strong, deep, rich, and effective beginning has been "accepted" by the world, especially the religious world, marks of *SPIRITUAL* loss show themselves? Of how many God-initiated ministries and instrumentalities this is true. From something of heaven containing a deep and costly spiritual history and possessing the dynamic and impact of the divine presence, with its later development as an "institution" standing well with men, with all its bigness and natural impressiveness, it has become a mere shadow of its origin, so far as depth and spiritual strength are concerned. There is now little or no "mystery" about it. It has nothing inscrutable and inexplicable in it. It can be mainly attributed to human ability.

Let us hasten to insert a protective word. We are *NOT* saying that it is a wrong thing for Christians as private persons to have *EARNED* honours, degrees, titles, or designations. We are aware of an ultra-exclusive movement which for fellowship, recognition, and participation at the Lord's Table demands a repudiation or relinquishing of all professional, academic, and other degrees. This we are definitely not countenancing. *IN THEIR REALM* these things have their place. What we are saying is, that if Christianity seeks to make these things the basis of its strength, its appeal, or its status, it has gone astray and will resultantly suffer the loss of spiritual power. "*The world knoweth us not*", and any attempt to put human importance in the place of that supernatural secret will prove disastrous. When the term "institution" begins to loom large in the Christian vocabulary, it can be taken to mean that a change has taken place which is not for the better.

The challenge to many hearts is as to whether they are prepared to be misunderstood, unacknowledged, unsung and unapplauded in this world and live only for eternal values. It has been said of the apostle Paul that "he lived with eternal values only in view". Was he right?

One apostle says: "*The world knoweth us not... it knew him not*". Another says: "*The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God*" (Romans 8:19). There will be some surprises when that happens - both ways!

Only the Spirit of sonship, and those who have Him, know the sons. God has hidden them from the world. It is painful not to be recognized, because it is contrary to our nature - as it is.

The world must see the embellishments, honours, vestments, titles, in order to take account. In the beginning it was not so. "*They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.*" There is a right way in which the world must know us, that is, know that we are here, and that is that we are something that it cannot comprehend.

Chapter Six

THE MEANING AND REALITY OF THINGS

The Book of the Revelation - a book which discloses the changed spiritual conditions in the early post-apostolic days, and perhaps, prophetically, the state at the end-time in the church - speaks of certain losses. It reproachfully uses the words: "first", "first love", "first works".

This is only another way of saying: "As it was in the beginning".

We are, in these reflections, seeking to note some of these changes and losses, with a view to creating exercise for recovery.

A further very evident change from the beginning, especially in Western Christianity, is indicated by the two words at the head of this page - meaning and reality.

Perhaps because of long tradition and familiarity, our accepted system and established order, or perhaps because of an oversimplification and superficial presentation of the involvement, we are in a time and condition when Christianity is very largely a matter of things without their meaning. "Conversion" is something less - if not other - than regeneration, a new creation. Baptism is something *DONE*, either as a bit of ritual, the requirement of association, a compliance with a demanded ordinance, an adherence to certain parts of Scripture, or - at most - the expression of a desire to follow the Lord. The "Communion service", "Lord's table", is very much in the same realm and of the same nature as baptism. Membership of the church or of *A* church, and Christian work are the expected things, and things to be maintained.

How great is the loss of the tremendous and demanding meaning of these matters.

It is not possible to read any part of the New Testament without being made aware of the costliness connected with *ANY* step in relation to Jesus as the Christ. The very contemplation of association with Him raised the most serious issues. Confession of Him and baptism involved in deep and far-reaching difficulties. Testimony to Him and just representing Him in the world produced spontaneous trouble. The further the believers and servants of Christ went, the more costly the way became. The believers, the churches, just had to stand and fight for their very lives spiritually. It is so manifestly true, even in our time, that where it is costly to stand true to the Lord - as in East Germany, Russia, etc. - there you find the most real and true kind of believers. It is known that some have deliberately chosen to return to such places and accept the suffering after having tasted or seen the spiritual poverty and unreality of Christians in what are called "free countries". It is not necessary to go behind the "Iron Curtain", or the "Bamboo Curtain", or to "heathen lands" in order to know persecution and thereby find reality. In such case millions of Christians in the West would never find it.

Utterness for the Lord *ANYWHERE* will produce spiritual conditions which will test, challenge and make for reality and bring out the real and deep meaning of everything. Utterness means willingness to let the Lord dictate every aspect of life and, when He faces with a question or test, to go through with it, whatever the cost. It means being committed to knowing the deepest and fullest meaning of every bit of our Christianity.

What does the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures mean by new birth, baptism, the Lord's table, fellowship, the church, ministry and service, etc.? Indeed, what does it mean to *HAVE* the Holy Spirit? There is such a great amount of assuming and taking for granted, which *MAY* work out in presumption - *PRE*sumption.

Most Christians accept the doctrines, the traditions and the ordinances, but, in the beginning, it was the implications, the significance, and the meaning which gave reality to everything. This reality provided a place for a wholesome fear. Violations or ignoring of vital principles can go on with impunity in our times and because the judgments of God are not prompt sudden and apparent but work slowly and almost imperceptibly on a long-term course, it is assumed - if thought about at all - that it does not matter. There *ARE* many conditions and situations, confusions and frustrations, limitations and complications, which - if we but knew it - *ARE* judgments. May we not have taken far too much for granted?

One thing is very clear: the apostles and their fellow-workers sought to make the believers take their Christianity very seriously and left them in no doubt as to serious consequences following - sooner or later - if they did not do so.

We may take up some of the matters mentioned in a more specific and fuller way, but for the moment we want to put the emphasis upon this: that the Lord has never made provision for anything less than downright reality.

Stresses are certain to be brought to bear upon our profession which will find us out, and we shall be tested on the threshing-floor. The disciples understood the implications of the Lord's teaching when they asked "Lord, are there few that be saved?"

Dr. Billy Graham has reason for asking why it is that, of all the thousands that make "decision", so few go through, and so many go back. The answer might very well be that the full implications and the deep significance of what it *MEANS* to be a Christian are not generally presented.

Chapter Seven

THE GREAT TRANSITION

Much has been written, and is still being written, about the difference in the progress of the Gospel in the first three decades of Christianity and the much longer time since. That the progress then was nothing less than phenomenal is impossible to deny. We have more than once quoted the words of Dr. A. M. Fairbairn:

"In the year 33 A.D. a few Galilean fishermen were seeking liberty of speech in Jerusalem and were hardly handled as men poor and ignorant. In the year Paul died (about 30 years later), how did the matter stand? There were churches in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Caesarea, in all Syria, Antioch, Ephesus, Galatia, Sardis, Laodicea, in all the towns on the west coast throughout lesser Asia, in Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Rome, Alexandria, in the chief cities of the islands and the mainland of Greece, and the western Roman colonies."

With all the tremendous organization, expenditure and propaganda since and particularly in the last century, there is nothing to compare with that, especially when it is observed that in those first years we do not read of any machinery, appeals, "drives", deputations, exhibitions, demonstrations and all the organization of missions and missionary efforts with which we are so familiar in our times. It is not that there is a lack of concern for evangelization or a lack of sacrifice and suffering on the part of many devoted servants of God. Whatever we may say, we must guard against belittling or undervaluing the very great outpouring of life and strength which has characterized the outreach for the salvation of souls in these past centuries. Contact with many such devoted servants of God in these spheres of service means a sound rebuke to any spirit of criticism.

But, recognizing every bit of that sacrificial devotion, there are very few who are not aware of the difference above mentioned, and masses of literature are being published on the matter. Our object, under deep exercise, is not to criticise or cast aspersions but to ask whether - if the comparison and contrast is right and true - there are any factors and features which constitute the change? Were there characteristics in the beginning which do not *GENERALLY* obtain now? Where there has been a really living and effective work to which all may point as approximating to the first days, is it because of the presence of those first factors? Let us look at one or two notable examples and see if they point backward to something in the original.

In the first place let us call to mind the amazing and heart-stirring story of the Moravian Brethren.

In their first twenty years (twenty years only, mark you) they actually sent out more missionaries than *THE WHOLE PROTESTANT CHURCH* had done in *TWO HUNDRED YEARS*. Of the closed lands entered, the sufferings gladly endured, the range covered, the lives lived and laid down, the grace of God manifested, it stirs wonder and shame to read. Someone has said that if members of the Protestant churches had gone out in corresponding numbers there would have been a force vastly in excess of the number estimated as necessary to evangelize the whole world.

What was the secret and what were the factors?

In the first place the cross had been deeply wrought into the very being of every one of those people. This had been through deep suffering. Their country was made a field of blood by massacre. They were driven from their homes. From three million they were reduced by persecution to one million population. Indeed, it sometimes appeared as if they would be entirely exterminated and their testimony extinguished.

Out of this fire of affliction there arose a company purified, with another fire burning in their bones. It was the fire of a passionate love for the Lord Jesus. The meetings of these brethren, when later possible, breathed the atmosphere of the upper room in Jerusalem when the tension was similar. Covenants were made that self in all its forms should be entirely banished: self-will, self-love, self-interest, self-seeking.

To be poor in spirit would be their quest and everyone would give himself or herself to be taught by the Holy Spirit. A prayer-watch was set up which should burn day and night, and in relays an entire twenty-four hours was occupied in seeking the Lord. Their motto was: "To seek for the Lamb the reward of His sufferings."

All this is its own argument. A deep inwrought work of the cross issued in a mighty personal love for the Lord Jesus. Personal considerations were lost and no persuasion was necessary. Is it necessary to argue or even indicate, that this was a real correspondence to those early days of Christianity?

So much for our first example. We turn to another, in which much of what we have said was taken over with other features. How often has the early story of the China Inland Mission been pointed to and how much appealed to as a great example of a work truly of God in its spiritual life and effectiveness! Books are still being published in retrospect with the object of inspiring and recovering by the example of that work. But it would be a mistake to make everything of the work, the "Mission", and overlook the spiritual background and explanations. With all his vision and passion for the evangelization of inland China, it is well known that as he went from place to place with his heart-burden, addressing gatherings of Christians, Mr. Hudson Taylor said comparatively little about China, often nothing at all. He poured out his spiritual message to bring the Lord's people to the fuller knowledge of what their union with Christ meant. The central and supreme thing in his message and with the Lord was his emphasis upon *THE UNIVERSAL EFFICACY OF PRAYER!*

Listen to him: "In the study of the divine Word I learned that, to obtain successful workers, not elaborate appeals for help, but earnest prayer to God... and the deepening of the spiritual life of the church, so that men should be unable to stay at home, were what was needed."

Were we to put the inner history of that work - the original spiritual background - into a few words, we should say that it was not by organization, advocacy, propaganda, appeals or advertisement, but through a man with a deep knowledge of God born of the Cross being deeply inwrought, with a living spiritual message for the Lord's people as to their fullest life in Him, and the practical outworking of such a life through prayer. Mr. Hudson Taylor did not rank with the outstanding Bible teachers in the sense of presenting truth in a systematized form. He was not one of the number of great Bible teachers in the generally accepted sense of that term in his generation. His was a message which immediately led to two issues. One, the relationship of the believer to the Lord and then the practical outworking of that relationship in prayer and other forms of

service; to bring the gospel to those who had no chance of receiving it except by consecrated effort to reach them.

Mr. Hudson Taylor's life turned at a given point upon a deeper realization of what oneness with the Lord really means.

In our last chapter we referred to the close connection between the convention movement, such as "Keswick" and the worldwide evangelization. In this connection we could point to the rich spiritual ministries of such servants of God as Dr. Andrew Murray and Mr. Charles Inwood, through both of whose ministries strong and fruitful evangelizing missions came into being.

In what way, then, does this link up with those first years of Christianity? The answer surely is found in a right understanding of the meaning of Pentecost.

What was Pentecost? We have lamentably failed to rightly and adequately answer that question. The cumulative and external effects have been made to obscure the deeper elements. We have interpreted Pentecost in terms of activity, signs, waves of emotion, excitability, tongues, healings, etc.

There was something that explained all the manifestations and was more than these. It was - *THE ENTHRONEMENT OF THE LORD JESUS AS ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGN, WITHOUT RESERVATION OR RIVAL OVER AND IN THE ENTIRE LIFE, IN ALL ITS INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES OF COMMITTED MEN AND WOMEN!* What had happened with the Lord Jesus Himself was made true by the Holy Spirit in the church at its birth. That exaltation to and in heaven meant that Jesus had been released. The book which we know as the Acts of the apostles could well be renamed The Lord's Release.

Up till the time of His death, Jesus had been severely limited. He Himself said so. His statement regarding this was:

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:49-50). ("Straitened" there means "under strain and stress".)

His spirit was longing for release; straining against the limitations of His present position. The incarnation in nature and purpose meant geographical and physical limitations. It meant national limitations. It meant the limitations in the men whom He had chosen; their present lack of spiritual intelligence and understanding; their inability to see the nature of the new dispensation which He had come to inaugurate; their earthboundness; their self-interest and ambition; their pride, assertiveness, and natural judgments. Then the terrible limitation of the unfulfilled Law in Israel, the reign of legalism, crushing and imprisoning the souls of those under its rest-destroying power. "O", He cried, "that the baptism (of the passion) were accomplished, so that I, and they, could be released."

That release came through death and resurrection - ascension. After the passion no more was He subject to physical, geographical, national, and natural "straightness"; He was emancipated and free. Universality was the new order, and the "earth could know the scattered fire". No longer by outward persuasion and command did He have the limited and restrained response of His men. Now by an inward dynamic and illumination they too were escaping their chains and traditional prison walls. Not fear, but courage! Not shame, but glory! Not self-defence, but readiness to suffer, even unto death for His name's sake! In one

strategic stroke He touched men "of every nation under heaven" in Jerusalem on one day. What a story follows that release! How the fire spread!

The Lord's release meant the release of the Holy Spirit and the release of the Holy Spirit effected the release of the church. Two things therefore arise for consideration and exercise. One, a new apprehension of the release through death; that is, what the Cross really means in the church's freeing; and two, what the real nature of the present position of Christ is. It is here that Christendom has fallen down, where the church in the beginning rose up. These two things will be our focus in the next chapter. It is here that, undoubtedly, there has to be a spiritual return movement if effectiveness and power are to be recovered.

Chapter Eight

THE GREAT TRANSITION (continued)

That all the elements of a great transition were present in those first years following the resurrection and ascension of the Lord and the advent of the Holy Spirit, is unmistakable.

Although those immediately concerned and in responsibility were not fully awake to the meaning of what was happening and were slow to grasp the implication of things, there is no doubt that they were conscious of being precipitated into waters strange, deep and unaccustomed. Strange things were happening, and the cumulative meaning only slowly broke upon them. True, there were *ACTS* of divine Sovereignty which could not be ignored, but their inclusive meaning only *GREW* upon them. For instance, the death of Stephen was an event, but what Stephen and his death implied only a very few seem to have recognized at the time. It took the "apprehending" of Paul by Christ, and the full purpose of his election to explain Stephen.

"The persecution which arose about Stephen" was under the sovereign government of heaven, but it seems to have been looked upon only in that light and not as a part of a *DISPENSATIONAL* plan. This, with the crisis event of Peter and Cornelius, was not seen to be related to heaven's intervention to change the base of operations, and the "headquarters" from earth to heaven. There was a clinging to Jerusalem.

Dr. Campbell Morgan has a fine paragraph on this in his "*Acts of the apostles*". It reads thus:

"The martyrdom of Stephen created a crisis in the history of the church. In reading the Acts, we find that from this point onward (chapter eight) Jerusalem is no longer the centre of interest. It almost fades from the page. This is not loss, but great gain. When Jerusalem ceases to be the centre of interest, the record does not suffer in any way, nor does it reflect upon Jerusalem. *THE LOCAL, THE TEMPORAL, THE MATERIAL, ARE OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD. THE UNIVERSAL, THE ETERNAL, THE SPIRITUAL ARE SUPREME.* It was of the very spirit of an old and past economy to fasten upon a geographical centre, and to depend upon material symbols. The church now moves out upon the great pathway of her victorious business, independent of Jerusalem. *THAT IS THE SUPREME REVELATION OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.* Not easily did they learn the lesson, for the apostles clung to Jerusalem; but the great spiritual movement, independent of Jerusalem, and the apostles, went forward, not slighting Jerusalem, nor unmindful of Jerusalem, nor careless of its past history and early contribution, but far more influenced by the vision of Jerusalem from on high, the mother of us all... *NO LONGER HAMPERED BY LOCALITIES AND TEMPORALITIES, THE SURGING SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH SWEEPED THEM ALL AWAY...* Church failure has invariably resulted from an attempt to check that spiritual movement which is independent of locality, and of all things material. Whenever the church is governed from Jerusalem, or from Rome, or from anywhere else other than heaven, it is hindered and hampered and prevented from fulfilling the great functions of its life." (Italics [emphasis] are ours.)

We have said that there was a slowness at the beginning to recognize the meaning of heavenly trends. This was probably due to two things. Firstly, when we are close up to events and happenings we only see them in themselves: the element of perspective and relatedness is obscured or blurred. The things themselves are all we see. We, in later times, are able to see how the steps and

incidents fitted into a divine pattern. Or, are we so able? Perhaps inability to so discern is the reason for so much confusion when the pattern is before us.

Then, secondly, they were thus slow because *GOD'S WAY OF TEACHING IS MORE BY EXPERIENCE THAN BY THEORY*. Often they only drew their conclusions from accomplished facts and not from reasoned theories. God did something and explained it afterwards. This is something which should be helpful to us all in events which, at the time, are "out of our depth". Heaven has the meaning and what is not explained now will subsequently be made clear.

What then was the great transition?

It was the passing of all government, with the seat of government, from earth to heaven; from the hands of man to the hands of the ascended Christ. Henceforth all reference and deference was to the exalted Son of God. Henceforth man was an instrument, a vehicle, a recipient. Man was not an originator, a projector, a source, a deviser, a planner, a master. He had to *GET* everything, be absolutely subject.

There is a very indefinite and nebulous belief in the sovereignty of God. It is a kind of fatalistic generalization which takes everything into its own hands, and "trusts God that it will turn out all right".

This is not as it was in the beginning. Prayer was made regarding every question and not until it could be said with assurance: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us", or "The Holy Spirit said..." would they move. Those are things which it is most rare for the church to say in our time. The custodianship of the Holy Spirit regarding the world-mission of the church, local and universal, was not taken for granted or assumed, but specific and definite reference was made to Him.

But, when we have pointed to the fact and general nature of the great transition, we are obliged to say something as to the great difficulty in which it involved the new dispensation. This probably was a further reason why, on the one hand, the change was so slow in being made or entered into and, on the other hand, why the Lord did not impose it on them all at once. He seems to have nursed them into it, with certain crisis precipitations. The change was so radical! The new position was indeed all so new. By way of illustration consider Israel in the wilderness. Under heavy testing, they may later have given to Egypt an illusory and sublimated adornment, when they hankered for "the fleshpots of Egypt", for the garlic and the onions, but still there *WERE* fleshpots! They took their "kneading-troughs", so there must have been dough to knead, and the frequent reference to leaven indicates tasty bread. Crushed, oppressed, and in bondage as they had been in Egypt, their support was tangible and sure. The wilderness was a new position and an extremely testing one. Life was placed upon a supernatural basis in all temporal matters. If this was true of an earthly Israel, how much more so of the heavenly!

In this new dispensation all our spiritual blessings are in heavenly places. Our city and citizenship are in heaven. Our Priest, altar, and sacrifice are in heaven. Our calling is a heavenly calling. Our entire spiritual support has to come from heaven; and so much more. Only those who are wholly committed to God know how testing this life of faith is. And yet, and yet, what a miracle it is that we go on and not under, even after many years of trials and sufferings! Our place is by no means an easy one. It is so contrary to the life of nature and the flesh! But it is carried on by the power of his resurrection.

We may add that the further we go on with the Lord - not in time merely, but in depth - the more testing our position becomes. It is impossible to take a position with God without having that position severely and perhaps repeatedly tested. It might be thought that to move with God will carry with it His defences against serious trials and adversity. In fact it works the other way, but He keeps and is faithful. Justification will be found in spiritual, heavenly and eternal values. Because many have not had the spiritual measure to stand up to a position *MENTALLY, DOCTRINALLY OR OBJECTIVELY* taken, they have reverted to an easier, and what they call a "simpler" or more "practical" way, and this explains so much weakness among Christians in our time.

Undoubtedly the Spirit of God is pressing many Christians up into reality. This is true, even amidst much activity to popularize Christianity and to eliminate the hard way of the Cross. It may be necessary for some hard blows to be struck at traditional fixity, but this would only make the end of the age correspond to the beginning, both in the Spirit's method and His object. Systems will have to collapse in order that the Person shall be all in all.

When we have said this we have touched one point at which things radically differ in organized Christianity from what they were at the beginning. The organized so often takes away the opportunity of proving God and letting *HIM* get *ALL* the glory.

Chapter Nine

THE CROSS

When we refer to the "beginning" - meaning the beginning of Christianity - we, of course, instinctively think of Pentecost, that advent of the Holy Spirit. We then proceed to think of the early record of the Holy Spirit's "Acts". For a return to or recovery of such a condition there is often expressed a desire, even a longing, and in many basic respects rightly so. We here are seeking to underline some of those fundamental factors. So, we come now to point to the one which is very vital and important to the whole of New Testament Christianity. Doctrinally this would arouse little controversy among Evangelicals, but the very acceptance of the doctrine as a matter of course may mean an inadequate recognition of its cruciality. We can only trust that as we proceed, a new recognition of the greatness and imperativeness of this truth may break or dawn upon our readers.

This great truth is that:

**The Holy Spirit has one court of appeal
from which he will on no account depart.**

The Holy Spirit has an arbiter, a judge, an umpire, to which He will unswervingly appeal for a verdict on every matter. As in a game or contest with two opposing sides the appeal of "How's that?" is made to the umpire; or as in a court of law the appeal for a decision is made to the one who is there to give judgment: so it is with the Holy Spirit. He has a fixed basis for His verdict, and His verdict is fixed as to death or life, as to rejection or acceptance. It is of supreme importance whether the Holy Spirit says "Yes" or "No". Go through the Book of the Acts and note where and when that verdict was given, one way or the other and see the result. There was a sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit then which meant everything for arrest or release by discovering whether His finger indicated "Yes" or "No".

What was the Holy Spirit's ground of arbitration, judgment and verdict? It was ever and always the Cross. The Cross combining the death and resurrection of Christ was God's almighty and categorical "No" or "Yes". The death of Christ was that eternal "No" to an entire order and source of things. The resurrection was His wonderful and glorious "Yes" to another order.

The Holy Spirit Always Appealed to the Cross

This is seen - if we have eyes - everywhere in the New Testament. Take in your hand the fact that the Cross set aside one entire humanity in Adam and gave the only place to another "Adam", a new and different humanity, and with it go through each book of the New Testament. Often, most often, you will find the Cross definitely mentioned in some way, such as "The Cross of our Lord Jesus" or "Christ crucified", etc. Sometimes it will be by implication, such as in Philippians 2:5-8. Sometimes an exhortation, a command, an admonition, an appeal, will involve the Cross for a response. The Cross runs the whole way through, and it has a very great many applications and connections. On ALL matters of life, conduct, service, movement, spirit, speech, judgment, etc., it is as though the Holy Spirit is saying: "That was crucified with Christ"; "That does not live before God"; "That belongs to a source which was 'buried with Christ'." Or, on the contrary, "That has My verdict of life and peace because it is 'risen with Christ'; it has God's 'Yes'."

At Corinth there was so much carnality that sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit's judgment was dulled or numbed. Hence the apostle - before coming to them -

made a positive resolve "to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, *AND HIM CRUCIFIED*". "Christ crucified - the wisdom of God and the power of God." "We preach Christ crucified."

This is an example of what we mean when we say that the arbitration, the judgment of the Holy Spirit is always by reference to the Cross. This can be noted in its manifold and specific connection in every other book. Violation of this position invariably resulted in confusion, complications, and frustration. Lapses there were, and sovereign acts of God saved the situation ultimately, but the record leaves these lapses as warnings for all time.

We cannot relegate the Cross to history, as an event, a bit of Christian doctrine. It is an abiding judgment-seat; the Lamb is on the throne now, and will be the final verdict of judgment. The last view is of "The Lamb in the midst of the throne", and the whole scene will be one of God's mighty and eternal "Yes!", when everything of the "No!" of God will have been actually removed.

Let us come with the Holy Spirit to the Cross with all our matters, and ask Him to register its verdict as to whether it is alive or dead unto God.

Chapter Ten

RELEASE BY ILLUMINATION

In this quest for the secrets of power and effectiveness as characteristic of things in the book of "The Acts", we are seeing that these secrets are so largely found in what happened in the apostles themselves, not in a complete system of teaching and practice or order in a Blue Book in their hands. It is still quite impossible to know exactly how they conducted their meetings. There are certain features mentioned and a number of details given as to things that happened, but so much was just spontaneous and unarranged. There is enough known to make a present-day conformity to it so revolutionary as to upset very much of our common forms, acceptance, and procedure. For instance, our present form of the "Holy Communion" or "Lord's table" bears very little resemblance to the New Testament way, and the meetings of the local church were almost entirely different from our "church services". Apart from a very few major and basic factors and features, and even those more general than specific, such as baptism and the *FACT* of the breaking of bread, there is no rigidly specified blueprint in the New Testament. It is therefore a false hope and effort to try to "form" perfect "New Testament churches". This does not mean that there are not very definite spiritual principles which, if really governing, will produce the power and effectiveness of those early times. It is to unearth these that we are giving ourselves in these considerations.

The spiritual principle to which we are now giving attention is one around which there rages the strongest controversy and opposition. That is usually true in the case of the matters of greatest importance, and we are convinced that this matter now before us is of *VERY* great importance indeed. It is what we will call:

Release by Illumination

In this connection we must begin with what happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

It is surely clear to everyone that, in spite of all the teaching and explanation given personally by Jesus to His disciples, they neither understood Him nor their Scriptures. Even when He gave two of them what must have been a masterly and matchless discourse on the key to all the Scriptures, from Moses onwards, and for the moment, "opened their mind that they might understand the Scriptures", it is evident that the "root of the matter" was not *IN* them. It was like Peter's transient illumination as to the Person of Christ, of which Jesus said that flesh and blood had not revealed it to him, but His Father, who is in heaven. The fleeting illumination did not save Peter from the most tragic and terrible thing that a man could do: deny the knowledge of Jesus with anger and vehemence. No, up to the burial of Jesus and for fifty days afterwards, their Bible was largely a closed book.

But look and listen on the day of Pentecost! Peter and the eleven are in the good of an opened Bible; the Scriptures are all alive. Look at the quotations, citations and interpretations. The Bible was all alive and was pricking men's hearts and making them cry out.

The closed book had meant bound and imprisoned men. Spiritual illumination was their release. The Lord was released by the Holy Spirit and thereby they were released men.

So far, no one will raise any objection. But we have to go further. What we have as our New Testament is the product of the continuance of that illumination. How

glad we Christians ought to be that our Christianity is not a matter of treatise and handbooks on religious subjects, discourses on the philosophy of religion or doctrine, but divine truth revealed to meet crucial situations arising in real life. Light given by the Spirit of God in the midst of battle, adversity and absolute necessity. Spiritual history hammered out on the anvil of deep experience. The New Testament is revelation given over against conditions and situations needing nothing less than sheer salvation, life or death as to destiny. It is not a volume of abstract theories but of light from heaven to deliver souls. Therefore its value is practical, not theoretical; it is vital, not static; it is consequential, not optional or capricious.

So far, so good. But now we come to the vital point.

Let us hasten to say quite categorically and emphatically that, as a divine revelation in substance and instrumentality, the Bible is closed and complete. There is no adding to it in substance and content. God will give no more Scripture any more than He will give an extra Christ. In giving His Son He has given in Him all! With the Scriptures He has given ALL in content.

But when we have said that we can be just with the New Testament as were the disciples with the Old. We may have the letter, the Book, the record, and still not have the *MEANING*. The work of the Holy Spirit was twofold in this connection. Firstly to give the all-sufficient substance and seal as final in that respect. Secondly to reveal or illuminate what is in the substance. The first reached its climax and finality when the last apostle left this earth. The second goes on. The New Testament uses two words in this matter. It speaks of "knowledge" (i.e. of Christ) and it also speaks of "full knowledge" ("of him"). One is by initial eye-opening; the other is by continuous illumination. Hence, the apostle Paul prayed for *BELIEVERS* that "*He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the (full) knowledge of him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened*" (Ephesians 1:17-18). It is by such illumination that life is maintained, growth is secured, and release is made.

The disciples on the day of Pentecost were emancipated men and a mark of their emancipation was the coming alive of the Scriptures by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But it did not end there. See Stephen's discourse. See Peter in the Cornelius episode. See Philip and the Ethiopian, and so on. This is no claim to special or extra revelation to add to the Scriptures, but it is a declaration that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His word".

In this matter hear what a highly respected and accepted servant of the Lord has to say:

"The inward kernel of truth has the same configuration as the outward shell. The mind can grasp the shell but only the Spirit of God can lay hold of the internal essence. Our great error has been that we have trusted to the shell and have believed we were sound in the faith because we were able to explain the external shape of truth as found in the letter of the Word. From this mortal error Fundamentalism is slowly dying. We have forgotten that the essence of spiritual truth cannot come to the one who knows the external shell of truth unless there is first a miracle of the Spirit within the heart." (A. W. Tozer in *The Divine Conquest*.)

Many a servant of God has had his entire life and ministry revolutionized and released - like the apostles - by the illumination of the Holy Spirit of the Word of God which had for long been in his hand and very familiar as to its language and substance. This is certainly one of the secrets of the power and effectiveness of

life and preaching "As it was at the beginning". The same Scriptures can be used by two distinctly different preachers or teachers with as distinctly different results. One with an opened heaven and anointing ministering by spiritual illumination in his own spirit, with the result that heavenly impact is registered and life imparted. The other with but a mental apprehension, studied and more or less clever, but spiritually unproductive, leaving the heart empty.

Thus far, in this particular connection, we have only stated facts. We cannot be too strong in this statement. There remain two things to be done. One is that the Lord's people, especially His servants, should realize that the gift of the Holy Spirit (which is for ALL born-again believers) is definitely for illumination, or, as the apostle says - "A spirit of... revelation"; to uncover, to interpret, and to guide into "all the truth". John makes a very definite point of this in speaking of "the anointing which ye have received". He says that "the anointing teacheth you all things". All believers should be living in the good of new eyes and new sight as an integral part of their new birth. This faculty of spiritual sight and apprehension should be increasing in strength and depth throughout the whole life. It is not an extra; it is the growth of a capacity given at new birth.

However, there may be a certain necessity, even a crisis, which results in the release of the Spirit, and the release of the disciple. It is to be recognized that the ministry of the apostles, so very largely to believers, had this spiritual illumination and understanding as its motive, which means that even true believers can be limited in this matter. Let us, however, believe in our birthright of spiritual illumination and have definite exercise about it before the Lord.