

THE CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

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A Series of Conference Messages, as spoken.

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Chapter One

THE CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Colossians 1:9-29.

The clause in the thirteenth verse very largely represents what has been laid on my heart for this time: "The Son of his love"; then that which follows, the position which He occupies according to the will of the Father - "He is before all things, and in him all things consist" and He in all things having the pre-eminence: then, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." I think we can well sum up all that in the phrase "The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ," and with that be wholly occupied for the rest of our lives, not only for this present time.

And so it is upon the centrality and supremacy of the Son of God's love that we shall dwell as the Lord will enable us. The Word of God brings into view four spheres in which that thought and purpose of God concerning the Son of His love is to be realized. There is the sphere of the believer's own individual life; then secondly, there is the sphere of the Church which is His Body; in the third place there is the sphere of the kingdoms of this world, the nations of the earth; and in the fourth place He is to be central and supreme in the whole universe, heaven and earth and what is under the earth.

We may not be able, in the time which we have in these days, to reach unto all those spheres and see what the Word of God has to say about the Lord Jesus in relation thereto, but we shall move as the Lord enables and at least take the first one or two of those spheres. But before coming to the first of them may I remind you also that

The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus is the Pivot and the Key to All the Scriptures

Of course the Lord Jesus Himself has told us as much. We know from Luke 24 that that is so. There we find Him taking Moses, the Psalms, and all the Prophets, and in them all speaking of the things concerning Himself. So that in our reading of the Word of God, *WHEREVER* we happen to be reading, the question that should always be in our minds is "What has this to do with Christ?"; and if you bring that question to your reading of the Word of God, wherever you may read (and that is not said without thought) you will at once get a new understanding of the Word, you will have a new value in your reading; for the Scriptures, and *ALL* the Scriptures, are they which speak of Him; although you may have difficulty sometimes in tracing Him, yet He is there. The cumulative effect of all parts of the Word of God is to bring you to Christ. You must not read the Word of God as history, narrative, prophecy, or as anything else as a theme in itself, but always ask the question: "What has this to do with Christ?" and until you can find what it has to do with Christ you have not found the key. You will probably be thinking of certain portions of Scripture which will be difficult. You will think of such books as the Book of Proverbs, and you will say: "What has this to do with Christ?" One little suggestion will at once illuminate that book for you. Wherever you read the word Wisdom, put Christ in the place of Wisdom and you have transformed the book and you have got its essence - and that is quite legitimate, quite proper, quite right, as your reading will prove to you. He is the Wisdom of God, the Eternal Logos. Well, just in passing we mention that because what we are after is to see the centrality and universality of the Lord Jesus, and He is by Divine appointment at the centre of everything in this universe, every phase and every aspect, and He is its explanation.

It is Also the Explanation of the Incarnation

Not only is this true as to the Scriptures, but this is the object and the explanation of His own incarnation. When you are studying the person and the life and the work of the Lord Jesus, there must be a Divine quest in your heart, and that quest must be for those features which suggest universality. Approach again the reading of the life of the Lord Jesus with that thought; you will not want for helpful, profitable Bible study, and you will find that things begin to enlarge in a way which throws back your horizon and enlarges your own heart and makes you feel the wonder of Christ. Looking for features of universality you will not go very far before you find them. They can be traced in the prophecies concerning His incarnation. You can trace them in the annunciation; you can trace them in the words of His forerunner as He is introduced. You can trace them in His birth with all its associations and incidents; the universe is there. It is so also in His circumcision. In the light of the rest of the Scriptures which are now ours in the New Testament you will find that there are universal features even in His circumcision, and even in His presentation in the temple. In His visit to Jerusalem, in His baptism, His anointing, His temptation, His teaching, His works, His transfiguration, His passion, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His sending of the Spirit, His present activity, and His coming again, it is that which is universal that is in view. Every one of these things is marked by universal features, they are things which reach out to the very bounds of the universe and embrace all the ages and the eternities and all realms. That is not uncommon ground to most of us, but it is said again in order to bring afresh to our remembrance the way in which we should regard the Lord Jesus.

We are not trying to make Him bigger than He is, but we are trying to reach His real dimensions; and the need of the Lord's people is to have a new apprehension of the greatness of their Christ, a new appreciation of the Son of God's love - and what a mighty, majestic, glorious, wonderful Son He is - and then to remember that unto us that Son is given. That will lift us, that will enlarge us, it will do a good many things which we shall see as we go along.

Christ's Centrality and Supremacy in the Life of the Believer

Coming now to those more specific applications of this universality to the spheres of His centrality and supremacy already mentioned, we take first His centrality and supremacy in the life of the believer. Let us look at that word again - "Christ in you, the hope of glory." You will notice in the context that the first chapter of the Colossian letter carries us right back into the mind and heart of God before the world was, and we are shown what was going on in the mind and heart of the Father concerning His Son. It is called "the mystery," that is, the Divine secret. It is impressive to see that before any creative activities commenced, God was cherishing a secret in His heart, the Father had a secret, something which He had shown to no one, told to no one, a cherished secret; it related to His Son. Out of the secret of His heart concerning His Son, every activity of God proceeded, and down through the ages He was occupied in many activities, in many forms and ways, working with His secret, enshrining His secret in those many activities, in those many forms and ways of His self-expression, never giving out what the secret was, never proclaiming what was in His heart in so many words, but hiding it, hiding it within symbols and types and many things; they all enshrined a secret, "the mystery". Then at length, in the fullness of the times, at the end of these times, He sent forth His Son, the Son of His love; then by revelation of the Holy Spirit He was pleased to make known the mystery, pleased to disclose the secret, and the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians is the matchless, incomparable unveiling of the secret of God's heart concerning the Son of His love, what that secret was. Read it again, every fragment of it, what God's secret

was. It is all gathered up, every fragment of it, in this: "That in all things he might have the pre-eminence." "In ALL things"; and then - and this seems to me to be the wonder of it, this is a thing which is so far beyond our comprehending - that all that, the eternal heart secret of God in its mighty meaning and outworking, was to have its beginning of realization within the individual heart of a believer. So far as the actual and practical realization of the mystery, the secret of God, is concerned, its beginning is within the heart of the individual believers. This mystery is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This secret of God, this thing that God has had in His heart from eternity is: "Christ in you". I want to emphasize that once more. That which was in God's heart from eternity, for its realization has to be put into our hearts in time. That which was in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world, has its commencement in the receiving of Christ into the heart by faith on the part of the believer, the individual believer. That is not the end, that is the beginning. What will follow will be the Church which is His Body. That has been foreseen and is complete in the eternal thought, but it will follow the individual believer's reception of Christ. The Church which is His Body is not the end. It will be the centre of another sphere, the kingdoms of this world, the nations will walk in the light thereof. And then again, that will not be the end, it will expand to the universe. Not only glorified humanity but the celestial forces and hosts will be in the light of that. But we come back to the individual.

God begins on the inside. Paul has a good deal to say about this eternal thought as to Christ and His centrality to the believer, and he speaks concerning this matter very largely from his own life and his own spiritual ambition, and as far as I can see he gathers it all up into five main aspects. There is the revelation of Christ within; there is the living of Christ within; there is the forming of Christ within; there is the home-making of Christ within, and there is the consummation of Christ within.

The Revelation of Christ Within

Firstly, the revelation of Christ within. You know to what we refer: Galatians 1:15-16. You look back to verse 12 and you see what it means: "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." "It was the good pleasure of God... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles." Now that represents the inner side of the Damascus Road experience. There was an objective, an outward, side. There was an inner side into which he entered because it had entered into him, and I think that inner side was not confined to the moment when the light from heaven above the noon-day sun in brightness was shining; that probably was very transient, swiftly passing. It seems to me that that inner side continued for three days. He was blind for three days, not having sight, and yet he was seeing. You notice that the connection was this, that "when it pleased God... to reveal his Son in me... *IMMEDIATELY*" - and if you look back at Acts 9 you will find that it was at the end of the three days when Ananias came in and laid his hands upon him and he received his natural sightedness there was a revelation given on the inside, there was an inwardness of the unveiling of Jesus Christ. It pleased God to reveal His Son in him. We shall never know all that those three days meant to Saul. They were three mighty days, three tremendous days, we might say three terrific days. He was seeing the Lord Jesus inwardly, and when inwardly he had seen Him, straightway he preached that Jesus is the Son of God; immediately.

Now beloved, for ourselves that principle holds true as it did for Paul, that everything hangs upon an inward revelation of Jesus Christ. Our lives as children of God are constituted by that, and all that we are and all that we do in relation to Him rests upon that inward revelation which has resulted in His centrality and

supremacy so far as our lives are concerned. It is so, even for religious people, for Saul was an exceeding religious man. I say that because so often there is a kind of a mental kick back when we speak of Paul's conversion and the radical nature of it, and the attitude is mentally taken - "Yes, well, we have never had such an experience; God has never done to us what He did to Saul of Tarsus, therefore the same thing cannot be expected of us, and cannot be basic to our lives." Now in spite of such a mental reaction, we want to reaffirm that the law holds good and that you and I will never be Christians, or servants of the Lord, in real spiritual life and effectiveness beyond the measure of our inward apprehension of the Lord Jesus. That is basic to everything. Many have not had a thorough-going revelation or knowledge of the Lord Jesus because they themselves are not thorough-going in anything. Saul of Tarsus was thorough-going and the Lord met him on his own basis, on his own ground, and because he was so thorough-going the Lord was thorough-going with him. "With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward," and the Lord did it. If you and I are more or less careless about spiritual things the Lord will meet us on that ground, and we shall never get anywhere; but when we get to the point of being burnt up to the last ounce in the interests of the Lord, even though we may be mistaken, nevertheless out and out, God will meet us on that ground. Is it not true with so many that the Lord has had to bring them to the place where it was a matter of desperation, life or death hanging upon a new knowledge of Himself? He has not been able to give them that inward unveiling until there could be for them no more life unless there was a new knowledge of the Lord. They wished not to live unless the Lord came to them in a new way. I think the Lord very often works to precipitate that. Well, even for religious persons this principle holds good, that everything hangs, not upon our religion, not upon our religious zeal, but upon the inward revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God's love. Christ brings the glory of God in His face, into our hearts, says the Apostle; just as Moses brought the glory of God upon his face from the mountain into the camp. That glory of God made him as God unto the people, for the Lord said: "... shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." "You shall be as God to these people, you shall stand for Me." So in a far more true, utter, intrinsic way Jesus brings the glory of God in His face into our hearts. "For God... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Everything Tested By This Inwardness

"... that I might preach him." Everything hangs on that. "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him," or proclaim Him; underline the last word "Him," that goes to the heart of everything, that interrogates everything, that weighs up the value of everything, Him! Since Paul's day so very much of Christian activity has been the furthering of a movement, the propagating of a teaching, the furthering of the interests of an institution. It is not a movement, nor to establish a movement in the earth and to get followers, adherents, members, support. It is not an institution, even though we might call that institution the Church. The Church has no existence in the thought of God apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ, and it is judged according to the measure in which Christ the Son of God's love is in evidence by its existence. It is not a testimony, if by that you mean a specific form of teaching, a systematized doctrine. No, it is not a testimony. Let us be careful what we mean when we speak about "the testimony". We may have in our minds some arrangement of truth, and that truth couched in certain phraseology, form of words, and thus speak about "the testimony"; it is not the testimony in that sense. It is not a denomination, and it is not an "undenomination," and it is not an "interdenomination". It is not Christianity. It is not "the work" - oh, we are always talking about "the work": "How is the work getting on?" - we are giving ourselves

to the work, we are interested in the work, we are out in the work. It is not a mission. It is Christ. "... that I might preach *HIM*." If that had remained central and pre-eminent all these horrible disintegrating jealousies would never have had a chance. All the wretched mess that exists in the organization of Christianity today would never have come about. It is because something specific in itself, either a movement, a mission, a teaching, a testimony, a fellowship, has taken the place of Christ. People have gone out to further *THAT*, to project *THAT*, to establish *THAT*. It would not be confessed, nevertheless it is true, that today it is not so much Christ as our work. It is true! Now beloved, an inward revelation is the cure of all that, and all that - am I saying too hard a thing, too sweeping a thing? - the existence of all that represents the absence of an adequate inward revelation of Christ. If Christ the Son of God's love is central and supreme in the heart of the believer so much else goes down, it must go down. Dividing things will go, insofar as they are things which are not controversies with the Lord. Controversies with God will divide, but those artificial things, those things resultant from man's activity and his projecting of himself, insinuating of himself into the interests of God, those things cannot abide where there is an adequate inward revelation of the Lord Jesus; they cannot be. These two things are before us: one, because of the revelation of Jesus Christ in our heart we have a passion for Him; on the other hand, because of the absence of a sufficient revelation of Christ in our hearts we are out for other things which we would say were in His interests, and for Him, but which can never, never satisfy God's heart. It is the satisfaction of the heart of the Father which is in view.

God's Eternal Secret

From eternity God had a secret in His heart - a heart secret. I say a "heart secret" because this term, this designation, "the Son of his *LOVE*" is linked with the mystery, the secret. It was not what God was doing to make His Son an official, in an official sense. It was not some activity (pardon me if it seems irreverent) of a great managing director of the universe seeking to promote someone in whom he had an interest. No, it was the Son of His love; His heart was in this thing, and there was a secret in His heart concerning His Son. He is beloved of the Father. Study the references to the Lord Jesus from the Divine side, the unveiling of God's heart as to Christ, and you will have a new appreciation of what we are saying. The Lord Jesus, speaking that parable of the wicked husbandmen, at last arrived at the sending of the son, and do you remember how He put it? "But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son." Why should they reverence His Son? Because He was the Son of the Father. Because of whose Son He was; because of the relationship. They had evil entreated all servants, but now surely they will change their attitude when the Son comes; surely they will reverence, respect, honour Him. And it was because they said: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance"; because of their utter denial, rejection of the rights of God as represented by His Son, that so great a judgment was pronounced upon them.

Well, it is the Son of God's love, and what is bound up with this whole thing is the satisfaction of the heart of God in relation to that eternal heart secret of His. That lies beneath what we are and all that we do. We are believers on the ground of "Christ in you." Yes, but Christ in you represents the realization of God's heart purposes, that is the way in which He is going to realize it, that is His manner of coming to the end that was in His heart in eternity past: "Christ in you." We can say that God can never realize that heart desire of His concerning His Son, save as there are believers who receive Christ into their hearts. Therefore, it is not converting people to Christianity, or getting them to be followers of a movement; it is receiving Christ, God's satisfaction. Then when we have received Christ,

everything with which we have to do in relation to Him, anything in which we have a voice or an influence, any part that we can take in the Lord's interests, must be wholly, utterly and always for the expression of Christ, the revelation of Jesus Christ, the bringing into view of Christ. *No assembly, no church, no movement, no testimony, no fellowship, is justified in its existence from God's standpoint except insofar as Christ is expressed by it.*

Beloved, we are speaking about the individual. I am not justified, and you are not justified, in claiming to be Christians except in the measure in which Christ is manifested in me, in you; and all the force and weight and ingenuity of hell is out against that. Believers have far more to provoke them to un-Christ-likeness than anyone else in this world. Believers have far more assaults to churn them up and to make them betray Christ than anyone else. Hell is dead set against the revelation of Jesus Christ. Everything begins with this, the revelation of Christ within.

Now we must have this very much in our hearts in its double out-working, in life and service. "What am I here for?" "Why do I bear the Name of Christ?" "What is the meaning of my being related to the Lord?" "What is the point in my salvation?" The answer is: Not my satisfaction, not my gratification, not my salvation as the end in itself, but the revelation of Jesus Christ, the realization of His centrality and supremacy according to the Father's desire. And then in the second place the question is: "What am I going to work for?" "Am I going to work to try to establish some society, some denomination, or some 'undenomination,' to win a place for a teaching, or an interpretation, or a system of truth?" "Is it to some *THING* that I am devoted, or is it to secure for the Lord Jesus His absolute centrality and supremacy?" Whatever we may say, we shall never get past that, we begin and end there. Christ is the beginning and Christ is the end, the A to Z, the Alpha and Omega.

We must have dealings with the Lord very earnestly about a new inward apprehension and appreciation of the Lord Jesus. It is the only way of deliverance from all the unworthy things in ourselves, and in things with which we may be linked. It is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and the only hope of glory, and if it is not that it will certainly mean shame and not glory.

The Lord just write this first fragment deeply in our hearts for His Name's sake.

Chapter Two

THE CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY OF CHRIST TO THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER (CONTINUED)

Reading: Hebrews 1:1-14.

We now go on to the second of the aspects of "Christ in you" and come to the familiar words of Galatians 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

Christ the Life Within

The first is the revelation of Christ within the heart; the second is the life of Christ within. It is important for us to recognize that this is not just the fact that Christ lives within, not merely that Christ is within us, living in us, but this carries with it something more than that; that Christ is the believer's life. Christ within is the very life of the believer; He must be central and supreme as our life, and He is our life just in the measure in which He is central and supreme, no more, no less. But we want to understand in what way Christ within is the life of the believer, and this whole letter to the Galatians helps us to that understanding. I do not want to be too doctrinal or theological in a technical sense, but I do feel that the Lord's people should be clear on the great doctrines of grace. Hence, I would ask for a brief consideration of the background of the statement before us.

We often speak about Christ being our life, we often say things to that effect, that He is our very life. We use another fragment of Scripture which is not in the same realm as this passage exactly, although linked with it: "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory." The principle of Christ being our life is the same, but here there is a background to that. It is not just that Christ is to us the vital energy which we call life. Of course He is that, He is the life; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life in us, but here that is explained by the context and given a deeper meaning. If you look at the immediately surrounding words you will see that this statement of the Apostle represents a change. This letter, as you know, is dealing with the legalism into which the Galatian believers had fallen, by which they had been overcome, overtaken or ensnared. You notice how chapter 3 begins: "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you...?" literally, "Who did cast the witch's spell over you?" They had come under a witch's spell, and it was the spell of a false legalism. Now what Paul is saying here in verse 20 represents a change. Paul had lived, in the old days, by holding on to the law. His position as a Jew was that under the law man must live by the law. The law was: "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not." When the 44 "shalts" were complied with, and the "shalt nots" were observed and avoided, then a man's life was preserved by God. If a man wanted to live and prolong his days upon the earth, then he must keep the law, and so he lived by holding fast to the law, the law of commandments. And we know, even from one like Saul of Tarsus who rigidly kept the law, that it was a tremendously burdensome thing, and it represented always condemnation and death. It was like the sword of Damocles always hanging over the head. Deviate one hair's breadth and you die, you come under condemnation, judgment and death. And the observances associated with purification and right relationship to God never for one moment touched the conscience, never touched the heart, they were merely, shall we say, expediences for the moment; they were purely outward, and there was always the inward sense of something wanting, something lacking. But Saul had lived by holding on to the law, he maintained his life by holding on to the law with all its

burdensomeness, all its wearisomeness, all its threat, judgment, condemnation, and its shadow of death which it always kept in view. That was his past life.

Now, no man had ever been found, as Paul makes perfectly clear in the first chapters of his Roman letter, who in his own nature could perfectly satisfy God on every point and requirement of His Divine law. All had broken down, all had failed, and in no man was the root of righteousness found. God could never be satisfied with mere external righteousness which was not in man himself; a sort of theoretical righteousness and not a practical one; and there had never been found a man in whom there was righteousness as in himself, and the whole race is gathered up in Paul's own declaration about himself with all his ceremonial righteousness: "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing."

Life by Righteousness, in Christ

Now Christ, the only one who could do so, had fulfilled the law up to the hilt in virtue of inherent righteousness, and having satisfied God, not externally, ceremonially, theoretically, but inherently as being the Righteous One, without sin, had in His own person fulfilled the law and put it out of the way. That is done with. God only wanted it fulfilled and then He can put it away. Christ had fulfilled it and put it out of the way and had introduced a new dispensation, not of law but of grace. He has brought in a new regime where the government is not the government of "thou shalt not" and "thou shalt," not a government of systematized legalism, but of grace, and the new dispensation is the dispensation of faith in Christ; faith in Christ as the One who has satisfied every demand that ever God made of man, and has satisfied God on the behalf of all men; faith that in Him all who believe are gathered up and represented, and God is satisfied with all such in Him: He has produced the righteousness that God required in man and God is satisfied. He has produced it as man for man, and God is fully satisfied and content.

Now that Christ, with whom the Father is completely satisfied on the matter of all righteousness, is within the believer; so that the believer in Christ has all righteousness in Him; God is satisfied. The believer is not any more righteous in himself than he ever was, but the Righteous One is within. God does not look upon us, He looks upon His Son in us; and so now Christ lives within, and Paul says in effect, "Now I live, not by holding on to the law but by holding on to Christ, and the thing with which I hold on to Christ is faith." "And that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God." "I am holding on to Him by faith, and I live." There is no condemnation, therefore there is no death; for righteousness is here, and where righteousness is there is no condemnation. There is no sin in Him, and there being no sin in Him, death and judgment have no power, no relationship. He is here, and therefore, He is the living One in the power of a life indestructible, unassailable. "I live by holding on to Him in faith." How? By saying, when the Accuser comes to lay a charge at my door, to bring me under condemnation and death: "Christ is my righteousness." When the Accuser assails with a fiery dart and says: "You are displeasing to the Father" (providing I am not wilfully indulging in sin, knowingly doing that which is displeasing to the Lord, and the enemy tries to bring upon me the sense of being displeased to the Lord and get me down into death), I say: "Christ, who satisfies the Father for me, is in me, the Father is well pleased with Him and He is in me"; and if by faith I hold on to Him, link myself with Him, instead of dying I live, instead of coming under condemnation I triumph; and in that sense Christ within is the life, that life which we live. We live triumphantly not by struggling against sin, and not by trying to answer back the Accuser as on our own ground, but by presenting Christ and holding on to Christ as within us, by faith.

Christ is God's satisfaction within our own hearts. What more do you want? And faith constantly holds on to Him as God's satisfaction. "I have been crucified with Christ" - Why rake me up then? "... and it is no longer I that live" - Why try and charge me with something then? "He that hath died is justified from sin" "... but Christ liveth in me." If you can charge Him with sin, and if you can lay sin to His charge, then there is no hope for me; but inasmuch as He is to the Father all that the Father requires in me, and I constantly keep the link of faith strong in what He is to the Father for me, I live. I do not die, I live, He is my life; He becomes my life in that sense. You see it is something more than our regarding Christ as the vital energy within us which keeps us alive. There is a great background to this whole thing. It gathers up all that Christ is in His person towards the Father, and all that Christ has done in His work on the Cross to satisfy the Father, and that is brought into us to be our indwelling portion, and then faith links on with that, keeps hold of that, and we live, "... and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

That has put into a small compass a very great deal of the Word of God, but I feel that it is something for us to dwell upon. You see what is involved is the bringing of the Lord Jesus back to His place of centrality and supremacy as our life, and it is only as He is that that we live. We live by Christ. Christ is our very life in that sense. Oh! answer back the Accuser with Christ!

The phrase "breastplate of righteousness" is only a metaphorical way, an illustrative way, of putting this truth. The breastplate of righteousness is Christ. He is the Righteous One, He is made unto us righteousness, and it is no use our trying to meet the enemy in ourselves, good or bad; we must meet him with Christ, answer him with Christ every time. And if the Father is making high demands, He has provided Himself with all that He needs in His Son, and He says to us: "All I ask of you is to bring both hands full of My Son; bring both hands full of Him in His perfections, that satisfies Me." Christ is central and supreme in the believer as the believer's life. I would have you make more of the Lord Jesus. The whole stress of these words is upon what He is in the thought of God; and as we grasp this livingly, not merely as doctrine, grasp it in the heart, we shall know what triumph is; we shall know the victory life; we shall know what fullness is. Beloved, I am convinced that it will be in the measure in which we are taken up with the Lord Jesus Himself that we are triumphant, victorious, overcoming children of God, and nothing else can be substitute for that, for what Christ is.

Christ Formed Within

We pass now to the third aspect of this inwardness of Christ, the hope of glory. Galatians 4:19: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." "Until Christ be formed in you."

Firstly we have: Christ in revelation within; secondly, Christ in life within; thirdly, Christ in formation within. Now here again discriminations are necessary. There is a similar passage in Romans 8, or one which appears to be similar. It has words which are very like these, but the two again are not of the same nature although they point to the same thing. Here it is: "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son." There the believer is being conformed to the image of God's Son. Here it is Christ being formed within. There are similitudes, there are differences, and we are occupied with this one in Galatians for its own specific meaning and value.

Take again the whole letter to the Galatians. Bring to mind its object, see what it is that the Apostle has as his motive for writing; that it is the correction of an

error. That falling into that error, the becoming bewitched, under the witch's spell, is due to spiritual immaturity. These believers had not gone on as they should have gone on in the Lord, and because of their belated maturity they had fallen a prey to this thing that was going about. Now the Apostle, writing to correct the error, puts his finger upon the root of the matter, right upon the spot, and he says in effect: "All this is because of the indefiniteness of Christ in you." Follow the metaphor closely and you will see what he is saying. In verse 19 the emphasis is upon the word "formed" "... until Christ be *FORMED* in you." It is a very strong word. What he is saying is: "Yes, Christ is in you inasmuch as you are believers and children of God, but it is an ill-defined Christ, an unformed Christ, a Christ without features developed; He is there, but He has not yet come to clear definition in you, the features are not developed, and because of that there is all this - this weakness and this aptness to be misled; the Christ that you have is one that has not yet come to formation." You see that this is a different thing from Romans 8:29. That points on to our progressive growth, unto the ultimate image of Christ the Son of God. That is what is going on. We are being conformed by chastening, by suffering, by tribulation, by pain, by discipline, by things which the Lord allows to come to us, we are being conformed to the image of Christ. That is what is going on daily, but that is not what is here, this is something else. This is the implication of Christ being clearly defined in our hearts. There was confusion, indefiniteness, because they had not seen clearly that "Christ is the end of the law to them that believe"; that Christ really represented a clean cut between the old dispensation and the new, the old order and the new; that Christ had fulfilled the law and put it out of the way. They had not grasped the clear definition of Christ in their hearts, and because they had not grasped clearly those features of the meaning of the person and work of Christ, they were a prey to anything that came along. Now there are a lot of the Lord's people like that. They are a prey to all sorts of things because they have not recognized the clear implications of Christ within.

The Necessity for a Clear Apprehension of Christ

Why are so many of the Lord's people just beaten and harassed and tormented by the Accuser causing them always to have their eyes turned inward in self-analysis, self-conscious introspection, occupied with themselves all the time; so tied up with themselves that they are useless to God and to other people? Why? Because they have not clearly recognized the implications of Christ; that Christ has answered to God on their behalf in all that God ever requires of them; they have not grasped that by faith. That is the way of deliverance from ourselves. That is deliverance from self into Christ. But still they are in an ill-defined way trying to provide God with satisfaction, and it is an awful struggle. They have not seen the clear features of Christ. Christ is not formed in them. He is (if you will suffer it) an unformed, ill-defined indweller. It is rather a difficult thing to explain, but probably you see what I mean. Immediately we grasp the clear implications of Christ dwelling in the heart, we have come to a settled place, we have come to a strong place, we have come to the place where no legalisers can come along and sweep us off our feet. It is what John meant when writing about the anti-christs, and about the Lord's people saying: "I wonder if this is right, if this is true? It looks very much like it." "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you." Inwardly you know by the anointing whether the thing is right or wrong. You are not able to put it into words, not always able to analyse the thing and say, this or that about it is wrong; you are not able to put it all straight; but in your heart you have a witness that there is something about it of which you have to be careful. There is all the difference between our suspicions and our prejudices and the witness within. Do not try and project your mind into anything; don't think you have to take up a suspicious attitude and question everything to keep yourself safe; don't

think you must be prejudiced for safety's sake. If you are walking in the Spirit you can have your countenance open, your mind open; you can be without fear, the anointing in you will teach you, you will know every time. You may not be able to define it, but you will say: "There is an intangible something in my heart; I know." That word was spoken in regard to antichrists, about which the Lord's people were not sure - "the anointing teacheth you." That is Christ formed within. You come to a clear, defined place. The features of Christ have been defined, delineated; senses have been exercised; Christly faculties have been developed. It is not an unformed thing but something clear; the formed Christ within. Paul says: "I am in anguish, I am in travail over you my brethren, your state of things puts me into a travail that you may come to a place where Christ is defined in your hearts; where He takes form, and is not a formless Christ." That is the meaning of Galatians 4:19.

Christ Settling Down (Home-Making) Within

And then the next thing, the fourth thing. Ephesians 3:17: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all saints..." "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Now here you have an advance upon all the rest. You may not recognize it, but it is an advance. This is not saying, that Christ may take up residence in your heart. This is not saying, that Christ may come into your heart. And this is not saying, that Christ may find a lodgement in your heart. This is saying: "That Christ may dwell in your heart" and the Greek word there is, "make His home" or "settle down" in your heart. "That Christ may make His home in your heart." That is something more than a lodging, that is something more than just coming in and being there. Every house is not a home.

Some of you will be going back to our thoughts about "Bethany," and you will remember how at the outset of our meditation upon Bethany, we showed that Bethany represented the contrast that when He came - He who created all things - came to His own and they that were His own received Him not, so that He said as to His presence here on earth: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head": that was His place in the world: but He came to Bethany, and He came again, and He came again - and in the face of greatest stress, when things were pressing more and more heavily upon Him towards the end, His constant retreat was to Bethany. The only home He seems to have had here on this earth was Bethany. It was because He found heart satisfaction in Bethany. There was one there who "kept on listening." As we pointed out, the literal translation of Mary's listening is: "she kept on listening to His word." He wanted someone, He wanted some heart into which to pour that what was in Himself and find appreciation and response, and He found it at Bethany - the better part. It was His own heart satisfaction there because He was listened to, responded to, and made to feel that it was the greatest of all privileges to have Him there. "That Christ may make his home in your hearts."

We are so often like Martha before she got right (thank God she did get right, and the last picture of Bethany is Martha still serving, but things are right now, the activities outwardly have not outweighed the spiritual activities inwardly; things have been put right) like Martha before the correction, we are doing a multitude of things for the Lord when the Lord is just craving an opportunity to be listened to. The Lord would often say to us: "Yes, I know you mean to be very busy for me, I know you mean it all for Me, I know your motive is right, I quite appreciate all that, but oh, that you would give Me a chance to say a few things to you; oh, that you would give Me an opportunity just to speak into your heart, to show you things which you do not know, which would make such a lot of difference." And this is the explanation of our being called aside at times. He would draw us from

the feverish activities of the "many dishes" to a place where He is listened to. But how much better if we gave Him the chance, than He having to make it. We have got to run the risk of being misunderstood for seemingly doing nothing, as Mary was misunderstood. Sometimes we are afraid that people will think that we are slacking because we get away with the Lord a little more. All right, the Lord knows. But mark you, He will come and make His home where He finds that. It is something more than having Christ as a lodger. (Forgive that way of putting it.) It is Christ being at home in the heart, making His home there. You ask the Lord to apply that to you just as it needs applying. You busy workers, remember that all your work, in the Lord's mind, can never take the place of an opportunity which He craves of being able to speak fuller things into your heart. Your activities will be without vitality unless you are giving Him time to speak and He is having response to new unveilings.

Christ Glorified in the Believer

Now finally, in 2 Thessalonians 1:10. "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." "And to be marvelled at in all them that believe" (A.R.V.). It is the consummation of Christ within. Don't you think that that is a wonderful statement, a wonderful thing that is said there? Yes, we expect to see Him coming in glory, we expect to see the glorified Christ, but He is working something in the meantime which means that when He appears His glory will be in the saints. It is not only the objective Christ in glory coming, it is the subjective Christ manifested in glory. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." He has prayed that we might behold His glory, and He is going to be glorified *IN* the saints and marvelled at *IN* them that believe.

It was - from the world's point of view - an ordinary Palestinian peasant who one day went up the slope of a mountain. There may have been things striking about Him, impressive, but for the most part He was like other men. He reached the summit of that mountain and suddenly that One became ablaze and aflame with heavenly glory, His raiment changed, white and glistening; glorified, changed suddenly from an ordinary man - as the world would say - to the glory of God; suddenly, bewildering those who were there so that they began to talk and did not know what they said. Utterly taken off their feet, as we say. Now beloved, that Christ is in us. We are very ordinary folk amongst men, there is nothing very striking, outstanding, distinguishing about us, but there is a moment coming when that which happened in the mount of transfiguration is going to happen to us; Christ in us is going to blaze out in glory through us, and as those on that mount of transfiguration marvelled at Him, so He is going to be marvelled at in all them that believe. That is the end of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The hope of that glory is Christ in you; in other words, Christ central and supreme. From the initiation to the consummation of the believer's life it all hangs upon that.

We ought to go back over the whole five stages and what each one of them represents as a demand. Do it for yourself. You will see that Christ as revealed in the believer means a captured vessel. Saul of Tarsus was taken prisoner on that day when God's Son was revealed in him. He was a captured man from that day. He called himself "the prisoner of Jesus Christ." You and I have got to be captured.

What "Christ in You" Demands

Christ living within as our life, means a crucified vessel. "I have been crucified" - captured; crucified. Christ formed within means a vessel that is going on with the Lord, not standing where the Galatians were, but going on. Christ making His

home in the heart is connected with being "rooted and grounded in love" and then there follows the phrase "with all saints." Thus fellowship in the Body of Christ, and the mutual love one for the other is a "Bethany" principle, leading to Christ's settling down. And so each one represents its own peculiar responsibility and demand, until you come to the consummation; and you find the context of each shows you what the demand is. In the consummation that letter to the Thessalonians speaks about their suffering, their joyful suffering for the Saviour's sake. They were suffering indeed because they had turned from idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from the glory, and they suffered, but suffered joyfully. And the consummation of glory is related to faithfulness through suffering. You see there is a demand for each thing. You can look at it more closely.

The Lord find in us that which responds to His purpose and makes possible the realization of His heart secret: "Christ in you," central, supreme, "the hope of glory."

Chapter Three

THE CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY OF CHRIST TO THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY

Reading: 1 Chronicles 28:1-21; Colossians 1:18.

The second realm of the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ is that of the Body, the Church. First of all let us take note of exactly what is said in this verse. "He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." That translation: "... who is the beginning" is hardly sufficient; the more complete and literal translation there would be: "In that he is the beginning." It helps you to understand what is being said here; reading it like that you will at once come into the fuller apprehension of the truth. "He is the head of the body, the church, in that he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." So you see that here the Church is related to Christ by His resurrection: "In that he is the firstborn from the dead." He is the Head of the Body, the Church in His resurrection.

Resurrection and Headship

The Headship is two-fold; it is as to place. He occupies the supreme place; and it is as to time; that place was occupied by Him in relation to the Body, the Church, in His resurrection. So that the headship of Christ over the Body, the Church, is by His resurrection. That represents more than may appear for the moment, but I think you will see, as we go on, the greater and fuller context. Now having said so much about the headship of Christ, or His centrality and supremacy in the life of the individual believer, we must recognize that the individual headship of Christ is not, so far as the believer is concerned, an independent authority. It is relative; that is, in other words, there are not so many heads as there are believers, constituting every believer a single entity authority, making of every believer an independent authority. While the headship must be established in every individual believer, there is only one headship and not ten thousand times ten thousand, or a great multitude which no man can number. One Head: which means that everything is relative and the very thought of the Body is that of a unity under one Head. The idea, the conception of a body clearly represents the idea of a unity under one head. The individual supremacy of Christ will lead to the spirit and principle of the Body. I mean that if Christ is central and supreme really in the individual life of believers, the natural, the spontaneous, the inevitable outworking of that will be the principle of the Body. If Christ dwells in your heart by faith - that was one phase of the individual centrality and supremacy of Christ which we considered - if Christ dwells in your individual heart through faith, it leads to the next part of the verse: "... that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend *with all the saints*...." Christ dwelling in the individual heart immediately leads to "all saints." The principle of the Body comes out of the establishing of the centrality and supremacy or headship of Christ in the individual. There is a contradiction, beloved, if it is claimed by anyone that Christ is supreme in the heart and in the life and yet such a one be marked and characterized by personal and independent action and interest. There is a violent contradiction there. Christ cannot be absolutely supreme in the individual life and there be a personal independent activity and interest. If anyone is a law unto himself in spirit - although he would never say that of himself - if his life takes the feature of being something detached, something separate, something independent, something apart from the rest of the Lord's people, a watertight compartment, there is a contradiction there, Christ is not supreme, Christ is not central. These two things cannot be reconciled, independence and the Body; independence and the supremacy of the Lord Jesus; because He is supreme in

the life as a Head, but not merely as the Head of an individual but the Head of the Body, one Head of all. The Body, as that which issues with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, reverses the very spirit of independence.

The Body of Christ Represents His Victory

We must see that the Body of Christ represents a tremendous victory. That Body comes out of His resurrection, or with His resurrection, and the pre-eminent example of the exercise of Divine power in this universe is in the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead, or from among the dead. That raising of Christ from among the dead, representing the supreme exercise of Divine power, represents the mighty victory of God in Christ, and if the Body of Christ comes out with and in His resurrection, that Body is a part of an expression of that mighty victory of God. Now Ephesians makes that perfectly clear and says that actually: "... the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenlies." The Body of Christ is the mighty victory of God in Christ in its realization. What was the nature of that victory? Over what was it a victory? It was over that spirit which came into the universe and found concrete, direct expression in bringing about schism, division, disintegration in the universe. Everything was held as a whole in God. It was one thing in Him. He, in eternity past, summed up everything in His Son, the Lord Jesus, that in Him all things should hold together, subsist; should be a corporate whole bound together in a oneness in the Son of His love. When Lucifer, Satan, saw the pre-eminent position and the transcendent glory of God's Son, he aspired to occupy a position even above that, to have something even above that, and so he broke away from that relativity of things in the Head, and in an independence of spirit, and action, and motive he sought to have things for himself apart from the Head Divinely appointed. The outworking of that in heaven brought schism there, a breach; the unity of heaven was broken, and angels kept not their first estate and were cast out and are reserved in everlasting chains. The unity of heaven was broken. But Lucifer brought that spirit down into the creation; and whereas God had given to man all things to have in Himself (in His secret which He had not yet revealed to the ages, His secret, His mystery, His unrevealed heart secret concerning His Son), Lucifer again, the Adversary, provoked, prompted, tempted, lured man to have it for himself out of relation to God, and man moved in an independence of God, acted again in an independent spirit, a self spirit, to have things not in God but in himself. Thus in this earth the schism of heaven had a counterpart; the unity of things in God was broken into, and from that time the principle of the fallen race is independence, self-direction, self-realization, self-possession; the flesh is just that, and that lies back of the whole terrible history of the revolt in heaven and the wreckage in earth. There is no unity until Christ comes, God in Christ. The Adversary has to meet God in Christ on this issue, and when God raised Him from the dead and brought with Him - as the Firstborn from among the dead - the Church, the Body, He secured His answer to all that work of the Devil; and the Church, the Body of Christ, represents God's victory over the disintegrating, dividing, schismatic work of the Devil. Oh yes, that is true in spite of everything. Ever since this, what he did at the beginning and always has done he has pursued with unabated energy, that is, slandering God, and he has tried to slander God since the resurrection of the Lord Jesus by the work which he has done among men, working upon flesh, even amongst Christians, to bring about schisms and divisions; carnality is behind it all. The enemy has done that, and in so doing he has sought to establish a contradiction to God's victory. But beloved, the unity is not in us, it is in Christ; the unity is not our unity, it is the unity of Christ. The unity is in a person. Now you see the necessity for Christ to be central and supreme.

Christ - the Unifying Centre and Object

As we have said before, if we have got any other interest that we are trying to further, something that we call a testimony, perhaps meaning by that a system of teaching, or a fellowship, or a denomination, or the contrary, the opposite, any of these things, well, the history will be still more divisions, it is bound to be. If it is Christ, only Christ, central and supreme, we have got the answer to the Devil; we have got the secret of victory, we have got the secret of fellowship, we have the power of His resurrection. Oh, how important it is for us to see that the Body represents His victory. The Body is His victory in the sense that it is the reversing of all independence, and that independence of spirit or action is a violation not only of the truth of the Body of Christ, but of the power of His resurrection. Now that carries you a long way. Fail to recognize that and you have not got the secret of victory over death and the power of the Devil. Isn't that exactly what the Apostle said to the Corinthians? "... not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" some die. Not all sickness and death, of course, is to be accounted for by failure to recognize the Body of Christ, but the Holy Spirit does put His finger upon that, and says that a very great deal can be accounted for by that. That sickness might have been handled and dealt with; that death, that taking away, might have been unnecessary if there had been a recognition of that for which the Body of Christ stands and an employing of the practical value of corporate life among the saints. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord." Elders - why? Why that? That is the recognition of the corporate principle, that is the recognition of the Body of Christ. Those elders are only representatives of the Body, and it is bringing the Body in, representatively, and that Body represents His victory, and if the enemy is back of this thing, well, it is through His Body as Head that He operates against the enemy. We may be suffering a great deal more than we need suffer because we have failed to see the Divine order. The enemy may be making much more havoc than he ought to be, because we have failed to apply the Divine means. We have kept the thing to ourselves and we have not drawn the Body in representatively, we have not made this a corporate matter. Individualism may rob us of a great deal in every realm.

Independent Life Contrary to God's Will

But what I was saying was, that the Body reverses independence, and we violate some of the great revelations of God when there is independence, separateness, when we just drive our own chariot and plough our own furrow, and do not recognize that we are a part of a whole. All that horrible work that the enemy has done is reversed by the Lord Jesus, and the outworking of His reversing of that work is through the Body, the Church. That is His instrument in resurrection for making known, through this age and the ages to come, the mighty victory over all the disintegrating work of Satan's independent action and spirit which he has introduced into the race. But this thing is very deeply rooted in us; the subtlety, the imperceptible desire of the flesh for gratification. If we were asked straight out whether we wanted to please ourselves, whether we were after our own personal gratification, whether it was our pleasure and satisfaction that was motivating our lives and directing us, we would at once most vehemently repudiate the suggestion, and probably be very offended with whoever made the suggestion; and yet, beloved, deeper than our deepest honesty, deeper than our truest sincerity, there is that subtle constituent of fallen nature which so often unperceived by the believer himself or herself does just love to be gratified, personally satisfied, and which does not like to be emptied out and have nothing. Gratification and glory is the very essence of the flesh even when we are engaged in the Lord's work. To set up something *FOR THE LORD*, yes, but men point at it

and say: "That is his work and her work," and how we like that! Something that will be a good testimony to faith, a great monument - yes, but subtly the monument to *OUR* faith. Such is this horrible thing that is always reaching out from beneath, under cover, and, quietly and imperceptibly, taking the glory of the Lord to itself. The remedy for that is the Body of Christ practically applied in principle. Yes, it is! That is why it is so difficult to live a corporate life with other believers, because you have to be so thoroughly crucified. There is nothing that demands crucifixion more than to live with other Christians all your days. You say: "That is a terrible thing to say," but you know what I am talking about. You have to defer, refer, consult, submit, let go. In a thousand and one ways you have to put your own likes and dislikes aside if the Lord is to get His end. Oh yes, it is the Body of Christ that is the saving thing. It is corporate life that is the remedy, but O beloved, that is the way of triumph, the way of victory. It is! It is a mighty remedy for the flesh, a mighty remedy for the work of the Devil, but it does represent the mighty power of God working in us. You see, you can never come into the Body of Christ until you have been crucified. It is because uncrucified flesh has impinged upon the corporate life of believers that there is such contradiction and denial, because the Body represents the exclusion of man, in himself - flesh.

The Body Necessary to Full Apprehension of Christ

Now the Body is essential to full apprehension and growth and expression. The body is essential to full apprehension. No individual, and no number of isolated and detached individuals, can come to the full apprehension of Christ. The Lord has constructed the whole thing upon that principle. You think of all the range of the people of God being standardized, say, to one mind. You say: "That would be an awful outlook." It would! I mean this, the very fact that the Lord has so constituted us differently every one of us, makes possible the varied aspect of apprehension which is its own peculiar contribution. And I am able to say: "Well, the Lord has shown you *THAT* I did not see *THAT* but it is splendid"; I profit by that. And you are able to say: "Well that never came to me, but thank the Lord I can profit by that." And so it is the whole Body that is necessary unto the full apprehension of Christ. The Apostle's prayer is that we "... may be strong to *apprehend with all the saints...*"; it takes all the saints to apprehend, and we lose a very great deal when we are detached, isolated, separated spiritually.

The Body Necessary to Full Growth in Christ

The Body is necessary to fullness of apprehension, also to growth, because it is the Body that grows up, that is built up, and buildeth itself up until it comes to the full measure of the stature of a man in Christ. You and I individually will never reach the full measure of that stature. I am never promised that I shall reach the full measure of Christ, personally, but as a member, a limb, or even a little tiny corpuscle in this great spiritual organism, with all the rest I can come to His fullness. It will take all the rest to come to His fullness, and insofar as I am detached I am limited, straitened. Insofar as I come into the fellowship of the Body and recognize the Lord's way, I am enlarged in the measure of Christ.

The Body Necessary to Full Manifestation of Christ

In the expression of Christ the same thing holds good. Is He going to manifest Himself against the enemy? Well, beloved, I shall have very little hope against the enemy in a detached capacity; but if I can bring in the Body, even if it is only in two or three gathered into His Name, that represents the Body, and the principle of the Body in function and representation is there; (and the Lord binds Himself up with a principle) He is in the midst. The Lord's irreducible minimum for

His Body is two, not one. Bring in the Body even by its minimum representation and the Lord recognizes the full value of the Body, and for manifestation it is in fullness through the Body. That is why alone we are so often brought to a standstill; why so often it is hopeless for us to try and get through until we draw in co-operation. The Lord holds us to that. But if you can get the Lord's people in a larger, fuller way into the real spiritual apprehension of the headship of Christ in relation to the Body, how much greater will be the potency of the impact of Christ in manifestation over against the enemy, and before men. The Body is necessary for the manifestation of Christ in fullness, and that is the Divinely determined method of the full manifestation of Christ in the ages to come. The headship of the Lord Jesus demands the Body. Not so many detached individuals, but the Body; because a head implies a body, demands a body.

Individualism is Limitation and Weakness

Now I think I can close this phase for the moment; and in doing so, let me stress once more the certain limitation which must be associated with mere individualism and detachment and independence. There may be a very great deal accomplished by independent action, apparently; you can see things and people which are independent, detached, and you can see a very great deal apparently being done. Now in spite of that, I say most emphatically that that does not get where God wants it to get. It may be a wide surface but a superficial one, without depth. It may only get just so far in spiritual things, and not get any further. It may reach the point of conversions; but conversions, beloved, are not God's end, they are only God's beginning. There may be much in that realm, praise God, but while we rejoice at every conversion and every bit of work that results in conversions, have we not come to see that there is infinitely more than that in the will of God? The tragedy is that so many who have been led to the Lord have not been taken on, and have either stuck or they have gone back simply because their being brought to the Lord was not upon an adequate presentation of the fullness of Christ. It was upon the basis of their being saved; but Christ did not come into His place as supreme, sovereign Lord and Head, and very often you have to go over the ground again and again simply because there has been a stopping short. Well, you can have a great deal of activity and apparent result - my point is not that that is without value, but it is this, that invariably and inevitably, there is always limitation, if we do not go on to see that the Body of Christ represents His fullness, and not individual Christian life or work. It is not our individual service for the Lord, it is the service of the Body with which we are joined, that leads to fullness. There will be weakness, limitation - ah, yes, and more than that, there will be exposure to error along the line of mere individualism, exposure to error, and a falling into error. Have we not seen this again and again? Things becoming marked by clear misleading, confusion, a having to take back positions and statements, and a confessing that a mistake was made, and the calculations were all wrong because there was something that was independent, individual in that thing. We need the covering of the headship of Christ in His Body amongst His saints to save us from that. You may take it - you will prove it to be so in the outworking - that mere individual independence in the life and service of the Lord will sooner or later bring to a point of limitation, and an element of contradiction and confusion will come in there. It is bound to be. To enquire in His House is the way of the ordered guidance of the Lord. You are struggling to get an independent guidance from the Lord and a whole lot of contradictions are coming in; you really do not know where you are and what is right. The Lord is not going to give you that which will constitute you a law unto yourself in relation to Him, He is going to give it to you in relation to His main purpose. Share it with the Lord's children, bring in those whom the Lord has provided to be fellows, and in that multitude of counsellors you will find wisdom. In the Lord's way you will find clearness.

You see the principle is a clear one and it just comes right back to the point where we started. It is not making the Body everything - God forbid! It is seeing that the Lord Jesus, as head of the Body, brings us under His headship for protection, for guidance, for fullness, for everything, and we recognize that we are members of a Body and we are not individual units merely. This is a relative thing. We come to enjoy all that is in Christ, and that Christ is as Head, Sovereign, in relation to the saints, in fellowship with the saints, and not in some detached line of our own. We want the Lord's full support? We get it relatively and not independently.

May the Lord help you to accept His Word, to lay it up in your heart, because I am quite sure that here is the way of a fullness which we may not have known, coming into what the Lord Jesus is by Divine appointment, in greater measure. It is this way. The Lord give us grace to let go our love to be free and independent, and to be crucified to that flesh, brought to live under His sovereignty, to Him as supreme.

Chapter Four

THE CENTRALITY AND SUPREMACY OF CHRIST AS "HEAD OF ALL PRINCIPALITY AND POWER"

Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13; 2:10, 15.

In a previous meditation it was Christ's centrality and supremacy in the light of the individual which occupied us; then it was His centrality and supremacy in the Church, which is His Body. We are now to consider that which is implied by the tenth verse of chapter two of Colossians: "... the head of all principality and power." Going with that is this statement from chapter one: "... who delivered us out of the power of darkness."

The Great Colossian Error

To apprehend rightly and appreciate truly the value of particular statements in the letter, such as this which we have just read, we must keep in view the background and occasion of the letter; and so for a moment we will be occupied with the main things which are in view in this letter. And firstly, and all inclusively, there is this absolute supremacy of Christ. For the unveiling of that to the believers and the establishing of the believers in that, the Holy Spirit led the Apostle to write this letter. It was because of a movement by means of a teaching which had come to Colossae, the effect of which was to take the Lord Jesus out of His prominent place and put Him in a lower place, that this letter was provoked. It was a corrective. The nature of that teaching was a combination of Judaism with a spurious Christian philosophy. There were elements of Judaism and elements of Christianity woven into a somewhat fascinating philosophy, and it had to do in the main with supernatural beings from low orders to very high orders: principalities and powers in the lower realms and in the higher realms, and these orders of supernatural and spiritual beings were traced through the ranks of spirits and angels and archangels, and then, as one of them, but of very high rank, Christ was presented. And He was made to be just one of the superior, or perhaps the unique superior head, of angelic forces, angelic orders, and these were offered for worship. There was what the Apostle calls here: "a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels," by which he meant that people were assuming to be very humble people, worshipping angels, bowing down to any superior person in the spiritual realm, a voluntary humility and worship of angels. As you will see by reading again, the Apostle repudiates the whole thing as being earthly, and of man, and being pernicious and evil, and to be utterly put out because, under cover of a very sincere and earnest religiosity, it subtly struck at this one thing, it struck at the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus as in the Godhead. It was a wonderful thing. It drew out worship. It even led to the worship of Jesus, it gave Him a very high place in heavenly orders; it represented a very great deal of devotion, and with its external rites which were taken over from Jewish ordinances, which you will see in the letter, it captured a great many, and they accepted it as a revelation, a wonderful revelation, and as a truth to be received and obeyed. They were in danger of failing to recognize the peril of this thing, that though it exalted Christ, led to the worship of Christ, produced in those who accepted it an attitude, apparently spiritual, of reverence and humility and had that moral effect in them of something to make them very reverential people, very humble, earnest people, with a great devotion to Christ, and a great respect for everything spiritual; yet all that blinded them to the deep, subtle, devilish thing that was there. How far Satan will go even in bringing about a kind of devotion to Christ, and promote a mystical, psychical "Christianity" (?) with elements of moral elevation, and yet hide within that very thing something which is of himself and, being of himself, savours of that which was in him from that

time when he himself was hurled out of heaven, that thing which would take from the Lord Jesus the absoluteness of His place in the Godhead.

That is what was here, back of this letter; and the letter was written to expose this Gnostic philosophy, this false spirituality, this Satanic devotion to the Lord Jesus, and to show that the Lord Jesus was not only at the top of angelic ranks, He was Head of all principality and power in the sense that He was the Son of God's love, and that He was one eternally with God in the Godhead. The fullness of the Godhead was in Him in bodily form.

Now, beloved, from what we have just said there ought to be guidance for us at the end time; and you can take what I have said and apply it to some things which are of this very character, which will have great vogue in the earth, but which just fall short of this essential thing. But that is not the object of my saying this, though it may provide that understanding and knowledge and guidance and precaution. He is head of all principality and power, Christ is absolutely supreme, in a unique supremacy, not as one of that order, at the top of that order, but One whose order is far above every other order and whose supremacy is because there is not another like Him. He does not belong to the angelic order. He is not a created being. He is eternally one with God. Of course, to you that is nothing new, and provokes not a very great deal of enthusiasm because we all believe that quite heartily. I hope that is true of you; that you believe that, that you stand there, that from your heart you are well able to say without the slightest suspicion of a reservation: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Christ's Supremacy Indicated by His Work

Now having said that, and seen that, you are able to move on to the thing which is connected with it as a main thing in this letter. Connected with the absolute supremacy of Christ, is His supremacy as indicated by His work. It is here that the Apostle shows in what way Christ is different from, and superior to, all other orders of angels and archangels and principalities and powers. It is not just the statement of the fact that He is, but it is the showing of *HOW* that is so, in what way that is so; and it is by reason of His work. You see that is what comes out in this letter. You take the great statement of chapter 1:13: "Who delivered us out of the authority (lit.) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." You can say that about no angel or archangel. There is no other being in heaven or in earth to whom you can attribute that. That represents His mighty work, and it was that that He did in what you read in chapter 2:15: "Having put off (lit. stripped off) from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (His Cross)." When He did that He delivered us out of the authority of darkness, and we were translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. No angel did that. No archangel stripped off principalities and powers. He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross. It was Christ who did that. It is Christ's whose is the kingdom. It is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, His is the kingdom; and that kingdom is His by reason of conquest, by reason of triumph, by reason of casting out all other principalities and powers; by displaying openly in His triumph those others who sought to take possession of the dominion of this world. His is the kingdom in virtue of His Cross; and His Cross is the scene of His dealing with every other authority and power in the universe that would in any way seek to take His rights as the eternal, predestined heir of all things, as the Apostle here says: "All things have been created through him, and unto him." The supremacy is based upon His work.

It is a great thing of course to recognize the personal supremacy of the Lord Jesus; it is an added thing, beloved, to recognize the greatness of the work which

He accomplished which brought Him into that personal supremacy. In Philippians 2 we see the descending movement of the Son of God's love from the place of equality with God down, down, down, until utterly emptied; He became "obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." "Yea" says the Apostle: "yea" - and no glorious death, no honourable death in the sight of men - "the death of the cross" - "Wherefore" (For this reason, on this account, because of this, the death of the cross) "also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The ground of His supremacy is the uniqueness and the transcendence of the work which He has done.

Our Place in this Supremacy

Now the third thing which comes in with this letter brings us in. That is all glorious, and our hearts ought to be moved by that great objective reality, the supremacy of Christ and His work: but we have got to see how we come into it, and one or two fragments will help us. Let us look at Colossians 2:12. "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses." "If ye died with Christ" - might we not leave out the "if" and make it an affirmation: "Ye died with Christ." "If then ye were raised together with Christ..." You see formerly he has made the statement that this was so, that we were buried with Him, that we were raised with Him. Now we might take it up like that, as a two-fold affirmation: Ye died with Christ; ye were raised together with Christ: "... seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." The right hand is always the place of honour and power; that is where He is. "For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there cannot be Greek and Jew... but Christ is all, and in all." That is the way into the good of what we have been saying and it is necessary for us to carry Christ's work right through to this full issue. The full issue of His absolute victory in the realm of all principality and power, in the realm of the authority of darkness - I say it is necessary to carry His work through to that full issue. Forgiveness of sins is a great blessing, the atonement for our sins is a great blessing, to be saved from hell at last and go to heaven is a great blessing, we would not minimise them for a moment or take from the greatness and the grandeur of those things because of the infinite cost with which they were purchased for us, but I say again, it is necessary for us to carry the work of Christ through to its full issue, and its full issue lies in the realm of principalities and powers, lies in the realm of the authority of darkness, the jurisdiction of darkness. That is important for the sinner to know, that it is not only a matter of being forgiven his sins and saved from sin, but that the sinner should know that in salvation all the authority, the jurisdiction of principalities and powers, of the Adversary, Satan himself, has been destroyed and broken, and out of that jurisdiction, that authority, that rightful hold of Satan, they have been rescued - for that is the word here - rescued by Christ in His Cross; it means that Satan has no more power because he has no more right. His power depends upon his right, and his right is based upon a state of things in our hearts, and the Cross deals with the state of things and destroys or removes the ground of his right, and breaks his power. Carry it right through. Now all that is in Christ for us. Christ in Himself embodies His supremacy over the Adversary because in Him there is no one of that ground that the Adversary must have upon which to encamp and construct his rightful

authority to hold in bondage. In Christ there is no such ground; Christ is in us when we believe, and, as we have already pointed out, that apprehended by faith means that the authority of Satan is broken because there is that in us which is Christ; there is Christ in us in whom there is no ground for the jurisdiction of Satan. To be delivered not only from sin (let me say it again) but from the authority of Satan, is a tremendous thing. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." What is the value of that? The Accuser comes along and tries to lay a charge against us. What is our ground of answer? Oh, our ground of answer is this: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." That is the way to answer the accusation of the enemy; Christ, who hath triumphed over sin and over all the grounds of Satan's authority. You and I can never meet the enemy ourselves in ourselves, he would have the best of the argument every time, but if we are able to present him with Christ, what can he do? "... the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." They are the words of the Lord Jesus. What power has he? In Christ's death and resurrection all his power has been destroyed. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Do you follow that? That is the provision God has made, and if only we had a fuller, readier apprehension of Christ we should find that to be the way of victory. What is it that the Holy Spirit works upon in order to make victory in us actual? It is not our struggles to be better. *THE HOLY SPIRIT NEVER HELPS US IN A STRUGGLE TO BE BETTER*. We may struggle on for ever, and die struggling, and the Holy Spirit will not help us if that is the way in which we think we are going to be either saved or sanctified. What is it with which the Holy Spirit will cooperate? It is our faith apprehension and appropriation of Christ as our perfection, as our salvation. "Oh," you say, "yes, but we are sinful and there is so much wrong about us; are we to close our eyes to actualities about ourselves?" You are to open your eyes to Christ. Stop looking at yourself and your own sin and get your eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus as perfection for you to God, and from God to you, and as you take Him by faith - "Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art" - "I in myself am bad: '... in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,' but Lord, You are my salvation, You are my righteousness, You are my holiness, You are my sanctification, I hold on to You for all that" the Holy Spirit makes that good to us. It is our appreciation of Christ that is the Holy Spirit's ground of activity; that is the way of deliverance.

Christ the Way Out for the Sinner

Hear that wretched man crying out: "... for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." In that up and down life, resolving and failing, at last he cries: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me? ...I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." What is the way out for the wretched man? An apprehending of Christ. Not his struggles, his resolutions, his efforts in making up his mind that today he is going to be better, and coming back and having to repent at the end of the day. No, no! It is our faith-hold on Christ which is the way out, the positive ground of victory. You try that way. God honours His Son, and God honours our faith in His Son. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again," triumphant; and, "Christ in you" "... the head of all principality and power." This, for the unsaved, is a necessary fact. If we had been converted on the strength of this we would have been stronger believers from the beginning. If only we had known this when first we were saved we would have leaped into something that came to us many years afterward. Oh for the preaching of salvation to the full! You get a different kind of convert altogether when you carry the work of Christ to its full issue; when it is not only preached that your sins will be forgiven and you will go to heaven and not hell - perhaps a little more than that; but it is infinitely more than that, and if only we preached the fullness of Christ's work we would have converts that went ahead, apace, and reached maturity much sooner

than the majority are doing, and we should find that most of our conventions are quite unnecessary, for they are mostly to get us to the place where we ought to have come when we were converted.

The Preacher Needs to Know This

It is necessary for the believer; may I just say that is necessary for the worker, the preacher of the Gospel, the one who has to do with souls. You will not be a popular preacher of course, if you preach this. You will find, more than ever, that hell will be out against you, and many of the Lord's people will turn against you, but it is necessary. You take the case of the heathen; though what we have in the heathen is only obvious and patent: the same thing holds in the case of the enlightened, civilized, but it is not so obvious, it has been covered up by civilization and a great deal of Christian tradition: but in the case of the heathen it is very patent. What is the trouble with so many converts from heathenism? They go so far on the matter of forgiveness and salvation from sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus, but oh, the haunting, tracking, pursuing fear of the spirit world, evil spirits, the authority of darkness; it follows them up, and very often that is the thing which drags them down and brings them back into bondage; and because of the fear of that, and the consequences of their action in breaking from the traditions of their fathers, fear of the consequences in the spiritual realm, what may happen to them, what may overtake them, they become again in bondage to fear and leave the way and go back.

If only we could bring to them in the power of the Holy Ghost right at the beginning the proclamation of Him "who delivered us out of the power (lit. authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love," and get that in, we should see different results. Take that to them.

Beloved, the same thing obtains here in this country as in heathen countries, but I have said it is veiled. The authority of darkness is just as real here as it is amongst the heathen, the same Gospel is necessary, and you will find that until you have registered the impact of Christ's Calvary work against spiritual forces behind men you have not wrought out their full deliverance. We believers know what it is for the enemy to try to get us into the grip of fear again concerning himself. The authority of darkness is a very real thing to us. We have experiences, and if we were to capitulate to them, that would be the end of us. He tries to bring upon us that impingement of the authority of darkness, and if we surrender to it, capitulate to it, accept it, we are beaten. If we are the Lord's, Christ is within, and Christ is supreme and we must go on even if we have no feeling, or if we have a very bad feeling; when it seems to be the last thing we ought to be saying, we say it because it is God's fact, and when we begin to affirm God's fact we win through. Believers know what it is for the enemy to try to make them accept the authority of darkness. Stand upon the truth of God. God does not change with our feelings. God does not alter with our consciousness. This whole life of ours is subject to variation, more swift than the variation of weather, but He rules, unalterable, unchangeable. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." And if He is there within, He has come to stay, and victory is in faith; believing that, standing on that, holding to that; and we must carry that through to its final and full issue, that He is Lord of all, "Head of all principality and power." Satan will sometimes try to make us believe that he is in the place of ascendancy, the place of supremacy, but since Calvary he is not, we stand there.

The Lord give us a new joy in the Son of His love as supreme in every realm.

*Flash from our eyes the glow of our thanksgiving,
Glad and regretful, confident and calm,*

*Then through all life and what is after living
Thrill to the tireless music of a psalm.*

*Yea; through life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning;
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.*