

"LET THE HOUSE BE BUILDED"

by

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*From the original, unabridged writings of T. Austin-Sparks
from the 1964 magazine "A Witness and a Testimony".
Based on spoken messages given in May 1957.*

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Chapter One

THE ETERNAL CONCEPTION AND DECISION

Reading: Ezra 6.

Christianity has many aspects and Christian people are occupied with those various aspects; such as evangelism, teaching, building up of believers, or contending for the faith. There are movements entirely devoted to the study of prophetic matters related to the coming again of Christ, and so on. All these are right. But they can, and often do, become things in themselves and, while being so good and right, have the effect of dividing Christians into sections, circling round some interpretation or some teaching or some specific object. The inclusive and supreme object of God, in and through and over all, is thereby very often lost sight of.

It is the purpose of these pages to seek to bring that object more definitely into view. Our concern is with God's inclusive object and purpose. I am sure you will agree that the value of any one aspect or side of teaching or work will be governed, very largely, by its relationship to the whole purpose of God. The value will be more immediate if that whole purpose is seen, and kept all the time in view. God does not commit Himself wholly or exclusively to any one part of His purpose; He only commits Himself wholly to the *all* of His intention. If we desire to find God committing Himself, it becomes very necessary for us to know what are the conditions and ground for His committal.

The inclusive object to which we refer is inherent in the few simple words which we have taken for our general title, from the sixth chapter of the book of Ezra: "Let the house be builded" (Ezra 6:3). That is God's all-inclusive object. You notice that Ezra traced this decree back through and beyond the instrument, the ruler who made it. He traced it back to God. He recognized that this decree, while made by an earthly ruler, originated with God (verse 22). He said: 'God put it into the heart of the king.' (7:27) This came from God. And, having shown that it originated with God, in the rest of the story he shows how God, in sovereign ways, committed Himself to it. God instigated this; God supported this; and, in spite of numerous and great difficulties, God consummated this.

If that was true then, we want to discover how it can be true in our time. I believe that all the people of God, all true Christians, are deeply desirous knowing, in our time, what it is that *God* has instigated, what it is that *God* takes upon Himself to support and see through, what it is that, in spite of everything - a great, vast everything - God will finish. We want to discover how God will commit Himself.

The Eternity of God

That brings us to a vital and fundamental principle of Biblical interpretation. It is a thing that everybody who handles the Word of God ought to recognize, and when we take up our Bibles it ought always to be present. It is simply the *eternity* of God. That bare statement perhaps does not convey very much to you at first. But the great fact is that there is no time with God. All 'time', as it is with us, is 'present' with God; with Him there is no past, present, future. He is the Eternal God - "from eternity to eternity Thou art God" (Psalm 90:2). God may accommodate Himself to the time-periods of men and this earth, but He Himself dwells in Eternity: His thoughts are eternal thoughts; His purpose is an eternal purpose. The architect has the whole plan before him; the builder only has the day-to-day part or parts. Those who only see the parts may be confused; they

may not understand; they may even begin to take the part for the whole. A writer of one of the New Testament documents introduced his thesis in these words: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets... in diverse manners..." (Hebrews 1:1). God did speak in time, at different times, in different manners and different portions; but, with God, the whole, from eternity, was present, and every part that came from Him had the whole in it.

We must ever remember that when we are handling the Bible; otherwise we shall "wrongly divide" the Word of Truth. The full design of God governs every part, as far as He is concerned. God's mind does not grow. There is no progress with God; He is full and complete and final at all times. God has brought His thoughts into time by means of models and figures, but they are only models and figures of spiritual and eternal realities. And the principle is this, that whatever comes from God, at any *time* from our standpoint, from this world's standpoint - whatever comes from God, however partial it may seem to be, has in it the eternal and complete thought of God. It contains within itself the whole of the spiritual mind of God. We have to look *through* the immediate form of presentation, to discover the spiritual and eternal thought that lies there.

This house - "Let the *house* be builded" - is only an earthly, temporary, limited representation of the vast eternal, spiritual thought of God. It is but a poor representation, and it will pass; but God's thought will never pass. What lies behind it will have no end: it has come out of Eternity; it will go on to Eternity. And the whole Bible is just a manifold expression of this principle. From beginning to end, in its numerous forms of presentation and representation, in its types, symbols and figures, the whole Bible is one comprehensive and many-sided expression of this one idea, that lies here inherent in this word 'House'.

God Coming Out From Eternity

Let us get behind the figures, behind the representation, to the great spiritual truth and reality. Here it is. Out from eternity, out from unknowableness, out from incomprehensibility, out from inaccessibility, God resolved to presence Himself in a special, unique creation, a spiritual organism, of His own devising; in something which, amongst many other titles and designations, is called in the Scriptures a *house*. God determined to come out, from all that vast unknowable, inaccessible, eternal realm and presence Himself, make Himself known, make Himself accessible, in a 'house' or dwelling-place. That is the truth that is running all the way through the Bible, from beginning to end; that is the thing that is governing everything, which we shall see as we proceed.

But as we take hold of that great truth, and move with it through the Bible, we begin to make a discovery about it. We begin to find that, while it is certainly a wonderful idea, an amazing thought, it is also something much more than just a thought and an idea. We find, in fact, that it involves the very heart of God - not only His mind, but His heart; it is something greatly cherished by God; something with which God's greatest interests are bound up. Far from being something objective to God, it turns out (if I may put it like that) to be a very part of Himself - of His thought, of His will, of His very heart.

One of the most staggering statements in the Bible is surely this: "...The church of God which He purchased with His own Blood" (Acts 20:28). God purchased this that is called 'the Church' with His own Blood. That will defeat and defy every attempt at fathoming and comprehension. Blood is the very vitality of any organism. This 'thing' (forgive the term for the moment) has the very life of God bound up with it. God has given His life for it. That is something more than a

matter of objective interest. The very heart of God is in this - His own life - Himself.

God Present With Man

What is this thought, then, this thing so near to the heart of God, with which all His interests are bound up? It is *God present amongst men*: God related to an organism, as the Inhabitant, the Occupier, the Indweller of that organism. The simple, plain meaning of a 'house' is, surely, something to be dwelt in, to be lived in; it has no meaning unless it is inhabited. God's thought is to be *there*, present, indwelling with the object of making Himself known and understood, and with the object of having blessed fellowship with that which comprises the 'house'.

I have said that the Bible contains the history of that thought, that eternal and Divine concept through the ages. It begins with a very simple, primal expression of the thought: the man and the woman in the garden, and God present, walking in the garden, talking, communing, making His thoughts and intentions known. It is a picture of happy fellowship between God and man, man and God. Man is shown in relationship with God, in terms of friendship (if I may use that word), and on a basis of commission to be God's regent here for the development and fulfilment of His purposes. Everything speaks of peace and order and beauty, and all that the human heart longs for. God has created for Himself a 'house', and is in it, and is walking in it, and talking in it. It is there in this simple first representation.

From that point, the Divine intention has a long and chequered history. Remember that all the actions of God are related to that one 'thing', and all the reactions in history, recorded in the Bible, are against that thing - to drive God out, to exclude God, to bring about conditions in which God cannot be present, to which He cannot commit Himself. It focuses upon this one eternal desire of the heart of God.

God's Intention Realized in Christ Personal and Christ Corporate

But where does it end? Yes, it is a long and chequered history, but, in the end, the intention is realized. And it is realized in two ways: firstly, it is realized in God Himself, as incarnate in His Son. We have not recognized the supreme significance of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, until we have recognized that in Him this eternal conception finds its realization; He is Emmanuel - "God with us"! God has reached His object. He Himself has made for Himself an abode. "God was *in* Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). In that first and fundamental way God reaches His end: and so we discover that the House of God is not an 'it' - it is a 'Him'; it is a Person. And then He proceeds from the One to the many, from the individual to the corporate; and an elect Body is brought into view, in terms of a dwelling-place for God. The end of the Bible is again in symbolism as much as the beginning was - a City and a Garden - and we hear the music of these words: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be... their God" (Revelation 21:3). That is where the Bible ends. History is consummated.

I have said that this divine intention explains the Bible from every angle; that all the action and all the reaction are centred in this one thing, that God may have a place for Himself where He may dwell, in these terms of fellowship and peace. There is, in fact, nothing in the Bible that is not related to this all-governing purpose and thought of God. Here is the object of the Father's concern and of God's jealousy. If God was jealous over a temple in Jerusalem, or over Jerusalem or Zion, as the prophets so strongly said, do you think that His jealousy was

exhausted in such an earthly, temporary representation? No, it was because of *the something represented* that God was jealous.

What is the House of God?

What then, is the House of God? The question is raised by God Himself, through His servant Isaiah: "Thus saith Jehovah, 'The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: what manner of house will ye build unto Me, and what place shall be My rest? For all these things hath Mine hand made...'" (Isaiah 66:1-2 RSV) You remember how Stephen, in that magnificent message which cost him his life - so significant in this very connection - quoted these words from Isaiah. It was almost the culmination of that great discourse; it all worked up, headed up to this. He says: "Solomon built himself a house... But... but... what manner of house will ye build Me, saith the Lord?" (Acts 7:47-49) "The Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him" (2 Chronicles 2:6)

(1) The Infinite Greatness of the House

What manner of house? There are some things there to take note of. Firstly, it is an intimation of the infinite, infinite greatness of God requiring something infinitely great. No magnificent temple, whether of Solomon or of any other builder, can answer to this demand. It requires something infinitely great to show forth the greatness of God. The apostle Paul, more than anyone else in the Bible, saw the meaning of this House; and, in spite of the wonderful richness, comprehensiveness and flexibility of the Greek tongue, he exhausted all the language at his command in trying to speak about it. With all his knowledge of words and language, Paul was hard put to it to find words in which to express the reality of this House - the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, and so on. He wrestles with human language, but it all fails to express how great this is.

But note - and here is the wonderful thing, where we are getting very near to it, or it is getting very near to us - there are some things that the apostle Paul does make clear as defining the nature and purpose of this house.

(2) The Place of the "Knowledge-Surpassing Love"

Firstly, that it is that in which the "knowledge-surpassing *love*" of God is manifested (Ephesians 3:19). God conceived this objective order, in order to demonstrate in it something of the knowledge-surpassing love of His heart. And then Paul speaks of *grace* - the "riches of His grace" (1:7, 2:7), the "glory of His grace" (1:6) and he brings that all into relationship with this House, that "in the ages to come" (2:7) in that House, Body (call it what you will), there should be displayed to a wondering universe the infinite grace of God. But Paul does not stop there: he passes to *wisdom* (3:10) The infinite wisdom of God is to be shown to 'principalities and powers' - in this House! It requires a big House to comprehend the greatness of His love, and the greatness of His grace, and the greatness of His wisdom - God present in such terms of Self-manifestation!

Man's Misapprehension

But there is another thing implied here. It is the implied misapprehension of man. When it is a matter of 'big ideas', wonderful conceptions, man has a way, as we know, of 'catching on' and taking hold of them. Man has got hold of this idea of a 'house for God', a 'dwelling for God', and has given it a twist and brought into it a false interpretation. Man has tried to capture God and put Him into a house of man's own making. By so doing, he has tried to limit God, confine God, possess

God, make God exclusive to some particular 'house' made by man - a building or an institution on earth. This inveterate propensity of man to make God his property, and the property of his particular kind of house, leads to the uprise of a terrible exclusivism: saying, in effect, that, if you do not belong here, go this way, then you are outside the pale. It is the effect of an idea taken hold of, but misapplied - a false interpretation.

That was Israel's tragic blunder, against which the prophets raged and stormed. It was that into which Jesus came. Like new wine in old wineskins, His coming burst the whole thing; but it cost Him His life. They had made God's house an exclusive thing, their own - they 'possessed' God. That was their blunder. And, as Jesus was walking away into the eternal, spiritual reality, He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38) - *your house, your house!* That is an awful indictment - *your house!*

Christ the Corrective

(1) Personally

We must take this all very seriously, because, from one point of view, it was this misapprehension, this false interpretation, this caricature, that Jesus came to correct. He did so in two ways. As we have pointed out, He corrected it, firstly, in His own Person. Do you want to see the House of God, what it is? - look at Him! Secondly, He did it in His teaching. The gospel by John, if we did but recognize it, stands, in the whole Biblical purpose, to show how Jesus supplants and transcends all earthly and material representations. It makes perfectly clear that He supplants and takes the place of the temple in Jerusalem. He supplanted and took the place of the priesthood, Himself became the High Priest and offered Himself a sacrifice acceptable to God, thus not only fulfilling all types, but showing that until Christ offered Himself God had never been satisfied. He supplanted and transcended all the Jewish feasts: you notice how in John's gospel the feasts of the Jews are constantly referred to, and Jesus figures in them, over against them, in contrast.

Jesus takes the place of the manna in the wilderness: He is the 'bread of God come down from Heaven' (John 6:33). Jesus takes the place of the water from the smitten rock and says: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." (John 4:14). "He that believeth on Me, out of Him shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). He takes the place of the lights in the temple, and says: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He takes the place of all the old shepherds of Israel, and says: "I am the good Shepherd." (John 10:11, 14). He takes the place of Israel, and builds a new flock out of His own blood: "I lay down My life for the sheep." (verse 15). Jesus is the answer to God's eternal quest.

(2) Corporately

But Jesus, as the New Testament goes on to show, does not stand alone. Jesus in corporate, organic expression is the House of God. Where and what is the House of God? It is where there is spiritual, organic, vital union with Christ; no more, no less. Says Paul: "In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body." (1 Corinthians 12:13). Jesus fulfils all the functions and expresses all the features of God's presence - God's presence in the midst of men.

This is a statement, but it is a challenge. How great is His House - but how spiritually definite is His House! It is built upon *the love of God*. The very object and purpose of this House is for the expression of the love of God. And if that

love of God is not present, or is contradicted, the House ceases to be what God intended it to be. It is the explanation of why Israel, who were once called 'God's House' as a nation, were set aside. Here is the infinite love of God, the infinite grace of God, brought into the world in the Person of His Son: and what does He meet? Infinite hate! Love cast out! Very well, then - "Your house is left unto you desolate".

All this doctrine and theology - even about justification, not by works but by faith, and so on - can be so cold, after all; *it* can become hard, legalistic, 'righteous'. But remember that that is all there in the Word of God in order to magnify the *grace* of God! "Not of works..." but the grace of God. The House of God exists on the basis that men and women have discovered that their deepest and most terrible need is for the grace of God, and they have come into the knowledge of that grace. The one word uppermost in their vocabulary is the word 'grace' - it is the most wonderful word in the language of earth and Heaven. Grace, grace, grace! It is that which constitutes the House of God. If you and I are living in the meaning of that wonderful word 'grace', we shall know God very near to us. God 'beholdeth the proud afar off', because the proud have no sense of their need of grace. Pride is an abomination to God, simply because it is such a contradiction of the grace of God. "To *this* man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). That is the atmosphere of the House of God.

And so, you see, God's House is not a 'thing', it is not a 'place' - it is not anything that man makes; it is something spiritual. On what ground does it rest? It rests on the ground of the Cross. God's House in the wilderness - the Tabernacle - came after the Altar, and stood as the background to the Altar. In the new dispensation, the Church is the background to the Cross of Christ, for it only comes by the Cross. What does the Cross do? It sets man aside, and makes room for God; it puts man out, that God may be all and in all. God's intention in the Cross is to make possible the realization of His eternal thought to be present, to be *there*. Where the Cross is most deeply wrought into the life of a people, *there*, most fully, you will meet the Lord. You will not meet Him in uncrucified men and women; in the presence of the flesh, God stands back.

The Need for Christ-Consciousness

In closing, we will ask one more question. What is the dominant necessity? The answer is twofold. The dominant necessity for the realization of God's desire - the bringing in of this House, in its beauty, in its love, in its grace, in its fellowship, in its peace, in its order, in its Divine manifestation - is a Christ-consciousness. Perhaps that does not convey much as it is stated. But what you and I need perhaps more than anything else, is more of this Christ-consciousness. Are we not ever and always rebuked when we hear Paul say, "the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that One died for all, therefore all died... that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him... wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh..." (2 Corinthians 5:14-16)? Are we not always rebuked by that? Do we not know one another so much after the flesh? Instead of laying hold on whatever there may be, even remotely, of Christ, in one another and making the most of that, we do the other thing: we make the most of one another's faults and weaknesses and un-Christ-likeness - and there is plenty of it, God knows!

But oh, for this Christ-consciousness - that we might give ourselves more to this laying hold of what there is of Christ, however small, and making the most of that. The House would be built, God would find His House and commit Himself if we would do that. God help us! And Christ-consciousness means House-

consciousness, fellowship-consciousness, relatedness-consciousness, that we are members one of another, so that the hand cannot say to the foot, "I do not need you. I can do without you". It is this corporate consciousness that is so needed today, to destroy all that is disintegrating and divisive

God grant that something of the impact of this may come upon our hearts, and lift us out of our all-too-small conceptions of the House of God. May it govern our attitudes in relation to all - *all* who rest upon the love of God, *all* rest upon the grace of God, *all* who have come to see and to acknowledge that it is only by the wisdom of God, in solving all the human problems, their own and others, that God will at last find what He is seeking - a place in which to dwell.

Chapter Two

THE CONTINUOUS CONTROVERSY AND CONFLICT

It is a matter of very simple evidence and observation that the first three chapters of the Bible have not been passed before all the elements of conflict and controversy are met with. And from then onward, right through the Bible, those elements of conflict and controversy are rarely absent. The Book is just full of them, until we reach the last two chapters; and the conflict ceases, the controversy is settled, and that, forever. But, as we pointed out in our first chapter, the centre of the consummation, the final issue, the end which has been the occasion of this tremendous conflict from the beginning, is this: *"The tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be... their God"* (Revelation 21:3).

When we look closer into this matter, it is most impressive to find that it is invariably related to and focused upon one thing: namely, God's place in this world, and particularly upon a people for His habitation. It is *that* which is, as we say, the bone of contention, the focal point of all the trouble. That is the issue there in the garden at the beginning, with the first pair. It is far too beautiful and happy a scene - for one exalted being - to behold God walking and talking with men, having blessed fellowship with men, in a scene of peace and rest and order - that is far too beautiful a thing to allow to go unassailed. Somehow, a situation must be set up, which will break in upon that fellowship, if possible end it, or at least suspend it, and drive God out. That was the issue then - God present here in conditions of fellowship with men. Many things may circle round that, but that is the point of the trouble in the first family. A family in holy and sacred fellowship with God is something that will not go unassailed. And so we find the family thrown into this state of conflict, and one brother murders the other.

It is the whole point in the history of the chosen nation, in all its varied phases and stages. It was the point when that chosen nation was in Egypt. What was it that God intended? It is found in His challenge to Pharaoh, king of Egypt: *"Let My people go, that they may serve Me"* (Exodus 7:16 etc). We know from later history what that meant - God in the midst of a people. And the great controversy and conflict in Egypt was born of the realization, on the part of sinister powers, that, if that happens, God will have what He has ever set His heart upon having, and that must be frustrated at all costs. God gets the children of Israel out into the wilderness, to be His people, for His dwelling-place; but, as they are in the wilderness, congregated at the foot of the mountain, and Moses goes up into the mountain, what happens? Note, Moses is going to receive the pattern of the Tabernacle, in which God will take up residence in the midst of His people, and for that Tabernacle there will be the need of some gold in the great symbolism of the Divine nature; and that gold has been brought out of Egypt. While Moses tarries in the mount, what happens? Once again, there enters in this challenge to the Divine purpose, and the gold is stolen from God and made into a calf, to be worshipped in the very place of God!

It is all a part of the one long story. And it goes on in their history, when they are through the wilderness and in the land. Solomon builds the Temple, and God takes up His residence. But just before that temple was going to be brought in and built, another terrible thing happened. It is said, *"And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel"* (1 Chronicles 21:1). We know the story. The numbering, of course, was just a bit of vanity - the vanity of the human heart; 'counting heads'; being able to say, 'What a great people I have, and what a great king I am!' Even a man of the world who had very little, if any, spiritual perception - Joab - saw through it and urged the king not to do it. But he

insisted, and then He had to reckon with God. The result - the devastation of the nation; till at last, as the plague swept over the people, mowing them down, the Angel of the Lord met David at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite - and that became the site of the Temple.

What a contesting, what a controversy all the time over this 'habitation of God'! The Temple is built and then, when the nation has come to the very summit, in the realization of a habitation for God, the builder of the Temple himself defaults, and makes an alliance with that which is another god, outside of Israel. And so it is not long before the nation is split in two. The downward movement rapidly gathers momentum, and the Lord leaves the Temple. The end of that movement is away into Babylon: the Temple, Jerusalem, forsaken of God; a people in captivity. After seventy years a remnant returns and commences to rebuild a temple. The story is told in the twin books of Ezra and Nehemiah - and what books of conflict they are. Here it is again; it is as though something or someone has said: "No, never, if we can stop it!" And indeed they were partly successful, for at one point we read "*Then ceased the work of the house of God...*" (Ezra 4:24).

In this atmosphere of conflict and controversy the Old Testament closes. As the New Testament opens, as we saw in our first chapter, God comes to His consummate realization along two lines. Firstly, He becomes incarnate in His Son as 'Immanuel' - 'God with us'. But His very presence raises the bitterest controversy, on this very point of the Temple. It all centres in and circles round this Temple. You remember *the* charge which brought Him to His death; it was: 'He spoke about the destruction of the temple!' He said: "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again*" (John 2:19). In their blindness to His true spiritual meaning, they interpreted it as meaning that the great Temple in Jerusalem was to be destroyed. Of course it was! But those words of His brought Him to His death. A few years later Stephen took up this matter, and, in words that are almost an echo of Solomon's declared: "*The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands*" (Acts 7:48) and those words unloosed upon him a storm of rage and fury. That was the focal point of it all, and it is most significant. And finally, when the personal Christ, having been sown like a grain of wheat in the ground, and having died, has risen in the corporate form of the nucleus of His Church, to form the 'habitation of God' in reality, what a storm breaks upon it! It is the signal for new outbreaks of this same terrible antagonism.

The Tragic History of Divisions

That is at the root of all the sad, tragic history through the centuries, of divisions and schisms, conflicts, contentions and controversies, amongst Christians. The one determination is - God is not going to have this dwelling, if it can be prevented by any means whatsoever; this must be stopped! For there is no greater menace to the kingdom of darkness than a people after this kind: a people to which God commits Himself, because they provide Him with a ground for being there - just being there in blessed fellowship. We believe that we are living in the 'end times'; and, as the end draws near, in spite of all the talk and efforts for unions and affiliations, and so on, the spirit of suspicion and fear and misunderstanding only intensifies. The atmosphere of Christianity is impregnated with it, until it seems that the last little thing will suffer division if possible. The differences are multiplying all the time.

Why are there so many differences and controversies in the realm of interpretations and of Christian relationships? It is this one thing. You may say it is because of this or that or the other thing; you may put it down to one of the many hundreds of things that make for division, but let us get right to the heart

and root of the matter. Every one of these things which may be the pretext is related to this one true reason, which is all-inclusive and all-governing: namely a spiritual-relatedness of the people of God, to provide Him with that which has been in His heart from all eternity - a habitation, a presencing of Himself with men. That is the heart of it. All this sad and terrible history and story is related to this corporate idea - in the beginning, the man and his wife; then two brothers; next the race, twelve brothers who became twelve tribes; the pattern of the Tabernacle, and so on. There has always been an inexorable determination, either to prevent it, or wreck it, if it has any semblance of being present. Ever and always the point of attack has been the people of God in heavenly fellowship, with God in their midst.

It is thus perfectly evident that there exists in this universe a force and system that is bitterly antagonistic to the realization of this Divine purpose. This phenomenon is not a 'natural' thing. True, there often seem to be good human and natural reasons for it. But get behind all that, and you find that it is all issuing from this realm, or hierarchy, which is antagonistic to this one thing.

And it is this one thing. We speak about the 'Church militant': what do we mean by the Church *militant*? Well, our ideas are usually objective when we speak like that. We think of the Church making assault upon heathenism, upon paganism, upon worldliness, upon vice, upon bad social conditions, upon suffering and its causes. This is perhaps what we mean by the Church 'militant', but however true and right that may be, the fact is that the Church 'militant' finds its campaign sabotaged from the inside - it is defeated before it even starts to fight. It cannot fight as a corporate whole, because it is already crippled from within by the lack of expression of this one, related, corporate life. Yes, the enemy has subtly got inside things, and has weakened and paralysed the Church 'militant'.

You are perhaps familiar with the story in the life of Spurgeon. The students of his college were preaching their 'trial' sermon before him and one young man chose Ephesians 6 for his subject. In a great attempt at eloquence and impressiveness, he pictured the warrior, and the armour, and himself as taking it up; and at last, fully clad, in great boldness he stepped forward and cried: "Now, where is the enemy?" Mr. Spurgeon, sitting in the audience, cupped his hands and called out: "Inside the armour!"

That story is very much to the point. The Church is not moving 'like a mighty army' - it is not true that -

'Like a mighty army moves the church of God!'

It is not true that it is "*terrible as an army with banners*" (Song of Solomon 6:4, 10). Satan has seen to that; he has given the lie to that. What is the point? We have got to take account of something more than the human factors and the natural elements. I am not wanting to open the door to any morbid occupation with demonism, but perhaps in our fears we have swung too much the other way. We must either accept the Bible or reject it; and if we accept the Bible as it stands, we have got to accept the fact of a great, evil, spiritual system that is unrelenting, ceaseless in vigilance and activity, watching for any and every opportunity and ground that it can use against this one thing - the absolute oneness of God's people, to provide Him with a habitation suitable to Himself. We have got to recognize that great system, and definitely take it into account.

Numbness to the Real Cause

There seems to be some strange dullness, numbness, over the Church in this matter - a fact which in itself may be significant. What Christian, for instance, does not know Ephesians chapter 6? Probably most of us could quote it: *"For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12). Who does not know that, as to the words, the language? But, who has really been *stung* into the realization of what that means for the Church - into the recognition of the fact that that word is the summing up of the greatest revelation of that Church which has ever been given to mankind? It is up to *that* that the apostle moves, with his great unveiling of the Church, in its past, eternal election, in its heavenly vocation, in its walk here with God and in its coming eternity of purpose. Through all that, he moves up to this, and says: Yes - but, while that is true, while that is God's masterpiece, the greatest thing ever conceived, it is at the same time the one object of the inimical, antagonistic interest and attention of countless hosts of evil spirits. The 'principalities and powers', the 'world rulers of this darkness', the 'hosts of wicked spirits', all have one thing that they are after, namely, the destruction of that Church, the dividing of that Church. We, I say, are strangely numb in the face of such a revelation: we are not stung alive to the recognition of what it means.

If all of this is true - and you will have very great difficulty in arguing your way out of this, if you are so disposed, for, as I say, the Bible, from the first chapters to the last, is full of this controversy and conflict, over the matter of God having a habitation for Himself, in a people - if this is true, we need to adjust ourselves, take a new attitude, and face the fact that these evil forces are merely concerned with the grand sum-total of the Church, to split it into so many sections, but that they will not stop at the last two individual Christians! They began with the first two, and they will pursue their evil purpose to get in between and separate the last two believers.

That being so, we have got to adjust ourselves to the further fact that any division, any breaking up of fellowship, is not to be put down finally to some human or natural factors. They may be the immediate pretext or the occasion, but behind, there is something very much more. We are involved in a terrible warfare over this matter of relatedness - far, far, beyond our power of overcoming or coping with it. And there is where the words in this great letter come to our rescue, as the apostle prays that the Father would *"grant you... that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man"*. *"Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, unto all ages, forever and ever"* (Ephesians 3:16, 20-21). Yes, we must take account of these forces, and adjust ourselves to the matter in a new way. We need to realize what it is that is happening, not putting everything down to secondary causes, but getting behind them to the primary course in that other, evil, realm.

God is holy: the place of His dwelling must be holy. If this dividing is the work of Satan, then it is unholy. The touch of evil means that God cannot commit Himself to that which divides Him. Cried the apostle to the Corinthians: *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Corinthians 1:13) And I think there was a tone of shock in his interrogation - it is unthinkable! Christ is not divided! Therefore He cannot commit Himself to division. The Holy Spirit is one Spirit: *"There is,"* says the apostle, *"one Spirit"* (Ephesians 4:4). There are not as many Christs, as many Holy Spirits, as there are believers. We do not have a personal or private Jesus,

or Holy Spirit. We only have Him and Them in common, and there is no other way of having the Lord.

The Key to Oneness

Now we have got to find the key to this oneness, this unity. And in this very passage, the apostle speaks of it as "*the unity of the Spirit*" (Ephesians 4:3). The unity of the *Spirit* - therein lies the key. Our oneness, our unity, is not first an intellectual thing. It is not that, after threshing out truth and matters of procedure and after the great deal of discussion and argument we have arrived at some measure of procedure, and a great deal of discussion and argument, we have arrived at some measure of agreement, and know we are one! It does not begin there; that is not the basis of our oneness at all. Even in evangelical truth, we do not arrive at oneness by argument, intellectually. We do not arrive at it by sharing in some enterprise, a common undertaking or piece of work - seeing something that needs to be done, and resolving to unite to do it. The history of Christian work is surely the history of how that kind of thing breaks down, does not go through, when it meets the forces of evil. No, we are not one in that way. We are not one by sentiment - by, (may I use the word) smarminess, nice talk, closing our eyes to wrong that *is* wrong; that is not a basis of oneness. It is not a oneness of ideals, and certainly not a oneness of pretence. What is it? It is, as the Word here says, the unity of the Spirit; that is, of the Holy Spirit. As I have just said, there are not as many Holy Spirits as there are believers. "In *one Spirit* we were all baptized into *one Body*" (1 Corinthians 12:13), says the Apostle.

This oneness is first of all basic, and then it is progressive. It is basic by our sharing of a common life. Oh, that we made more of that fundamental reality. We know it is true. Were we to be scattered over the world, meeting perhaps one Christian in a hundred thousand, we should find the thing becoming very, very real. What a grand thing it is - generally - to meet a Christian! You do not immediately raise ecclesiastical questions, doctrinal questions, and so on; you just find you have something in common. And if we only keep on that ground, what a long way we can go. We know a believer, a true believer, anywhere in the world, without introduction. The introduction is inside! It is something fundamental: we share one life; we have one Holy Spirit dwelling in all. That is the basic reality of oneness, if only we would make more of it.

And then the oneness is progressive: that is, it grows, it develops, it proceeds and progresses: by our *living in the Spirit*. It is ministered to by life in the Spirit, by a life governed by the Holy Spirit within us. Though this has been said many times, it is a point for very great emphasis: if only you and I, personally, really lived lives that were under the government of the Holy Spirit inside, what a big difference it would make! For He is the Spirit of *truth*; and if we as born-again children of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, knew Him governing our spirit and our inner-consciousness, supposing we had a false notion about some other child of God, it would not be long before we knew, in our own hearts, that the Holy Spirit did not agree with that notion. We hear something about somebody - a false report, a false rumour - and take it on. But reports that are apparently true, and that come from the most 'authentic' and most 'trustworthy' source, may yet be false; and we can know it in our own hearts by the Holy Spirit. And the governing of the Spirit will be a safe-guard against some division, some strain, some broken fellowship, which ought never to be, because it is founded upon a lie - it may be even a beautiful lie! We could spend much time with that.

Oneness - fellowship - is then progressive on the basis of a life in the Spirit. And you and I, as God's people, are called to live in the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, to know the voice of the Spirit, the inner instruction and teaching of the Spirit. It

takes us a long time to learn it in any great measure, but it is a great reality which ought to begin with our new birth - the consciousness of a new standard of values, of things that differ, of right and wrong, of what we ought to do and what we ought not to do, of how we ought to speak and how we ought not to speak - all this ought to be born with us at our new birth. And it ought to grow, and grow, and grow. Only so will this other evil kingdom be destroyed; only so will its works be countered; only so will the Church be "*terrible as an army with banners*". Only so will God find the place that He is seeking, where He can commit Himself and abide, and make Himself known.

There is a great battle on, and that battle is not just the battle of different conceptions and interpretations and presentations of Christianity. Behind all is the battle between a great intention of God, and the counter-intention of a great foe. May God help us to have our eyes opened to this, and to be very clear-cut as to where we stand in this fight.

Chapter Three

THE ULTIMATE CRITERION

When, as we read at the beginning of the Bible, conditions were such as to make it possible for God to pass the verdict, "It is very good", then God was found present in communion and fellowship with man. We are not told very much about how He was present: we are told that He walked in the garden in the cool of the day; that He talked with man, and made known to him His thoughts. So far as the story goes, we know little more about it than that. It may well have been much like the forty days after the resurrection, when the Lord Jesus came, showed Himself, spoke, and went, and came again, and went. There may have been a coming and a going, showing and speaking, making it clear that the desire and thought of His heart was to be present, and, in personal presence, to be able to commune and communicate.

But so soon He had to withdraw. Conditions changed; they no longer corresponded to His mind, no longer made it possible for Him to say, "It is very good". The change made it necessary for Him to withdraw. In a sense, morally, He was driven out - expelled. But, again and again, through history, we are told of God's effort to recover a condition suitable and well-pleasing to Himself, so that He might return.

He gave to Moses the pattern of a heavenly habitation (Exodus 25:9) and, when all things were made according to the pattern, it was as if God said again, "It is very good" - and He returned and filled the Tabernacle. But again, it cannot be abiding. It is a habitation in figure and in type, and in a measure; but things are not fully and finally according to His mind in the people themselves. Later, He gave to David another pattern - the pattern of a Temple, a representation again of a heavenly habitation (1 Chronicles 28:11-12, 19); and when all things were made according to that revealed pattern, God came and filled the temple, again showing that this is what He is ever seeking. But yet again things changed, and we have the sad story of the glory departing, removing, going away (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:18-19; 11:23), and that habitation remaining just a 'thing' - an empty shell, a cold, unreal formality.

The Old Testament closes on the note of failure in this great purpose of God; failure, and yet promise. "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing? Yet... The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former..." (Haggai 2:3-4, 9) And then that great statement: "Yet once... and I will shake... the earth... and the desire of all nations shall come..." (verses 6-7). *He* is the desire of all nations. You will remember that those words are taken up by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews (12:26), and applied to the shaking of everything here on this earth that is but a representation - a type, a figure, a symbol - in order that the spiritual reality may take its place.

Three Expressions of God's Thought

There are, in the Bible, three major expressions of this Divine thought for a dwelling-place among men. There are other minor ones, but three major ones stand out above the others.

Firstly, Israel. We have not understood Israel until we have recognized that that people was chosen among the peoples of this earth for this one, sole, and only object - that God should find in a people a habitation suitable for Himself. He strove, He laboured, He longed, He suffered; He showed His infinite patience and

mercy and long-suffering with that people, because His *heart* was bound up with the realization of this eternal thought and object, that of having a habitation here in a people. I repeat: we do not understand the dismissal of Israel from the Divine program, until we have recognized their utter and final failure to fulfil that vocation.

But God has not abandoned His purpose. We turn the page from the Old Testament to the New, and we find the next consummate movement of God in relation to this purpose. The second great expression - perhaps we may call it the inclusive expression - of His thought is in the Incarnation itself: "Immanuel, God with us". Again, we have not understood the Incarnation, until we have related it to this eternal thought - God finding in man a habitation, making man the place of His dwelling. In the person of His Son, He has found His Sanctuary, His Temple, His Tabernacle. "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory...)" (John 1:14).

The third major expression is in the advent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. We have not understood the deeper significance of these great events - the Holy Spirit coming to take up residence in the newly-born Church - until we have related that to this one thing, *God is here*. The Church is that place of His dwelling and He has come to His Temple. We can see how gloriously that was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Verily 'the messenger of the covenant has come to His temple.' (Malachi 3:1); verily God was present on that day, and did not depart. He has come to stay. It is God Incarnate who says: "I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20). He has come to stay in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Now, it is quite clear that that was the Divine thought for the Church in general. But then we find that what was to be true of the Church universal, was God's intention for the local churches. The one thing that was to characterize local companies of God's people - I repeat, *companies* of God's people - was that *God* should be found there. That was the ultimate criterion, and that is, as you see, our third message. Let us remind ourselves that 'criterion' just means the principle which determines the standard of judgment; that is, the ground on which any matter is decided; the standard of measure by which things are determined.

The Criterion

The one criterion ultimately of the House of God, universal or local, is ultimately just this: that God is there, and may be found there. That is the dominant thing about it. It is not the methods and the manner, the performance and the rites, the formalities and the ceremonies, and all the other external 'things'. It is that, either in them or through them, or without them, apart from them, God is there - you meet God; you cannot go in there without meeting God. That is the ultimate criterion as to whether the House of God is present as a reality, or not. It is not a place, but a people, in the midst of whom God, in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, is present and known to be present. For is it possible for such a One as He to be present without His presence being known? (Yes, perhaps it can be if there is something wrong with us, but it ought not to be so. It ought to be that, where God is, we know it, because we meet Him). The criterion is just this: *Do you meet God?* If not, it cannot bear that name, because it does not fulfil that function; we may as well dismiss the thing, cease to try to keep it going, if it is not like that.

The Ground for God's Presence

This brings us to the question of the *ground* on which God is present. Let me say here, in parenthesis, that God may be present in greater or lesser degrees. What we read of the churches in the New Testament makes it clear that that is so. It is not at all difficult to discern that God was more fully present in one place than in another - that there was a greater measure of the Lord and His glory in this place than in that; for instance, in Philippi as against Corinth. But surely, the thing that ought to concern us is - not that the Lord should be there, so to speak, 'anyhow', but that He should be able to be there without reserve or restraint, giving Himself wholly. It is something that ought to concern us, as individuals, that the Lord should be able to be with us individually, without reserve - just free to commit Himself. And surely *the* concern of every company of the Lord's people, in every place, should be - not this or that, or some other thing relating to material existence, but - the maximum of the presence of the Lord.

I venture to say that if that were the governing and dominating concern, it would be the key to, and the solution of, many problems. All the difficulties would clear up if we were to say to ourselves - 'Now, the thing that matters more than anything else is that the Lord should have an absolutely clear way to fill this place with His glory. Whatever stands in the way of that must get out of the way.' This must be a mighty motive in our lives. Our eyes must first be opened to see this eternal thought of God; then we must become so wedded to it, it must become so much a passion with us, that anything that may threaten it, obstruct it, limit it, cannot be tolerated. That is the challenge of this message.

But in order that it should be like this, God must have conditions which, on the one hand, will not involve Him in man's disorder - for God will not allow Himself to be involved in man's disorder, He will not commit Himself to that - and which, on the other hand, will be completely suitable to Himself. May this not explain much of the reserve of the Lord, that we, Christian people everywhere, are finding so difficult either to understand or to endure? All the cries and the appeals, the pleadings and the praying, day and night, for a visitation of God: and God seems so reserved and so slow. May it be that God cannot commit Himself to man's order of things, without becoming involved in something that will dishonour Him? I put it in the form of a question; but it is clearly shown in the Bible that, as a principle, this is so. The cry of the prophets to the people was to put things into such an order or state that God could come. It is something to be taken account of, that in all our praying there may, after all, be something for us to do, in preparing the way of the Lord, casting up a highway for our God, in gathering out the stones which would injure His feet should He come. There may be something!

Satan's Interference

Now, Satan, as we saw previously, in the continuous controversy over this one thing, and in his efforts to prevent God from having an abiding place, has sought, from the beginning, to put man in the way of God. Man was created for the very purpose of providing God with a habitation, for it was ever His intention that He should dwell with man. Therefore Satan's great stroke and effort has been to turn the very man of God's creating against the purpose of God. to turn man into a positive hindrance, a means of frustrating God. That is the long and terrible story of God being hindered by man, and by the conditions created by man. Jesus saw that: He saw quite clearly that the nature and effect of Satan's interference with man was so to change man that God could not come and dwell in him. At the end of the second chapter of the gospel by John, which ought never to be divided from the third chapter, we find this comment about the Lord Jesus, that He would

not commit Himself to man, because He knew what was in man (2:24-25). What a terrible thing, that man, who was intended to be God's very temple, should now be in such a state, that God cannot and will not commit Himself to him!

I said that chapter two of John ought never to be separated from chapter three; for, a few verses later (in what in the arrangement is chapter three) we come on this: "You must be born again". What is the point? This throws a new flash of light on new birth: it says that God must have a new kind of man to indwell. And you notice that it was said to an outstanding representative of the Jewish nation: for Nicodemus was a full length portrait of Israel - the people who had claimed to be (what they were intended to be) God's very habitation; who had appropriated God, who had sought to lock God up to themselves, to make Him their exclusive God. It is here in Jerusalem that Jesus, knowing what was in man, would not commit Himself to them; and then, speaking to a representative of such a nation, as to the nation itself, He said: "You must be born *from above*".

Why this? In order that God, the Holy Spirit, should come right in and take up residence; and that is chapter four. You see, it is all a wonderful sequence. It all centres in this one eternal thought - this thought unlocks the whole Bible, everywhere - the thought of God to be *indwelling*, in man, in the midst of man. That is why we find the matter of the new birth coming in at the point where Jesus would not commit Himself, because He knew all men, and knew what was *in man*.

Ezekiel's Visions

So, the question immediately arises: To what will God commit Himself? Let us look at the prophecies of Ezekiel for a few minutes. Do you recall the last words of those prophecies? "The name of the city from that day shall be, Jehovah-Shammah - The Lord is there." With that the book closes. The end is reached; the thought and purpose of God is attained: "The Lord is there"!

Now, leaving aside the controversy over Ezekiel's Temple and House, as to whether there is to be a literal rebuilding of the temple on this earth in Jerusalem, when all this Moslem world has been swept aside, and the mosque of Omar has been obliterated from the Holy City - there is much to be done yet, but it is not impossible with God! - whether it is to be like that, or whether all that is realized in the Church spiritually, we leave such controversial matter aside, for it is irrelevant to our present purpose. The book of Ezekiel in any case stands for today with much positive application and teaching. Its Divine principles, which are eternal, belonging to no particular age or place, are very clear. As regards the whole end of things - where it is to be, what it is to be - well, the end is summed up in this - The Lord is there!

The whole of these prophecies is a progressive movement towards that end. They begin with the prophet saying that he saw "visions of God"; and then the visions that follow are progressive towards that consummate end: they are the stages and the phases of that progress, showing the principles or the ground upon which that end will be reached - The Lord is there!

The Man on the Throne

The first vision, which in a sense is inclusive of all the rest, is a vision of the Throne: the Throne above the firmament, and upon the Throne above, the likeness of a man. What does it signify? The first, the fundamental, the all-inclusive reality, by which this end of God shall be reached, is the absolute enthronement, exaltation and authority of that Man (with a capital M), the Son of

Man, on the Throne, above the firmament. It was there that Stephen saw Him; it was from there that He stooped to encounter Saul of Tarsus. The Man on the Throne: Christ glorified, Christ exalted, Christ in possession of all authority in Heaven and in earth. If God is going to reach the end - "The Lord is there" - that has to become a practical reality in all matters and in all details. This is a fundamental, governing principle: that the Lord will be 'there' in the measure in which it is true that Jesus Christ is exalted, that Jesus Christ has His place as the Exalted One, that He is on the Throne, and that the authority is recognized as being in His hands.

There are many ways in which that can be put. In the Church at the beginning, and in the churches, it meant this, that they never had meetings, committees, councils, for deliberating on what they were going to do: they had prayer meetings, and submitted everything to the Holy Spirit, and took all their instructions from Heaven. It proved to be a very effective thing, did it not?! God was there! That was the effect; that was *reality*: the Lord was with them - the Lord was there! The place where they were gathered was shaken by His presence. And it was all on the ground of their testimony that this Jesus had been set at the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens. But that that was not just an objective fact, or even teaching, or truth: it was a practical reality in all the details of every day life. Jesus was referred to, and Jesus was deferred to, in all things - His authority was *applied* authority, not theoretical.

The Altar

We move on, and we find a man whose appearance is as the appearance of brass, with a measuring line and rod in his hand (Ezekiel 40:3). And then we come to the great Temple area, the great square of the Temple precincts; and we find that if we draw diagonal lines from the uttermost corners of that great square, at the point where those lines meet and cross, right of the centre of that area, is a great Brazen Altar: central and universal, governing all things within and without. A Man of brass - an Altar of brass. Now brass symbolizes righteous judgment: righteousness unto judgment, judgment unto righteousness. At the very heart and centre and core of everything is the Cross: the Cross, where everything is brought to judgment and judged according to God's standard of righteousness, of holiness.

That is the ground on which He will be present. We are so familiar with the teaching of the Cross, but we can only rightly appraise and understand the meaning of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, when we see that it relates essentially to this one matter - God's presence. Everything must come to judgment according to God's standard: what cannot pass must be consumed upon the Altar, and what is of God can be established in Heaven. This is the great discriminating work of the Cross: on that, God will be present. Yes, 'Jehovah-Shammah' comes right back to this: how far has everything been brought to that great judgment of Calvary, and determined as to its acceptance by God?

How searching this is, for all things - in us, in you, in me, in our fellowships, in our assemblies, in our churches, everywhere! Can this pass the judgment of the Cross? What does the Cross say to this and that? How does this stand in the light of Calvary? The answer will determine just how much God is going to commit Himself. That is most important; we cannot get away from that. This Man of brass will see to it: He will measure all things according to the Altar - God's thoughts of righteousness.

The House

And then we move with that Man to the House. If you know the vision of the House, and all that is said about it here, you will be familiar with its dominant feature. The dominant feature of this vision of the House is 'measurement': this Man of brass with His rod, His measuring reed, is moving everywhere within and without measuring, measuring, around and about, so meticulously. What is he doing with this House? He is defining it according to Christ; He is measuring according to Christ; for Christ is going to be the measure of everything. "God... hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man Whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31) - it is the Man of brass, to bring everything in the world to judgment according to Himself. If that is true of the world, and judgment is coming to the world, it must begin at the House of God.

Now, to resolve that into one statement, it just means this. If it is to be 'Jehovah-Shammah' - if it is to be "The Lord is there", it will be according to the measure of Christ - just how much there is of Christ there. Neither more nor less will God commit Himself. It is not this or that, or many things, that men think constitute a place for God; it is only one thing - how much of Christ is there? Let that go right into our hearts: how much of Christ is there in you and in me? Does this not explain the infinite pains that God takes, and His preparedness to sacrifice so much, in order to increase our measure of Christ? It is the explanation of so much. Why will He take a very busy and useful servant of His away from His work and shut him up? - why? We say 'loss', we say 'tragedy', we say the Church suffers; but God knows. It matters more to Him that there should be an increase of Christ there for eternal purposes, than perhaps the doing of a lot of busy things for Him.

There *must* be an explanation of the strange providences of God. May this not be it? I put it again in the form of a question. The Lord is prepared to take any pains to increase the measure of His Son; to make any sacrifice - not just for its own sake, but in relation to the thing to which He has given His heart: that of finding a state suitable for His own presence. And you and I are prepared to say immediately that, where there is most of Christ, there you meet the Lord indeed - "the Lord is there"; the two things go together - though it often means the ruination of ourselves to make place for Him.

So the House is measured, not just as a whole, but at every point, at every corner. As we know from the letter to the Ephesians, it is just the measure of Christ.

The River

Finally, in the visions we come to the river. When He is on His Throne and has His place, and when the Altar is in its place, judging and governing everything according to God's righteousness; and when the House is measured according to Christ - well, what do you expect? Out from that House will emerge and break a river, fullness, to make 'everything live whithersoever the river cometh' (Ezekiel 47:9). That happened on the Day of Pentecost. The Lord has got His House; Christ is on the Throne; the Cross has done its work, and the river proceeds spontaneously.

I raise one question in conclusion. It is no criticism, it is no judgment of mine; it is really an exercise. Christians have been praying and pleading for years for revival, revival, revival - that is the word. Well, it happens when God has His conditions. May its delay be explained by the fact that He has not got His conditions? This is not merely an objective question, a subject of interest; it has a

very immediate application. What you and I desire is that out of us should flow rivers of living water. Oh, that there might issue from us this stream that makes everything live, so that when we pray with people, when we speak to them, life comes into them; they feel refreshed and renewed: when we move about the world, the effect is that people are helped to live anew. Life comes.

That is true also of our churches, our assemblies, our companies. There can be life flowing out, reaching far out. If God has His conditions, there is no limit to the possibilities of a little company ordered of God, no limit to its range. The influence of that little company, hidden in some little corner, may go to the ends of the earth, may be ministering Christ far, far beyond its own borders. If God has His conditions, it just happens: you do not have to organize great campaigns to do it - it happens! Note: the river comes out of a measured sanctuary; it comes down by way of the Altar; it is from the House according to Christ, which House has been judged by Calvary as to how it stands before God, that the Spirit comes, the Spirit of life.

Let us now sum up. The deciding factors as to the presence of God, more or less - God grant that it may be more and ever more - the deciding factors are: the absolute authority of Christ in everything; the centrality and universality of the Cross; the measure of Christ in believers, individually and collectively. These are God's conditions for that which answers to His own heart and satisfies Him, so that He can be present without restraint or fear - 'Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there'!