

DIVINE ORDER
- IN CHRIST

by

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Chapter One

There is a very old hymn called "Tell me the old, old story". When we have sung "Tell me the old, old story" so heartily, we are confronted with the most difficult thing that has ever been called for by angels and men. To put the story of Jesus and His love to music is to employ the whole range and compass of every note of every octave, and then to want more notes. It reaches the highest; it goes down to the deepest. It is the very range and compass of His Person and His work that show how great He is; so much greater greatness than all others. It is the universality of the Lord Jesus that is His supremacy. There is no language or tongue in all human speech into which that story cannot be interpreted, which cannot grasp something of its meaning. That has been proved, and is being proved continually - it compasses all language and all languages. Although it has taxed and over-taxed the greatest intellects of all the ages, it is enjoyed, appreciated and loved by the simplest and the most unlearned. It meets the problems and difficulties of the mature and the aged, and yet it is the delight of little children. Of all the various temperaments into which the human race is classified, there is no temperament that does not find in Him something to meet its own peculiar problems and demands. Jesus and His love are an ocean of the profoundest mysteries and treasures. He is a mine of inexhaustible wealth. In a word, it is going to take all eternity to reveal His fullness. That is what we are up against when we so easily sing: "Tell me the old, old story." It just cannot be told!

But it may be that in these chapters a little more of the light of that story will break upon our hearts. There is a phrase in the Word: "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land of far distances", and that twofold statement can quite truly, and rightly, be applied to Him. He is the King in His beauty; and He is also the Land of Far Distances.

To come into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus is to come, sooner or later, to the impasse of the incomprehensible, and we just have to say: "Lord, You are beyond me! Lord, I cannot comprehend; You are too much for me!" That, of course, on the one side, means difficulties, for it puts us into a difficult position in that we cannot trace Him, follow Him, and understand Him. But, on the other side, we would not have it otherwise; we would not have a "little" Christ whom we could comprehend and altogether understand with our little minds. No, He is beyond us altogether, and what you and I, as His people, are destined to come to if we go on with Him, is just this: that He is ever reaching farther and farther beyond us, and drawing us out beyond ourselves, beyond our resources of mind and will, yet drawing us on, and making us know that we have got to go on. We just cannot stand still; we have to go on.

Now, dear friends, the Bible rests upon one tremendous affirmation, upon a truth which it affirms in a thousand different ways, and that truth is this: that everything related to the great destiny for which man was created is bound up inseparably with the knowledge of Christ. You have two tremendous things there: the greatness of the destiny for which man was created - and the Bible has a very great deal to say about that. That destiny, that great divine purpose in creation, demands for its realization the knowledge of Jesus Christ; it is bound up with the knowledge of God's Son. Within that compass of divine purpose we have man's creation, man's redemption and salvation, man's transformation, man's glorification, and then man's eternal vocation. These are all features of the great purpose of man's creation and I repeat them: salvation, transformation, glorification, and eternal vocation and all that, rests upon the knowledge of Jesus Christ. None of it is possible without knowing Him.

We look at a little child from the day that it comes into this world, and the one thing the parents are watching for continually, and waiting for, is the sign of intelligence. For the normal development of a human life is marked by growing intelligence, that is, in the first place, the ability to identify objects. It is very simple, but very real, when, first of all, the parent is able to recognize that the child knows him or her - the child identifies. And so its development of its very life is marked by this growing intelligence, this ability to identify objects, and then to interpret and grasp their meaning. It comes so slowly, and yet it is there. To apply those recognized, identified objects to practical value, to turn them to account, to know that they mean this, and that they are meant for this or that; the application of their intelligence to practical needs or situations, these are the indications of normal development and it is along the line of growing intelligence.

If that is true in the natural, it is equally true in the spiritual. The mark of spiritual growth, the growth of the spiritual life, is this power to recognize the meaning of Christ; to identify Him in things; to interpret Him - the power to interpret Him and to explain Him; and then to apply Him to practical situations, our own and others. That is "knowing" the Lord. That is the way of spiritual growth to full manhood, to the fulfilment of the ultimate vocation. And let it be recognized at once that what is true in the natural is true in the spiritual in this sense - God created man with an object. A life has missed its way and purpose if it fulfils no vocation and if it becomes an end in itself. Vocation is the object, the end, of all life and all development. That is true in the spiritual life. The Bible reveals progress toward eternal vocation, and essentially along the line of spiritual intelligence, or the knowing of Christ.

The Pre-eminent Factor in Life

God has placed supreme importance upon this very basis. Hear His Word: *"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me"* (Jeremiah 9:23). Above all other things in which men do or may glory, God puts this, with His tremendous emphasis: Thus saith the Lord. The supreme thing with Him is to understand and to know Him.

We have read how the Lord Jesus put this matter in relation to the most vital thing, even that of eternal life, and there is no more vital thing than that. In one sense eternal life is the key to the Bible. *"And this is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ"* (John 17:3). Life eternal, with the Lord Jesus, is placed upon this basis of knowing Him. That man Paul, Paul the aged, with a long life of learning Christ, and of perhaps incomparable revelation of Jesus Christ, is now standing at the gate of eternity and crying, "...that I may know Him..." You might say that that was the cry with which Paul entered into heaven. And alongside of that, you remember, he said: *"I count all things to be loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Philippians 3:8). Not to be learning, is to stop growing, for growing, is along that line. The knowledge of Christ is the beginning of salvation; the knowledge of Christ is the whole meaning of the Christian life; the knowledge of Christ is God's motive in all discipline and training. You and I find ourselves in those hands of the "Father of our spirits", who is putting us through a hard school, and on a difficult way. And the one question which should always be in our hearts is not "Why?" as to His dealings with us in a general sense, nor any murmuring, but: "What do you want me to learn by this? What is there of Christ that I am to understand by this means?" For, I repeat, all the dealings of God with us have but this one thing in view: our education as to Christ, the knowledge of Christ. The very essence of glory will be the knowledge of Christ. Perhaps that

sounds a strange word, but it is not so difficult to understand. When at last we see in Him the answer to all our questions and our problems, and He becomes the answer to every cry of our need and heart, we see Him as He is, and He fills all the vacuum of our longing, that will be glory. It is so now in the smallest ways, is it not? If, after a very difficult time when we have been brought through deep and terrible suffering, we have our eyes open to see something of Christ that meets our need, that is glory! He becomes our glory. Glory is not just something of an external, shining radiance - it is a state of heart, it is full satisfaction, full gratification, and possession of a full explanation and understanding. That will be wonderful! So the knowledge of Christ will be the very essence of glory.

But having said all that, mark you, this is not, in the first place, a knowledge in the reason, nor the satisfying of the natural mind and intelligence. This knowledge of Christ is essentially, in the first place, spiritual knowledge. It is what we might call "life-knowledge". It means life; it brings life; it is life; we know by life. We may not yet be able to interpret it in human language, even to our own satisfaction, or be able to explain it, but we have come into a knowledge of the Lord which has brought life and which is life. "This is life ... that they may know." This kind of knowing is life-knowledge and is altogether deeper than natural intelligence. We do not say, in the first place, that now we know because the thing has been explained. We say: "I know because that meets my heart need, because something has happened in me through that. It has brought me into life." That is spiritual knowledge.

And it is by way of experience. The Lord's school of instruction, training, teaching, is not to tell us things, or to write them in a book for us to study and memorize, and then say: "We know now!" This is not a manual education at all. It is the education, the knowledge, that comes by experience, and experience simply means that something has been done *in* us by a certain process. We know in that way. We know the Lord in our constitution, and how much better it is to know Him constitutionally - that is, in our being. He has become a part of our being, and not just something explained to our minds.

That is the way in which we *learn* Christ. It is very practical, deeply practical.

Christ, the Embodiment of Heavenly Order

That is all by way of leading up to our present particular consideration. You will realize, in the light of this little that has been said, that Christ is many-sided, vari-sided. He is far too great to be comprehended, though we spent all our days trying to do so. And we can only look at Him from time to time from particular standpoints.

In the light of the situation in the world, and in the church, and churches, I have been very greatly exercised about one thing. I have put it aside as being too difficult, but I am compelled to face it. It is concerning divine order. Of all the ways in which Christ is to be known unto life and unto growth, there is one way in the Word of God which, we might be tempted to say, is supremely important - though we could say that of every way in which He is to be known. However, that one way is this: To rightly understand Christ is to see that He relates to a heavenly and eternal order of things.

That word "order" lies right at the back of everything in the Bible. Everything that the Bible has to say to us is related to an eternal order that God intended to obtain in this universe. And His key to that order, without which nothing of all His glorious purpose is possible, is Christ. The Person of Christ is the very embodiment of all the principles of a universal order. If we could comprehend,

discern, understand and know Christ, we should see that in that one universal Person are gathered up all the laws of a great heavenly order.

We are told that "in Him, through Him, by Him, and unto Him were all things created". His creative activity at work is marked by a marvellous order, and we shall say more about this as we go on. Creation, as it *comes from His hand*, as it is projected by Him, is a marvellous system of coordinated forces and objects in a wonderful relatedness and harmony. Everything is in its own place, everything is in its own time and everything has its own function. And so you could go on, but, I repeat, we will come back to it.

His redemptive work, the whole of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus has this one thing in mind: the recovery of a lost order. He stands in His Person, in His creative work, and in His redemptive work, related to this whole matter of an eternal, heavenly order.

Let me pause here with a parenthesis lest you should be as near despair as I have been in this matter.

Everything seems positively to contradict what I am saying, especially concerning the Holy Spirit; that is, that the Holy Spirit, who is the custodian of the whole purpose of God concerning His Son, is occupied with this matter pre-eminently - a heavenly order; the will of God as it is done in heaven to be done eventually on this earth in like manner. If you want to know the meaning of the Holy Spirit - and this will perhaps be a suggestion to you if you turn again to the Word - the answer is here. The Holy Spirit is meticulous about order, He will not overlook disorder. For divine order to be overlooked, violated, ignored or frustrated, is to perpetuate the loss, the suffering, the disappointment and the despair of the creation, for the hope of the creation lies in the direction of God having it according to His order. This is the matter with which the Holy Spirit is supremely concerned.

You might well interject: "Is that really true, seeing that things are as they are, everywhere and in everything?" The answer is twofold. Firstly, the fact is proved by the condition. Where the divine order has been violated, a condition arises which clearly indicates arrested maturity and a limitation of spiritual measure. It shows that what could and should have been, and what God intended, has been missed and lost. There may be the illusion - the seemingly pleasant illusion - of a false liberty and freedom to do as you *like*, but, in truth, things are less and other than God meant. The New Testament includes for our instruction for all time a document which is the classic on immaturity due to disorder. It is the First Letter to the Corinthians. The situation is summed up in a sentence: "*I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able*" (3:1-2). Then there follows the explanation of that arrested growth. Twice the apostle uses the word "for", meaning "because", "for these reasons", and the reasons? disorder. The rest of the whole letter is occupied with the disorders and the apostle's labour to correct them. It would be quite difficult to find in the New Testament a stronger proof of this fact that spiritual maturity is governed by divine order.

The second thing to include in our judgment of things is that eternity is governing this matter. While the Lord wants as much as can be of heavenly order in time, especially in the church, the churches and the individual, and there can only be limitation of Christ in each if this order is ignored, violated and disregarded (undoubtedly this explains the poor level of Christian life), it will be in eternity that *measure* will be the criterion of position and vocation. The apostle tries to

say something about this eternal difference in glory and position hereafter in chapter 15.

We may be responsible for the upsetting or contravening of God's order and seem to get away with it, but no Christian believes that what we do in this life is the end. We have always to reckon with Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. The apostle includes himself.- "we ... *all* ".

So eternity bears down upon time, and time is revealed in eternity. When God's Kingdom comes, it will be perfect order!

Now we return to our main line: God is a God of order. But there is a personal evil intelligence in this universe who is God's archenemy and, as such, is the instigator of all disorder. He is called "the god of this world" (or age) and "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (what an enlightening phrase - "children of disobedience"). The hall-mark of all satanic rule and influence is disorder. That rule is rapidly moving to its fulness and final judgment. The test of the measure of Christ is spiritual order under His government.

Important as a fuller consideration of this matter is, so as not to overload you at one time, I will break off for the time being by reiterating the four main points:

1. God is a God of order;
2. Satan is the instigator of disorder;
3. Christ in Person and work is the embodiment of the divine order;
4. The church is the elect vessel in which and through which that divine order is to be manifested and administered in the ages to come.

We might add that God's disciplinary work with us is with a view to measure and position in the ultimate order.

Chapter Two

To those who have a knowledge of the Bible it is evident that the whole of the Scriptures open up along the four lines that we have indicated; namely that

1. God is a God of order;
2. Satan is the prince of a world under divine judgment, and the nature of that judgment is confusion;
3. Christ, in Person and work, is the embodiment of divine order;
4. The church is the elect vessel in which, and through which, that divine order is to be manifested and administered in the ages to come.

The end of God is glory as against chaos, and the Bible shows - comprehensively - that glory is inseparable from order; divine order is the way to glory. The Bible should be read in that light. On the contrary, confusion always leads to shame. This, then, is *the* great issue of the Bible.

Perhaps you are wondering, or asking in your mind: What does this mean where we, simple believers, are concerned? It is all very wonderful, very great, but here we are, a little company of Christian people - how is this a message for us? Will you be patient, dear friends? This is of most vital account to you and to me. We are a part of a great whole. We are not just fragments that have shot off into space, with an independent and unrelated life. We are called by the grace and sovereign will of God into a great purpose. And what is true of the whole is true of every part. You and I are going to learn, if we learn anything about Christ, that we are a part of the disruption of the divine order, and that grace, *grace*, in its deepest and grandest interpretation, is to bring order out of our chaos, is to introduce heaven into us and us into heaven, and is to conform us to that which obtains in heaven. Oh, yes, we are going to learn in many, many different ways that what God is doing with us, and has called us into, is just: to conform us to the image of His Son. But that is not only conformity to a Person, it is conformity to a divine order. His Son is an *order* of God, the *order* of heaven.

I do not know how you read the four Gospels. Perhaps you read them as the life of Jesus here on earth, what He did and what He said - purely as a historic record. I suggest to you that you go back to those Gospels with this one thought: Here is the embodiment of another "order" of things, in constitution and in behaviour, in ways of life and in laws and principles governing the life. Here is heaven in evidence. Here is heaven in control. Here is another world embodied: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" - here is another world that has come in this Person. Read the Gospels in the light of that, and you will begin to see that He does not do and speak as the people of this world would, even the wisest of them. He is getting everything from heaven; He is getting every word from heaven; He is governed by heaven. That is the meaning of the so-oft repeated phrase: "the Kingdom of heaven" - the rule of the heavens. "The Kingdom of God" - the rule of God. As we learn Christ, so we pass more and more from this world in our inward life, and find ourselves more and more in conflict with it, and incapable of accommodating ourselves to it or being at home and happy in it. It becomes more and more a "far country" - something to which we do not belong. That is true in the consciousness of the true child of God, but growingly so. The true child of God, as he or she goes on in this inner, spiritual change of knowing Christ, will often ask the question: "What is happening to me? I used to be able to do this and that, but I cannot now. At one time I had no qualms or difficulties, but today I have a question." I think if we stayed here long

enough we would find this world an utterly impossible place to live in spiritually. We could only live in it as heaven came down to help us stay here at all. Well, that is a way of putting things - we are just "going home" all the time.

Now, to refer again to our great interpreter of these things, the man Paul who had such a full and exact knowledge of the Scriptures in the first place and, added to that, the one to whom was given that peculiar and that so great revelation of heavenly things, especially of Christ. To that man the great issue of all things was this very thing - the recovery of a lost divine order in this universe. He has stated that. Here is one fragment of that great statement: "... unto a dispensation (an order, an economy, a government, a rule) of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth" (Ephesians 1:10). Here we are faced with a tremendous statement. There is a word here which is almost an unspeakable word in our language. In the Greek it requires no less than nineteen letters! It is a compound which is translated "to sum up", but in its original meaning is this: "to bring back and centre in One, all things". To bring back, to recover, and to centre in One, all things. To gather up all that which has been lost and focus it, embody it, in Christ. First of all, the implication is that there was an order once obtaining in God's universe - a perfect order. Secondly, that that order has been lost; a great disruption has taken place in the universe. And thirdly, the re-gathering, the recovery, the restoring of that lost order in Christ. That is what Paul saw to be the significance of Christ. What a range! What an interpretation of everything! What a word! To gather up all the fragments of this shattered vessel, all the parts of this disrupted and confused universe, to repair the damage and make of it all one beautiful expression of heavenly order! That is the work of the Person of Christ in redemption. Paul uses a word so often - "to *reconcile* all things unto Himself" - to reconcile, implying that the situation is such as to find God not in a state of conciliation with it, and it not in conciliation with God. Everything has gone to pieces, and is under a terrible strain where God is concerned because things have broken down - the divine order has been shattered. This One, Jesus Christ, came into this world, in the first place embodying in His own Person that which He is going to recover, objectively. He cannot be deflected from that for a moment on any consideration, by any bribe, or by any suffering. He is going through with what He calls the Will of God. And, dear friends, while we use that phrase, sometimes glibly, sometimes seriously, we do not always recognize - if we *ever do* - that the Will of God is the expression of this perfect order of God. "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." If only we knew how things are done in heaven we would see a beautiful harmony, a complete accord, and the utter absence of any jangling, confusions, contradiction or inconsistency. That is God's will. He came for that. It could only be, as we shall see later, by the Cross, in which He had to take hold of this enormous force of disruption and confusion, and break it for ever, and produce, or reproduce that order, which we find *commencing* in the New Testament. We must leave that for the moment.

To rightly understand and know Christ is to see that He stands related to this of which we are speaking - this universal, beautiful order of God in the creation. Christ Himself is the Seed of that order. You take your seeds, or your bulbs, and if you get the bulb of the hyacinth and place it in the earth, you do not expect a cabbage to appear! Within that small organism there is the order of hyacinths. That is the nature, the life, the species, the kind of thing that is there. So it is in every organic creation. Every seed has its own life, producing after its own kind. That is Scripture, is it not? - "after its own kind". Christ is the Seed of a heavenly order. In Him is implicit that order of God: the life is in Him; the order, or the "form" is in Him; the "nature" of that is in Him. The order requires a kind of nature. A disposition, the kind of Person that He is. He is so different! We are always crying and praying to be "like Christ"! Yes, in Him is the nature which,

when it becomes universal, will be seen in a certain perfect harmony and order. He is the constitution of everything. Paul finds himself beggared for words in this very thing, and he is a master of language and languages. He speaks about Christ "filling all things", and "all things filled into Christ". You cannot grasp that? It is just this. He is going to be the constitution of everything, and that "everything" is to be an expression of this "mind of *God*", *how* things should be, *what* things should be, and how they should behave. You and I behave as we do because we have a certain constitution. We are made like that. Make the whole creation like Christ and it will behave like Christ, the nature, the constitution of a great divine system.

God is a God of order. If there is one thing that the Bible reveals about God, it is that. On the other hand, the Bible is a tremendous testimony all the way through against disorder. If you want to see what it is all about, what it means, why this and why that, it is this conflict between a divine order, and a disorder. It is like that all the way through, and that is the battle.

And I say again, before we are through it has got to come down to our own lives in a very intimate way. But take the great truth, for it is capable of having a tremendous effect upon us. We must make it our business - if this is *the* business of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the meaning of the Cross - to come under the rule of heaven, the rule of Christ, the rule of the Holy Spirit, so that all the discords and conflicts go out of our individual life and of our collective life; that we are more and more an expression of Him, whose life, character, work and ways have no inconsistencies, no contradictions and no conflicts in Himself. He is the sum of this beautiful harmony.

Do believe this, amongst other things and whatever else it means, that when that great Song about which we read in the Book of the Revelation is sung by a great multitude out of every language, every tongue and nation and kindred and people, the one thing about it will be that there is not one discordant note! It will be the most marvellous harmony. Why? Because the Centre of it all is one Person, who pervades all. It is the Lamb. His work is done; He has redeemed by His Blood out of every nation. He has brought together all the broken pieces, all the shattered plan of God, and here it is, redeemed. And the mark of His work is this: that out of all the divided peoples of this earth, divided by language, divided by colour, divided by temperament, divided in a score of different ways, He has made *one* harmonious whole, singing one song, with no discord. It is the mark of "order" that is the mark of His redemption "Babel", which means confusion, is undone!

Chapter Three

We began these messages with a fresh contemplation of the greatness of Christ; and then we went on to remind ourselves that everything which has to do with the realization of God's purpose in creating man, and this world, and its universe, is a matter of *knowing God in Christ*, which, of course, means knowing Christ. Every aspect and detail of God's will and God's way and God's end is a matter of knowing the Lord Jesus. All progress, as all life, rests upon that - knowing Him. The Christian life here is meant to be one of continuous growth and development and progress, but that only takes place as we come to know more, and still more, of the meaning of the Lord Jesus. This progress will not stop when we leave this world, and when time gives place to eternity: "Of the increase of his kingdom there will be *no end*." Stagnation is no mark of life, and life there will be ever manifesting itself in new and more wonderful fullness's and forms. Therefore, the knowledge of Christ which will, in time and eternity, be the secret of growth and progress, will continue in heaven, and it will take eternity to exhaust it. Well, that was our next thing - all growth, progress, fruitfulness, rest upon this growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

That brought us to this: Seeing He is so vast, so immense, so many-sided, we can only see Him from one standpoint at a time; we have to move round to see Him from every angle. And at this time we are just looking at the Lord Jesus from one of the many angles, or points of view, which is this particular aspect of His significance: that He, in His Person and in His work, stands related to an eternal, heavenly order. He Himself, in His wonderful, complex Person, is the very embodiment of all the principles and laws of a great heavenly order. When everything is conformed to Christ and takes its character from Him, it will be one glorious, harmonious whole, perfected into one, just one glorious unity.

So that is what we are seeking to grasp at this time: the relationship of Christ to this eternal heavenly order. We have, of course, laid our foundation in the Word of God. We have allowed that to come to us in one marvellous statement through the apostle Paul that "in the fullness of the times - *the fullness* of the times - God has determined to gather together (or, re-gather together) all things in Christ". Seeing that the very word contains that idea of re-gather, it implies, if it does not declare, that there was a glorious order at one time when everything was as God meant it to be. All the sons of God shouted for joy as they beheld the marvel of His creation and His order. That word implies that that order has been lost, and in its place there has come disorder; and it declares that the order is going to be restored in Christ. That is the great significance of the Lord Jesus from this standpoint. We repeat: He personally is the embodiment of that; and His work is related to that.

That led us to the place where the great river of revelation divides into four.

God is the God of Order

We dwelt a little while on the fact that God *is* the God of order, although it altogether defeats us, for it is so great and so full. This fact, of God being such, is revealed clearly, firstly, in His creative work; secondly, in the great representation that we have in type and symbol in the Old Testament; thirdly, in His redemptive work; fourthly, in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In all these four ways there is a wonderful revelation that God is a God of order.

Let us think for just a minute or two on the first of those - *revealed in creation*.

While, of course, we are confronted with so much in this present world and system which seems to shout disorder, derangement, discord and confusion, even in nature, there is still discernible in nature a wonderful background of an ordered system. That is something which has engaged men for their whole life, and is a marvellous universe itself of instruction and of fascination. Here is an extract from a big work by one of the most outstanding biologists. He writes thus:

"The hosts of living organisms are not random creatures. They can be classified into battalions and regiments. Neither are they isolated creatures, for every thread of life is intertwined with others in a complex web. This is one of the fundamental biological truths, the co-relationship of organisms in the web of life. No creature lives or dies to itself. There is no insulation in nature. One organism gets linked on to others, and becomes dependent upon them for the very continuance of its race. Flowers and insects are fitted together as hand in glove. When we learn something of the intricate give and take, supply and demand, action and reaction, between plants and animals, between flowers and insects, we begin to get a glimpse of a vast organization in the creation."

Well, take it for what it is worth. You will see that that gathers up into a few sentences something that is capable of tremendous enlargement. You see it everywhere. Behind this creation there is a mind that loves to have things properly ordered and related. Behind this creation there is a perfect, spiritual system. God is the God of order, and what is true in natural history is seen to be true everywhere else. God has arranged the year in seasons. He has arranged the co-operation of heaven and earth in that the heavenly bodies govern the movements of the earth, the tides; and so on.

We would not know where to stop if we were to allow ourselves to go on with this! There is one hymn in our hymn-book which begins: "The spacious firmament on high..." You notice that the conclusion of that hymn is: "It all declares a Mind Divine." Well, if we wanted to go on with this we do not need to go far away to the celestial bodies or to objects outside of ourselves. We have only to have a little intelligence about our own human bodies, and to see that the human body, in health, is a marvellous system of related, dependent, interdependent, co-operative functions, principles and elements. Anyone who really has any knowledge of the human body ought to be a great worshipper! It is a marvellous unity in diversity. It all speaks of this "hand in glove" principle, of one thing fitting into another in perfect harmony and symmetry. There is another side to that, I know, and I am going to speak about it presently.

We have done no more than stated a fact: that wherever you can trace the hand of God before the other hand comes upon it - either the hand of man or the hand of the devil - you find this beautiful harmony, this wonderful order.

We come to the Old Testament, and anyone familiar with it will not need an exhaustive proof of this great truth. In the Old Testament representations of God's mind we begin with Him bringing order out of chaos, for that is where everything begins. God, who is the God of order, reacts against this state of chaos, and His reaction issues in a remarkable and excellent order. And what is true as to God bringing order out of chaos where the earth is concerned is seen to be a principle that is working all through the Old Testament. You see it at work in a representative people - and here is the glory and the tragedy of Israel. The glory of Israel is that they were taken out of the nations to be the embodiment and the manifestation of a heavenly order on this earth, and the tragedy of Israel is that Israel has come to chaos. You see them in Egypt, and what was true in nature was true spiritually and morally of Israel in Egypt - chaos; no order; barrenness; frustration, confusion; hopelessness. Exodus is the book of

emergence from all that, and they are not a rabble, a crowd of refugees going out into the wilderness. They are ordered, and ordered by their ranks. You can trace these marks as you read carefully. No, they are not just a mixed-up crowd, a disorderly crowd, running amok to get out of Egypt. See them marching like an army, in their serried ranks and their appointed order! It is order out of chaos. See them at Sinai, when God has given His pattern for their national life. Just take a look at one of those pictures that we have of Israel assembled around the tabernacle. And then, the order of the service. Leviticus is the book of the ordering of worship. And what a marvellous system that book is of the *order* of worship! It is not just that God said this, and that, and that is to be in the way of sacrifices and offerings and feasts; you will notice that there is an amazing sequence, an ordered sequence, and that need is supplied at every point. It is a progressive, ordered development of worship, of approach to God, under a specified and particularized government. That book of Leviticus is a wonderful book! You move into the book of Numbers, and the very name of the book indicates what it is all about. This is the book of the marchings through the wilderness, and everything is numbered, tabulated and ordered. I just indicate the details and you will pick them up.

Pass over the many years until you come to the temple, and this is one of the things that almost overwhelms you! The marvellous, meticulous order about this temple - every detail, every measurement; the size of everything; the place of everything; the material of everything. And what shall we say about the "courses of the singers" and the "courses of the priesthood" all in course round the clock. Everything is prescribed for. And when the Queen of Sheba came and looked at the order of the house there was no more breath left in her! That was the impressive thing. Everything here was so quietly, harmoniously and beautifully regulated. It all speaks of a mastermind, and that was God. He gave the pattern for that, and He gave the revelation. And although that was disrupted and the people went into captivity, passing seventy years in exile, the return of the remnant, the rebuilding of the wall and of the house were again marked by this order. We have read and studied the book of Nehemiah from other standpoints and have perhaps not been impressed with the wonderful organization in it. You notice that one whole chapter is taken up with: "next unto him ... and next unto him ... " It is all arranged and ordered. It is, if you like, all organized. We can use that word in the Old Testament if we cannot in the New Testament. Nehemiah represents a master-organizer in the things of God. This is all under divine direction, and it all points to this: God is a God of order. We must be impressed with this, dear friends. It is not something to see objectively and historically. You and I have to be tremendously impressed with this and see that God is very particular about how things are done, what things are done, and *who* does these things, and also about the relationships that obtain amongst those who are employed. God is very particular, and, as we have said, this is not because He loves to have things "just so", but because He is made that way. We know quite well that real progress, real fruitfulness and real achievement demand order. If we come into a place that is all upside down, disturbed, with everything all over the place, we know that we have got a job on hand, and we begin by saying: "Well, we cannot do anything until we have got this straightened out." That is God: "We cannot get on until we have got it straightened out! We shall never get anywhere until things are put straight."

But I do not want just to be piling a lot of data upon you. It is of very vital spiritual consequence that we get it into us that God is particular, and He is not going to overlook anything, or bypass anything. He will have it so, or He will not have all that He desires. He will be patient; He will work; He will wait; He will do a lot to get it so; He may take years to get it so, but that will be our loss. If He could have it His way, He would get on with His job forthwith by having things

according to His order. Frustration, delay, unfruitfulness, are always due to this absence of God's way of doing things, or of His object in doing things, or of what He wants done, or of the way in which He wants it done. Let us never deceive ourselves in false satisfaction because God gives *some* blessing!

That is perhaps enough by way of emphasizing the fact that God is the God of order. I have only opened a window to you through which you can see a universe.

We come to the next thing: the disruption and disorder. There is a sense in which the Bible throughout is occupied with the confronting of this long drawn-out, obdurate, incorrigible disorder, and with the evil forces that are behind it. You meet it everywhere - the dealing with interfering forces is found almost everywhere in the Bible. The Bible shows the source of this disruption and disorder. And we are all too aware of this disorder. Everywhere in this universe, in this creation, there is a disrupted order, a disorder. There is a great schism everywhere. That is true, is it not? Well, taking it that you agree that it is so, the Bible shows us where it came from, the range of it, the entrance of it into this world, its development in this world, its nature and its effects, and its main cause.

This disorder, the Bible shows us, began in heaven. It was a rebellion against God; and we know how it entered into this world. The first result was that man himself became a divided creature, a centre of civil war in his own nature. Man is, by nature, no longer a unity. He is himself a clash of two worlds. The Psalmist prays: "Unite my heart" (Psalm 86:11). "Unite my *heart!*" Our hearts are divided things. Man is a division, and he is himself a conflict. And when I speak of man, I am uniting the man and the woman, for with both of them this became true in themselves individually, and then, of course, it became true of them as two. The enemy sought to divide the husband and the wife - and he did it. He struck right home to that marvellous oneness. You see, the Scripture goes out of its way to describe and emphasize the oneness: "They shall be *one flesh*... the twain shall be *one flesh*." It has so much to say about that oneness of husband and wife, but this disruptive influence and power came in and divided them. It is a real lesson! From the husband and the wife it reached to the family, and it is not long before you find the family disrupted. Cain and Abel - the one murdering the other, and destroying the family life. From the family, it reached out to embrace the whole race; and you know how the book of Genesis contains the story of racial disruption and confusion. This thing spread and it has become universal. The spirit of it is in the lower heavens: "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" - it is in the air: "the prince of the power of the air"; you can breathe it and you can sense it in this world, the antagonism, hatred and malice, and much more like that. It has come right into the human life of the individual, and into human relationships, into the nearest two. It has come right into the family - and what a problem family life is now! And what a key it is to so much more! - until the race is shot through and through with this disrupting and dislocating spirit and power. Yes, it is here. We have seen where it came from, how it started, its range, its development, its nature and its effects - to set every man's hand against his brother.

Its main cause. This is something that we must stay with for a moment. Do remember that the Bible always regards this matter as a *rebellion*, for it is the spirit of rebellion. The more we know of our own natures under stress, under trial, under pressure, the more true we know this to be. Right in our constitution there is something that rebels, and would even rebel against God and His ways, would question His wisdom and His love. It is *in* us. And the seat of this rebellion is in man himself. He is a disrupted being, not only disrupted in his relationship with God, but disrupted in his own personality. Man is a divided creature in

himself, for the spirit of rebellion came in. The word "iniquity", which is such a characteristic word of the Old Testament, has its roots in this very idea of rebellion. The real nature of this thing lies here - and perhaps we can illustrate this best by looking at the physical body, because those who know something about this - the laws of physical health and disease - tell us that it is all a matter of the environment of the living cells. This is a quotation: "It is the cell environment that is responsible for whatever disease affects the human body, either in the immediate environment of the cells, the presence of a poison, or the absence of some essential ingredient." All these millions of living cells are environed by this lymph stream, which provides what is necessary for their life. This lymph stream is their environment. If some poison gets into that stream, or if something essential to their life is lacking, then the living cells fall into disease, and the body in its whole order is upset. And sickness is only disorder, is it not? Now, I have taken this illustration, because God has written His spiritual laws in all His creation, and, I think, pre-eminently in the human body.

You see, all this disorder, and resultant sickness, all the pain and agony due to this disruption, are because man left his environment. God is man's true environment. In Him there is no darkness at all, and no poison. In Him is all that we need for our life and for our health. But man left his environment. He took himself out of his environment in God, and took his life into his own hands, to say what he would do and not do, what he would have and not have, He became a law unto himself, rebelling against God as his law and his environment. What happened? He entered into an environment of poison and of fatal lack of what is necessary to his very life. Salvation - which is the word for health - is a return into God. Hence Christ emphasized the need to "Abide in Me".

Now start again with that thought. You see, the whole Bible is about bringing man back to God, bringing him into God, and restoring him to his environment. "In Him we live and move and have our being" is the fundamental truth of the spiritual life. There is one thing I suggest to you, or hint at, which, if you grasp it, would be such a tremendous help to you. When the Lord says anything it may look on the face of it something very simple, and not at all profound and wonderful. But anything that comes from the Lord, though it be apparently very simple, contains all the vast knowledge and understanding that the Lord has, and not to take account of that "simple" thing may bring you into a vast amount of trouble. When the Lord Jesus says: "Abide in Me" it sounds so simple and so ordinary, but it contains all this history, and this great principle and truth: "If you get out of your environment you are exposed to all the poisons and all that creates spiritual disease. Abide in Me for your health's sake! for your life's sake! for the sake of everything! Abide in Me, and I in you!" Have you got that? You look again at any seemingly "little" thing that the Lord says, and if you could see you would find that you have a universe of meaning in it.

Well, the main cause of all the disorder is getting out of your rightful sphere in God, and that is what happened at the beginning. The cure, as we shall see when we come to the redemptive work, is to get back into your place, into your cover, in God. Forsake your wandering, which is outside. Leave your independence, and come in.

Now, you see, this carries with it the whole matter of the absolute, undivided, unquestioned supremacy and sovereignty of God in and through Jesus Christ. Put that another way: the absolute surrender, yieldedness, un-questioning acceptance of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as Head. That is the way of life, the way of health, the way of fruitfulness, and the way of progress. And we know so well that frustration, limitation, arrest, barrenness are because there is still unyieldedness to Him in the life. Adam took things into his own hands and

said: "I will be the lord of my life", and we are like that by nature. And I am afraid we have not got so far away from it in grace. We meet one another, and what do we meet? We meet a man and a woman who have got a mind of their own, a will of their own, and a way of their own, and will never be taught by you, or told by you, what they should do. Unteachable, stubborn, mulish, knowing best!

Let me close with this: Pain, all pain, is because of disorder. Pain is nature shouting: "There is something wrong!" It is true in the physical. You may kill pain. There are lots of things provided for killing pain, and I am afraid I am one who says: "Thank the Lord for that!" Nevertheless, no sensible person believes that the killing of pain is getting rid of the trouble. No, you may kill the pain and silence the cry, but the trouble that is there may work itself out in your death. The killing of the pain does not mean that you heal the disorder.

The world is trying to silence this cry of pain, to numb this ache, to kill it, and go on as though there is nothing wrong; but it is there. What is true in the physical is true in the spiritual. Pain in our spiritual life, in our corporate life, is the cry that there is something wrong, there is disorder somewhere, and things are not as the Lord intended them to be. There is a dislocation in the joints, there is a fracture in the fellowship, and there is a disease of sin in the Body. We cannot just take something to numb the pain, silence the cry, and go on as though it were all right. No, the thing will work itself out. We have got to stop and say: "What is it? Where is the disorder? Where are things wrong? What is it that is against God's mind?" Until we can get our hand upon that, there is no hope for clearing up the situation at all. That is the need. Remember that the Bible says that the end of the age will see disorder - rebellion - come to the full.

Chapter Four

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST IN HIS CROSS

We have been giving ourselves to a seeking to see and to grasp something of the significance of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in relation to the whole created universe. We are really gathered around one thing: that He is the key to everything and that only as He comes into His place will the creation find the explanation and answer to its existence. That has taken us out along several lines. We have seen that there was a primeval order in the creation, of which He was the centre and the sphere, as the Son eternally appointed the 'heir of all things'. There was an order expressive of God, who is the God of order. We have seen that all progress, all fruitfulness, all satisfaction, all fullness, is a matter of Jesus Christ; and that, so far as we are concerned, Christians or mankind, it is a matter of knowing Him.

We have dwelt much upon this matter of order as essential to life, to progress and to the realization of God's end. Order is a key to everything.

We went on to see something of the disruption of that order, the interference with it and the breaking in upon it. The result: disorder, and all its baneful consequences - pain in the creation, spiritual pain as well as physical pain. The Apostle has put it like this: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain" (Romans 8:22), because things are out of order. We traced the course of that disruption and dislocation, which began, apparently, somewhere outside of this present world - in heaven, where there was an uprising of a leader with a great following of angels, apparently in revolt against God's destined place and purpose for His Son as 'the heir of all things'. It was a bid for that position of equality with God, a bid to displace God's appointed One. That brought disruption in that realm, and the leader and his followers were cast out - "angels, which kept not their first estate" (Jude 6). We saw the leader of them, no doubt with his following, invading this earth and breaking in, so that the beautiful order of the creation was upset. In the first place, the order in the man; the balance, the symmetry, the beautiful harmony in the man's own life and constitution were upset and disorganized. Then immediately to the corporate - in the man and his wife, so that you can, in almost the first mention, detect something that has come into their fellowship. The one blamed the other for what had been done, and that momentous ordinance of God with so much bound up with it in His purpose - the two as one - is severed. And then of course, the family. The family has this schism in it, working out to one brother murdering the other. Jesus went right back to that and said of Satan: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). From the family to the race, and that book which records all this brings us to the whole race in confusion in every way. The order, universally, in the upper realms of this earth, in the lower heavens, the earth and its environs, what we mean by the cosmos is shot through and through with this disruption, this schism, this strain, this conflict, and is just shattered to pieces. Spiritual progress in the purpose of God is arrested and all the beauty of the Lord is marred. Well, that is where we were in our earlier chapter.

Now we come to the significance of Christ in His Cross in relation to that. The Cross of the Lord Jesus stands right at the very centre and heart of that whole cosmic disruption. The Cross is the heart of redemption, but redemption relates to the whole range of Satanic interference with the order of God. The Cross, and redemption, and salvation are far, far greater things than dealing with men's sins. They deal with sinfulness, which is much, much more than sins, and sinfulness is traced right to that one who made this assault upon God's appointment, God's economy and God's order. The Cross of the Lord Jesus stands related to that

whole realm and range of disruption and disorder from centre to circumference. The Cross is not a small thing; it is an immense thing, and it reaches as far as this thing that has happened in the universe reaches. And we must look upon the Cross and upon redemption in the light of this once existing Divine order, then its upset and disruption, and then its recovery and eternal establishment beyond any more fear of the thing happening again. So far the Cross reaches, and so far Christ crucified has His significance.

The Realms of Disruption

(1) The Cosmic Realm

The redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in the Cross follows the whole path of this mischief. It follows that very course, and it is important that you and I should recognize the order and sequence of this thing. The very first realm in which the Cross has its application is the realm of the spiritual hierarchy of evil. It begins there. On the day of our Lord's crucifixion, or death, the very heavens were affected: "Darkness was over the face of the earth"; "there was a great earthquake"; "the veil of the temple was rent, from top to bottom". Heaven is involved and is breaking in, and there is a tremendous thing happening in that realm. When we read the Gospel account, of course, we only have the events and the associated happenings, but there was a man who was given an insight into something more. This was not in the Gospels and could not at that time be revealed. He tells us that in the Cross 'He stripped off principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' (Colossians 2:15). That is where redemption begins. The very heavens (by that, I take it, the lower heavens, not God's Presence) were defiled by this revolt, and they were purged by the Cross. The disrupting forces of the order of God were met in the spiritual world by God's Son on the Cross. It is far too deep and full a matter for us to dwell upon at length, but there is a very real practical value in this, for, after all, we are not dealing in the first place with circumstances, nor conditions, nor with effects and results. We are dealing with causes. When there is a breaking in, in any realm, of those disruptive, schismatic, disordering forces, in an individual life, or in a community, or anywhere, the usual way is to find a scapegoat, to blame somebody, to begin to look at one another, to put it down to this, and that, and something else, and in so doing we are missing the point and missing the way, and we will never clear it up like that. We will only make it worse. We have got to get behind it, for there is something behind it all - ah, there is someone behind it all.

I do not know what you feel about it, but with all the desire that we may have - and it is a very real one - not to become demoniacal-minded, you are just more and more forced to realize that there is a whole system of iniquity and animosity to the things of God at work in this universe, and it seems that these forces are more and more at work. They come very near and are like a blanket upon you, especially when there is something of the Lord on hand. It just recurs like the seasons when the Lord has something more in view. It just happens. It is not coincidence, nor chance, nor imagination, for the thing is far too desperately real: it is calculated to put you right out of the fight, and strategically so, at a very, very important moment. Well, we could say much about it, but this is in a realm that is over things, that encompasses 'things', circumstances, happenings, feelings, and all that. They are secondary. It is what is around as the source of them that it is important to recognize.

Now, the Lord Jesus, in His Cross, has something to say to that realm, and you and I will never know victory over things until we know the value of the Cross and the Blood of Jesus in that ground and realm. The victory has got to be won in

that realm, or applied in that realm, before 'things' will give place. Oh, take that to heart! Remember that! For we are just being 'played with' by these evil forces, and being made to do just as they want us to do, because we have either lost, or never have had, this key to the situation: that Calvary touches the cosmic realm of evil. That is where the path of redemption begins, as that is where the trouble began.

(2) The Realm of Man

The next thing on the way, as you noted, is man. This whole thing, great and far-reaching in its range, and terrible in its nature, is focused down upon man. He is the next point of assault, to disrupt him, divide him, and make him, in himself, incapable of functioning simply because he is divided. You know that it is true, if you are divided in yourself, or amongst yourselves, you cannot do anything. You are just paralysed and cannot get anywhere. That is a fact, and the devil knows it, if you do not! And so he comes in from the outside and brings this disruption down to man himself, and man becomes a paralysed creature simply because he himself is in division. His nature is divided. The order, the beautiful order, balance and symmetry of his own personality is upset. Man was created in an order. I am not staying with the order of spirit, soul and body, but there is an order, and if that order obtains in Christ, you have a man in peace, in rest, in strength, and a man who is accounted for something. Upset that man in himself, in his own constitution, and throw him all out of gear and out of order, and where does he get? Well, that is what the Bible means by vanity. "The creation", says Paul, "was subjected to vanity" (Romans 8:20). That is, 'You shall not get through!' It is imposed and you cannot get anywhere.

Redemption by the Cross of the Lord Jesus is intended, dear friends, to come to us individually to recover and restore a harmony in ourselves. It may be a long process, but we do know that a beginning is made when new birth takes place; when we come to the Cross of the Lord Jesus as to our condition, our need as to ourselves, and that Cross becomes effective just at the beginning of the Christian life. The testimony of all that have come that way is that there is a wonderful sense of peace that comes into the heart. Peace is only another word for harmony, you know. It is not just that everything has quietened down. Oh, no! It is that now you have got into true line with the purpose for which you were made. You are on the path now. You have been all over the place, but now your feet are on the way and something of the peace of the end comes into the beginning. You are going to have many conflicts presently, but the beginning is like that. Even with a little child it is wonderful. A child does not understand all your theology and doctrine of atonement and justification, but a little child can know what it means to receive Jesus into the heart. And when that is done with a little child you at once see something. Something has happened, and it is not imagination. It is the beginning of a life re-adjusted, re-harmonized. The conflict has gone out, so far as the person is concerned. It is like that in new birth. It is the beginning of the new creation which, in its completion, will be a beautiful reproduction of a lost harmonious order.

The Christian life, from that beginning, from that starting point, is just the school in which we learn the way of harmony, the way of life. What is it? It is everything centred in, and governed by, the Lord Jesus. You see, we have these statements here. We are so familiar with them that they have almost lost their real meaning to us. "In him all things hold together." He is the integrating centre of this universe. He brings the broken parts together, and forms again. He takes hold of the chords, which are all out of tune and tunes them again into a harmony. 'In Him all things consist.' When Jesus has His place, things begin to be like that. There is a re-conciliating. And, I say, the Christian life is the school of learning to

let Jesus have His place, and when He has His place you know, as well as I do that, so far as our inner life is concerned, things are far more restful, more sure, and certainly more fruitful. It is just that, but that is a tremendous thing, because we say: 'Jesus has His place!' It sounds so elementary, but you see how comprehensive it is. He is the centre of a harmonized universe, and when He has His place, He begins to harmonize the inner life. And the more place He has, the more unified we are, and the more at peace we are. We know quite well how true it is in the opposite: that when He is not getting His place in everything, everything is under a strain.

For the individual, and His significance there as the unifying of the heart - one heart, not a divided heart - it is a deep work, a great work, and perhaps it is a long work, but that is the business of life: the unifying of everything in Christ. That is, Christ becoming the single Factor who makes of everything a single factor: 'For to me to live is Christ,' a single factor unifying the whole life. Satan is not going to leave that alone. He is going, by every possible means, to assail it, to interfere with it if he can. But, you see, he cannot, for he just cannot destroy Christ. He has been destroyed by Christ! And the work of the Cross of our Lord Jesus is the ground upon which we stand, and must stand, against all that interfering work of the evil forces to bring us again into inward confusion and uncertainty. Satan is trying it all the time. Stand your ground on the Cross! Stand your ground under the Blood when he tries to rob you of that quiet assurance that all is well, because of what the Lord Jesus has done in His Cross.

(3) The Marriage Realm

You move from the personal into the corporate life. This is the pathway of the evil forces, and this is the pathway of the Cross. Yes, into this most sacred relationship which was the true ordinance of God at the beginning - husband and wife. Is it necessary for me to say to young people who are contemplating that union: 'Be sure that it is in Christ! Be sure that it is in Christ to begin with!' There is no guarantee or even hope for all that it means in the purpose of God unless it is in Christ. And there are tremendous things bound up with that relationship in Christ. But, if it has taken place, this is one of the sacred things that the evil forces and the evil one will never cease to assail. You, perhaps, have not realized the tremendous damage that the devil can do when he can separate two in that relationship. It is a focal point of his constant attack to divide there. That relationship is a real battleground through life, for there is so much for the Lord in it. If it has in any way been interfered with, how are you going to put it right? Not by mere human attempts. You have got to get back into Christ, for it is only getting back on to the ground of Christ that will put that right. It may be that the man is pulling in one direction and the woman in another. There is no real togetherness. One has one mind, and the other has another: one will, and another; one interest, and another; one like, and another. And you know it is weakening, it is frustrating and it is desolating. It is only when the two get on to the ground of Christ crucified that that thing can be dealt with and put right. Every one has got to let go their natural ground and take the ground of Christ crucified as to themselves.

But, dear friends, the Word of God makes it perfectly clear to us that, in the beginning, that ordinance of God, that relationship, was a representation of something far greater. This, in its testimony, is a Church matter. 'I speak of Christ and the Church', says the Apostle in speaking of that relationship. The real principle in the principle of 'corporate life' anywhere, anyhow, in Christ - maybe the two, the three, the local company, or the larger company of the Lord's people. The principle is one principle. The enemy will stand at nothing to get in between, to divide. And the only - but the sure - means of preserving that unity

is the Cross of the Lord Jesus at work in an inward way in us all. That is a tremendous thing! But it will do it. If only that Cross becomes really a subjective reality in all concerned, that is the end of all divisions.

(4) The Realm of the Church

We can easily see, without dwelling upon it, that this extends, beyond the individual, beyond the two and three, beyond the little group and company, to the Church universal. We can see that, eventually, it will reach the whole inhabited world, when Christ has His place. 'All the great multitude, out of every diversity of nationality, and tongue, and clime, and kindred' will be on the ground of the Lamb slain, the Cross of the Lord Jesus. They will be 'singing one song' in harmony. The high notes, the low notes, and all the notes between will be ascribing worth to the Lamb. Glorious chorus! Redemption follows that course. The Cross of the Lord Jesus relates to that one thing, to an end where all is reunited in Christ.

We have placed John 17 as the foundation of this message, and you know the great, perhaps the highest, note of that chapter is in a little clause: 'that they may be perfected into one'. Perfected into one! That is the end of His prayer, the end of His travail, the end of His redeeming work - perfected into one! Then the great arch-adversary of the Divine order can do no more. His work is finished, his power is destroyed, for the Cross stands victorious over this long history of disruption.

I see no hope for unity anywhere other than in the Cross of the Lord Jesus: Christ crucified, put in His place. And although the battle goes on and the enemy is always trying to make a show of disruption and disorder, if the Cross has really done a work in human hearts, there is a basic something that will triumph over all that.

Chapter Five

THE CROSS AND THE DISRUPTIVE POWER OF SIN

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14).

"Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32).

In the Scriptures cited above we have the Lord Jesus three times speaking of being "lifted up". Of course, it means on the Cross. In connection with that 'lifting up' He uses two phrases: "Whosoever" and "All men". The issue of the Cross, then, is said to be a unifying of humanity. When we think of the Cross, we usually, and almost entirely, think of sin. This is right, if we understand what is meant by sin. There are sins, and there is sin. The Cross is His 'bearing of our sins in His body on the tree'. The Cross is also the judgment upon, and destruction of, the effect of sin.

In the Bible sin is regarded as spiritual disease. There the greatest illustration of spiritual disease is leprosy, and the effect of leprosy is to disintegrate the body, to break down its unity. It does that first in the individual, and then in the society; for the leper must go outside of his family and away from other people. This breaking up principle and power of sin is also represented in another type, which has an embargo upon it when the Cross (in figure) is present, and that is leaven. The effect of leaven is to break up, disintegrate, and inflate.

Jesus says that the Cross, and the 'lifting up' will be against that effect of sin. Sin separates between man and God; between man and a heavenly society; between the "natural man" and the spiritual man in the Church. (See 1 Corinthians.) It was because of that divisive effect of sin that the Apostle said that he would know nothing among them but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified".

The only cure for divisions in any realm is the power of the Cross. We have - in these messages - been seeing the course of disruption, from Satan's jealousy of God's Son in the "before the world was" (John 17:5). and the resultant schism there, to the earth in its chaos as possibly Satan's earlier "princedom" ("the prince of this world"), then to - and in the Garden - man and wife; then to the family, the tribe, and the whole race.

That long and terrible history was destined by Divine Counsels to be met and destroyed, and "reconciliation", reunification, reintegration, to be accomplished in the same dimensions as the evil. The instigator and his work were to be destroyed and cast out of God's domain of light, life, and love, for ever. The Person to do it, and rightly constituted for it, was God's Son, and the instrument for its accomplishment was His Cross. Every aspect of the cosmic universe was focused in that Cross. The Cross is a factual position, basic, fundamental, final as to this schismatic power of sin. Then it is a progressive principle to be applied and made effective in the Church. The final and consummate vision of the Cross is a great multitude out of every tribe and nation singing in unison or harmony the Song of the Lamb.

This is all a very great test and challenge as to the place and work of the Cross in ourselves personally; in our relationships; in the local assemblies, and in the Church universally. The heart of the disrupted universe, and the heart of all disrupted situations contains an 'I'. It commenced there when "Lucifer" said in his heart, "I will be equal with the Most High". The principle of self-hood, in some form of 'grasping' and not letting go to God, is accountable for all schisms which affect Divine interests and glory. (See Philippians 2:9 onwards.)

So, coming back to our main subject, the Divine order is in the Person of God's Son. It is secured by His Cross. It is increased by the principle of the Cross at work in believers. It is the real meaning of 'knowing Christ', and it is consummated when the Lamb in the throne is the adored Centre of a new Creation.

Let us not just view all this objectively, but continually challenge all motives and situations by it.

The Application of the Message to Local Assemblies

While the disruptive work of the enemy of Christ is extended to the whole Church - the true Church - to effect its disunity by every possible means because the true Church - the Elect of God - is destined in the eternal counsels to occupy the position of administration of the 'new heaven and new earth', it is of particular interest and concern to the enemy to disrupt and discredit all local representations of Christ and His Body. This he will do - and does - by bringing about wrong order. Order - Divine order - is absolutely indispensable to growth, strength, and effectiveness. This fact is greatly overlooked and therefore much advantage is given to the disruptive forces. Because the Divine order is heavenly and spiritual, only the Holy Spirit, sent down from heaven, knows what it is and can administer and constitute it. Immediately man puts his hand upon the Church local to organize, form, arrange, and control it, disorder - or un-order - will set in, with the results of confusion, limitation, artificiality, make-believe, and - in time - an end in itself. It can be worse - even shame and disgrace.

Therefore, to have the Divine order it is basically essential - as in the beginning - that the Holy Spirit shall be in complete control in terms of the absolute headship and lordship of Christ. This means that everything shall be meticulously referred and deferred to the Holy Spirit. This is the principle embodied in fasting with prayer. We say the principle, because there is no virtue in fasting without its meaning. To some men it might be costly to go without a meal or two; to others meals are not of such account, indeed, they feel better without a few. The principle of fasting (not only or merely in going without food for a day) is the refraining from what is of man in any way to give the Lord a full way through occupation with Him, which is the function of prayer. The Lord does not want us to go on 'hunger strike' to get what we want, but to go on self-strength strike to let Him have what He wants. It was out of this 'prayer with fasting' that the Holy Spirit instigated the Divine order at the beginning. (Acts 13, etc.) Note: the appointments were made firstly through abandoned prayer, then by Holy Spirit direction, then in the midst of the (local) Church, and evidently by the Church's unity. Who will ever estimate the values which issued from that microcosm of the heavenly order? The most impressive thing, and the most significant, is that the local emerged into the universal. Souls saved, companies born, and saints fed in far-reaching ministry, and all-time values. Man's arrangements and appointments do not work out in that way!

Every assembly ought to be a vessel of light and food for all the Lord's people, as well as of evangelism to the unsaved.

The law of order as governing development, growth, strength, effectiveness, and reproduction is written large by God in all organic nature, and not least in the human body.

Order is the spontaneous outworking of life. It proves that life is unimpeded, unobstructed, and working normally. What is true in nature is equally true in the spiritual organism - the Church. It is when there is an invasion of something contrary to "the law of the Spirit of life", from selfhood or the world, that the life is obstructed and there is a loss of power, effectiveness, and productiveness. The Bible calls this "the Anointing". Every vessel, every ministry, every "office", every position, every function in the local Church should manifestly be under the anointing. It should be evident to all that that man in that position, doing what he is doing, is unmistakably there and functioning under the anointing; that God put him in that position, and therefore life flows through him and his function.

When we have said this (and we could add very much more concerning Divine order in the local assembly), we are brought back to an all-inclusive and comprehensive work and meaning of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit: it is to reveal Christ. We have said that Christ - the Son of God - is the full embodiment of the heavenly order. By the Anointing He expressed that order. We need to get right away from our man-crystallized systems of Christianity to a new Holy Spirit revealed apprehension of Christ. If the Holy Spirit is really governing He will organically constitute all things according to Christ, and the Church and churches will not be institutions, organizations, or even 'churches', but representations and expressions of Christ.