

*Great Doctrines
of the Bible*

THREE
VOLUMES
IN ONE

GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON

VOLUME ONE

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

VOLUME TWO

THE CHURCH AND THE LAST THINGS

VOLUME THREE



MARTYN
LOYD-JONES

Great Doctrines of the Bible



On Friday evenings in post-World War II London, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones held discussions in one of the halls of Westminster Chapel. These discussions tackled the practical issues of the Christian life, but the questions that arose often involved matters of doctrine. The meetings were so well-attended, and so many people were asking about the biblical doctrines, that Lloyd-Jones moved the meetings into the Chapel itself and began to give a series of lectures on doctrine. Out of those lectures came the initial material for a three-volume series, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Now this material is combined into one volume—a comprehensive systematic theology of the Christian faith.

Concerned that the truth be in words “understood by the people” and that it not remain only in the head, Lloyd-Jones uses clear language and makes application in each chapter. Through this book he extends to Christians a compelling invitation to study the Scriptures and to learn and integrate doctrine with daily life. For when we do, we encounter the riches of God’s grace and come to understand more deeply the significance of the Cross.



Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), minister of Westminster Chapel in London for thirty years, was one of the twentieth century's leading voices in evangelical doctrine and preaching. His many books, including nearly twenty that Crossway has published so far, have brought profound spiritual encouragement to millions around the world.



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Great Doctrines of the Bible

THREE
VOLUMES
IN ONE

“People come to you . . . and speak from the Scriptures; you know there is something wrong, yet you don’t know what to answer to it. The whole purpose of studying the biblical doctrines is that Christians may discover the error in these teachings. If they can once grasp what the Bible does teach, they can test all other teachings that are offered to them.”

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

*Y*ou’ve experienced the need for sound, biblical doctrine, haven’t you? When members of a cult showed up at your doorstep. When a coworker started spouting New Age ideas. When a pastor candidated at your church. When your son came home from college and wanted to know how the Bible could be true in light of all the other worldviews out there. It is essential that we think with clarity about these issues because so much in our world openly defies biblical Truth—the media, our schools, even many of our “religions.”

If you’ve realized the urgency of knowing the doctrinal ground on which you stand, the chapters of this book will help you grasp that foundation. Lloyd-Jones explains the character and ministries of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, as well as the Bible’s teaching on the church and the last things. If you want to learn more about the great doctrines of the Bible but don’t want to wade through lengthy academic works, this book is for you.

THEOLOGY

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VOLUME I
GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON

VOLUME II
GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

VOLUME III
THE CHURCH AND THE LAST THINGS

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

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GREAT DOCTRINES
OF THE BIBLE

VOLUME I

GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

CROSSWAY BOOKS

A DIVISION OF

GOOD NEWS PUBLISHERS

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Great Doctrines of the Bible, Volume 1: God the Father, God the Son

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Preface

On Friday evenings after the war, Dr Lloyd-Jones held discussion meetings in one of the halls in Westminster Chapel in London. The subjects of these discussions were practical issues in the Christian life and the meetings were attended by many people. The questions which arose demanded a knowledge of biblical teaching of all kinds; often, too, a matter of doctrine would arise which the Doctor would deal with, usually in his summing up at the end of the discussion. It was partly as a result of this, partly, too, because the numbers were becoming too large for the hall, and, perhaps even more, because so many people were asking him about the biblical doctrines, that he felt it right to move the 'Friday night meeting' into the Chapel itself and to give a series of lectures on those great subjects. He did this from 1952 to 1955 and after that he began his magisterial series on the epistle to the Romans which continued until his retirement in 1968. The doctrine lectures were very much appreciated by the large congregations who heard them and, over the years, many have borne testimony to the way in which their Christian lives have been strengthened by them.

Later, the Doctor himself felt happier about preaching doctrines as a part of regular exposition—'If people want to know about a particular doctrine, they can find it in the doctrine text books,' he once said. But the great strength of his doctrinal studies is that they are not arid text-book lectures. He was, above all, a preacher and this shines through in all of them. He was also a pastor and wanted men and women to share his sense of wonder and his gratitude to God for the mighty facts of the gospel; so his language is clear and not encumbered by complex academic phraseology. Like Tyndale, he wanted the truth [p viii] to be in words 'understood of the people'. Also he did not want the teaching to remain in the head only, so there is an application in each lecture to make sure that the heart and will are touched also. The glory of God was his greatest motive in giving these lectures.

Those who know the preaching and the books of Dr Lloyd-Jones will realise, on reading the lectures, that his views on a few subjects developed over the years and that his emphases may not always have been the same. But this is all part of the richness of his ministry as it has been of the ministry of many of the great preachers of the past. However on the essential, fundamental truths of the Word of God, there is no change and his trumpet does not give an uncertain sound.

We have had one difficulty in preparing these lectures for publication. They were delivered in the early days of tape recording so that in a few places the words have been difficult to decipher and a few tapes are missing. Also, only a very few of the lectures were taken down in shorthand so in one or two cases we have neither a tape nor a manuscript. Fortunately, however, the Doctor kept his very full notes on all the lectures so we have used them, though, of course, it means that these chapters are not as full as the others.

The Doctor's tapes are distributed by the Martyn Lloyd-Jones Recordings Trust and, of all his tapes, by far the largest number of requests is for these doctrine lectures. The lack of knowledge of the vital truths of the Christian faith is greater now than ever before—certainly greater than it was in the 1950s—so it is our prayer that God would use and bless these lectures again to our strengthening and to His glory.

The Editors

1

My Purpose and Method

It is always good for us to start with a text. Not that I am going to preach, but I do want us to begin with some words which will give the background of all I propose to say now, and which will explain what I am proposing to do in this series of studies on biblical doctrines. I refer to Deuteronomy 29:29: 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.'

Now, inevitably, we shall have to begin with introductions; that is necessary, I think, for several reasons. One is that some people may question the rightness of what we propose to do. We live in an age in which we do not hear very much about doctrines, and there are some people who are even foolish enough to say that they do not like them, which seems to me to be a very pathetic and regrettable attitude. Lectures or sermons on biblical doctrines were once very common but they have become comparatively uncommon, especially during this century. However, though we shall not deal with that criticism directly, it makes a good starting point, and it leads me to say that there are certain things which we must have quite clear in our minds. We shall consider three things: *what* we are going to do in these studies; *how* we are going to do it, and *why* we are going to do it.

What, then, are we going to do? This is to be a series of studies on biblical doctrines. What do we mean when we talk about a biblical doctrine? The answer is that the Bible is particularly concerned about teaching certain truths, and nothing is more important than that we should grasp that and that we should start with it. The Bible is a book which has a very definite objective. All its teaching is designed to a certain end; it is concerned with putting before us its doctrines, the [p 2] particular truths which it wants to emphasise and to impress upon the minds of all of us.

Let me put that more clearly in the form of a negative. The Bible is not, for instance, a general history of the world. We do not always remember that, but notice how it crowds two thousand years into just eleven chapters in Genesis. The Bible is not primarily interested in world history; it has another object.

Or let me put another negative. The Bible is not even concerned to give us a complete history of everything that God has ever done—He has done many things which are not referred to in the Bible—but it selects certain things which help to bring into focus its own purpose and plan. The four Gospels, for instance, do not pretend to be a complete biography of the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. No; they are concerned about presenting certain truths about Him, for instance, they only deal with about three years of His life—there is very little apart from that. They tell us about His birth—yes; but the main emphasis in the Gospels is His public ministry; what happened to Him after the age of thirty.

John in his Gospel puts this very clearly to us. He tells us, 'Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.' Then, 'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name' (John 20:30–1). John did not set out to give us an exact, detailed account of our Lord's life. No; he had an object in view, and the last verse in his Gospel says, 'And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written' (John 21:25).

'What, then, is the Bible about?' asks someone. Surely there can be no hesitation about answering that question; the Bible, in its essence, is the grand story of redemption. It is the history of what God has done about men and women as the result of their sin, and everything else that we find in the Bible is, in reality, incidental to that. The Bible is concerned with presenting to us the message of redemption by God and from God, in a way that we can understand and see and believe. So when we talk about biblical doctrines we mean these aspects of redemption which are unfolded to us in the Bible. They are the various truths that we find in the Bible about this great question.

Now there are many classifications, but let me suggest to you some of the doctrines which we are, therefore, of necessity bound to [p 3] consider. One is, of course, the book itself. Why do we pay attention to this book? Why do we confine ourselves to it? What does the Bible teach us about itself? Clearly we must start with that. We cannot go on to consider the doctrines of the Bible unless we have a clear idea as to what the Bible itself is, and what it claims to be.

Then, of course, having accepted our authority, our standard, we start with the great doctrine which always must come before every other doctrine, and that is the doctrine of God. 'In the beginning *God*' (Gen. 1:1). We meet God here. It is His revelation. So as we come to the Bible we learn the truth about Him and, strictly speaking, that is what is meant by the term *theology*.

Next, obviously, is the doctrine of man. I have said that the business of the Bible is to teach us about redemption and redemption is what God is doing about man. That is what is called *anthropology*.

Then we come to the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—*Christology*, because, after all, all redemption is in Him and in Him alone. Everything that happens in the Old Testament looks forward to Him, He is the climax, and the Bible has a great deal to tell us about Him.

But having found how redemption has been provided, the next matter that occurs to us is: How is this doctrine applied to us? The Bible has great teaching about this, the doctrine of applied salvation or *soteriology*.

Then, what happens to us when we are redeemed? Well, we are brought into the Church and are made members of the mystical body of Christ. So, clearly, you would expect the Bible to tell us something about the Church, and it does. This is called *ecclesiology*—the doctrine of the *ecclesia*, the Church.

And then, naturally, we ask this question: Here we are, the redeemed, members of Christ, of His body, the Church. What for? What is going to happen to us? What will it lead to? The Bible meets us again at this point, because it has its doctrine of the last things, which is called *eschatology*. Biblical teaching is all leading up to something, to a grand climax and consummation. There remain certain ultimate, last things, and you find a great deal about that in the Bible.

Now those are some of the truths that, God willing, we hope to consider together, and that is all I am proposing to do. So let nobody think that we are concerned here with giving a general survey or synopsis of the Bible and its contents. That is a perfectly good thing to [p 4] do, but that is not what we shall be doing. I have given you the general outline of these doctrines, and we shall address ourselves to that. We shall find the doctrines in the text, in the word, and our business is to extract them and study them.

But let us now look at our second question: How are we going to do this? And here, again, we must be careful to have a good definition, and to be clear in our minds as to what it is we are really attempting, because there is often a good deal of misunderstanding at this point. Let me again put it as a negative. I am not going to give a series of lectures on theology. I wonder whether that comes as a surprise to anybody? I wonder whether anybody thought, 'Well, surely, you cannot lecture on biblical doctrines without giving lectures on theology!' I suggest to you that the two things are not the same, and it is important that we should know the difference as we contemplate this series of addresses. We must of necessity confine ourselves to what the Bible says and to what the Bible alone says.

Now theology does not do that; it takes them in a wider field. Theology starts by saying that God has not only revealed Himself in the Bible, but in history. He reveals Himself experimentally in experience, and theology says that before it gives you biblical doctrine, biblical dogma, it must take into consideration these other aspects of revelation. Of course, theology includes that as well, but theology includes more than the Bible. In other words, the theologian does something like this: he goes to the Bible; he studies it; he traces and extracts its doctrines or he considers what somebody else has already done. He then proceeds to reflect upon these doctrines; he thinks about them and analyses them. He tries to bring them into a scheme. He brings in philosophy, which means human thought and thinking, and he takes all these things together and reflects upon them, and the end of that process is what is called theology.

So I trust that I am making it clear that that is not what I propose to do. It is not that I do not believe in theology—I do. But when I say I am going to give a series of addresses on biblical doctrines, I do not mean that I am going to give lectures on theology.

Let me give you an example to explain precisely what I mean by this. There was a famous Bible lecturer and expositor in America at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century who published a booklet called *The great doctrines of the Bible*. Now I was very interested when I turned to that book to see what this author had to say, for instance, on the doctrine of God. To my amazement I [p 5] saw that his first heading was this: ‘Proofs of the existence of God’. The moment I saw that I said to myself, ‘He should not have put that title to his book; he should have said that it was a book on Christian theology, because you do not find the proofs of the existence of God in the Bible.’

What I mean by these proofs is this. People argue that you can arrive at a belief in God by just looking into your own conscience. You say to yourself, ‘I think, so there must be ...’ I think of God, but the idea must have come from somewhere, there must be something corresponding to my thought. Therefore there should and there must be God,’ and so on. Then they take the argument from nature. They say that you look at nature and, as you do so, you see the order and design, and you say that it all must have come from somewhere—there must be a creator. A very good argument.

Again, there is the moral argument. I recognise that there is good and better in this world, and that suggests to me that there must be a best somewhere, there must be an absolute perfection, and that is what is called the moral argument for the existence of God. Now this writer to whom I referred goes through all that in his book, and many other arguments; but that is something which the Bible never does. Here is a man who tells us that he has written a book about the great doctrines of the Bible, but who is behaving as a theologian!

I am not saying that there is no value in those arguments for proving the existence of God, but I do want to emphasise that you do not find them in the Bible. And it is interesting to observe how this man, who gives a text for everything he says, suddenly has no text whatsoever in this particular section. So he has gone beyond what he had said he was going to do.

But we shall deal with biblical doctrines. The Bible does not give us proofs of the existence of God, it proclaims Him; it just tells us about Him. Also, though, as I have said, it is not that I do not believe in theology, yet I do want to say, in passing, that we must remember that there is a danger in connection with theology. The moment you bring in philosophy and speculation, and your own thoughts and human reason, you are beginning to do something that may be dangerous, not of necessity, but it may be. Now, we shall avoid all that.

We shall also avoid something else. We shall not attempt to defend these doctrines. That, again, is a perfectly good thing to do—it is called *apologetics*. But we are not concerned to defend the doctrines and I say this because some of you, when we go on to particular [p 6] doctrines, may be disappointed that I am not doing so. For instance, when we come to the doctrine of creation, the whole question of evolution arises but it will not be my primary purpose to deal exhaustively with it. Biblical doctrine does not make you do that. Of course, we shall have to refer to evolution, but primarily we shall be expounding positively what the Bible itself has to say.

So the position we occupy is that, again, of Deuteronomy 29:29: ‘The secret [the ultimate explanation of] things belong unto the Lord our God.’ Again, we shall be dealing with the doctrine of sin and somebody will want to know, ‘Where does evil come from?’ I cannot tell you. The Bible does not tell us. You can speculate; you can reason but that is not biblical doctrine. We must confine ourselves to the things that have been revealed, not to the secret things that are ultimately in the mind of God.

That, then, is more or less a definition of the way in which we are proposing to consider these doctrines. And that brings us to the last point. *Why* do we believe that this should be done? Now these are some of the answers I would suggest to that question. The first is that the Bible itself does it and therefore we are bound to do it. I told you at the beginning that the Bible is not merely a general history. It is a book which is concerned to bring certain particular truths clearly before us and those truths are doctrines. So to

read my Bible properly means that I must consider doctrine. The Bible wants me to grasp its doctrine. In other words, I may know my Bible very well, but unless I realise the importance of grasping its doctrines, my knowledge of the Bible may be quite useless to me.

Let me put it to you like this. Is that not exactly what the prophets did? You read about them in the Old Testament—what were those men doing? Well, they were taking hold of those doctrines—the doctrine of the law in particular— and they were enforcing them. They were applying the law. They went to the nation and they said, ‘You people think that because you have the law, you know it, but you don’t!’ They said, ‘The law is bringing this before you, and this is what you have to grasp and to understand.’ They preached doctrine to the people.

Is this not also exactly what our Lord Himself did? What was He really doing in the Sermon on the Mount except this very thing? He said, ‘Ye have heard ... But I say unto you ...’ (see Matt. 5:27–8). He took the law and expounded it in the form of doctrine. He explained it. He said that a mere general acquaintance with the law [p 7] was of no value; you must know exactly what it says. He extracted the principles, and He applied them and enforced them.

It is also, obviously, the very thing that was done by the apostles. Read the book of Acts and observe the preaching of those first Christian preachers. What did they do? Well, you do not find that they took a text and then gave its exact meaning in the Greek and the Hebrew, and then analysed it, and so on. No, no! Their way of preaching was to proclaim doctrines. They had a message, and they presented that to the people; they used their Scriptures to show that this was the doctrine.

And, of course, that is what is meant by preaching; that is the purpose and function of preaching. It is not merely an opportunity for a man to express his own thoughts. It is not merely, I repeat, to give an alternative translation of the Scriptures. No, its purpose is to bring truth to the congregation. The apostles did that, as preaching in its essence always does.

Or take the epistles of the New Testament. What are they? Well, in these epistles certain great doctrines are taken and are underlined and enforced. There was a particular need of that in particular churches. So the writer of the epistle brings his doctrine, and applies it in a practical manner. All along you see that they are concerned with the expression and elucidation of doctrine. That is my first reason, therefore, for doing this; I argue that the Bible demands it. It does it itself and it exhorts us to do so.

Another reason is that it is dangerous for us to study the Bible without doing this. We talk, do we not, about missing the wood because of the trees, and what a terrible danger that is! The real trouble with the Jews at the time of our Lord was that they stopped at the letter and never arrived at the spirit. In other words, they never got at the doctrine. They were content with a general familiarity with the words but they did not get the Word. And it is something that we all have to realise as a terribly dangerous possibility for us, for if we stop at the letter only it profits us nothing; it even misleads us. It may be the cause of the damnation of our souls. Not to arrive at your doctrine after you have studied your Scriptures means that your study is thoroughly unprofitable. It may be very intellectual. It may be a good way of spending your time. I have known people who have used the Bible as others have used crossword puzzles, or even jigsaw puzzles, for fitting things together, but they have never arrived at doctrine. Their study is of no value. It is profitless.

But another reason for studying biblical doctrine is that the Church [p 8] throughout the centuries has always found that it is essential to emphasise the doctrines of the Bible. In the very first days of the Church no one was received into church membership without making the confession, at all costs, that Jesus is Lord. But the moment you say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ you are making a doctrinal statement. Then, after a while, the early Christians found that it was not enough merely to say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ they found it necessary to introduce what was called a baptismal formula. Candidates for baptism were catechised; they were asked certain questions, and they had to be able to answer them.

But you remember what happened? Very soon heresies began to arise; people within the Church began to say things that were not correct. They were quite genuine and sincere, but many were saying things which were wrong and which were harmful. And these heretical and false teachers, of course, not only

caused confusion within the Church, they were also misleading to people outside the Church. The rise of heresy within the Church, led the early Church to draw up what we commonly call the creeds, for example, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed.

Now those creeds became essential because there was so much error and heresy in the Church, and the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, said, 'We must make it quite clear as to what we do believe and what we do not believe. It is not enough merely to give people an open Bible. Perfectly sincere and genuine and able men and women may read this book and say things that are quite wrong. We must define our doctrines,' and the definitions of doctrines are what we call the creeds.

Then, of course, after a while, the Church, which, in a sense, had been one, was divided into two—into the Eastern and the Western Church; but, more or less, the doctrine was the same. The Church was dead, I know, but it was governed by these three great creeds.

Then came the Protestant Reformation. New life, new vigour, new understanding came in, and again the Church found it was absolutely essential to extract its doctrines, and to state them in a perfectly clear and definite manner. So you had what is commonly called among Protestants, the great Confessions. These are nothing but a listing together and an exposition of the doctrines of the Bible. The leaders, again, said, 'It is not enough to give people an open Bible. We must guide them. We must help them. They are liable to go astray. So we must tell them that we believe this about God and that we do not believe [p 9] that. We must tell them about Christ and about the Church and so on. The Church of England had its Confession which is called the *Thirty Nine Articles*. There were also many famous Confessions on the Continent, those, for example, of the Moravian Church and the Reformed Church. And then there was the great Confession that was drawn up in Westminster Abbey in the seventeenth century and is therefore known as *The Westminster Confession*. It is the Confession of the Church of Scotland and of all Presbyterian churches everywhere throughout the world.

Now all these Confessions, and the catechisms which go with them, are nothing but a statement of biblical doctrines, so that people within the Church might know exactly what to believe and what not to believe and the reasons for this belief. They were all designed to build us up in the faith, and to enable us to know exactly where we stand.

Now if all that was necessary in the early days of the Church, if it was necessary at the time of the Reformation and in the seventeenth century, surely it is something which is urgently needed at this present hour? Today the Church is surrounded by cults; these people come to your doors speaking, as they say, 'from the Scriptures'. They say that they believe the Bible which we teach. The moment they make a statement you feel instinctively that there is something wrong with it, but you cannot answer them. No one of the purposes of studying biblical doctrines is to enable us to discover together the error in such teachings. Not that I am going to lecture on the cults; what I shall do is this: I shall remind you of what the Bible does teach. Then, having a firm grasp and knowledge of that, we can test every other teaching presented to us.

But not only are there all these errors and cults around the Church, even in the Church herself there is terrible confusion. There is an absence of doctrine, there is a lack of clear definition and a readiness to allow anybody to say anything they like. And this means that there was never a time when it was more urgently necessary that Christian people should consider together the doctrines of the Bible. We must know the ground on which we stand, and be able to withstand every enemy that comes to attack us, every subtle foe, every ploy used by the devil who comes disguised as an 'angel of light' to ruin our souls.

But I have a higher reason for considering these doctrines with you. Ultimately it is the only way truly to know God, to come into His glorious presence and to learn something of the wonders of His ways [p 10] with respect to us. Yes, let us go on reading our Bibles and studying them, but let us not get lost in the detail. Let us pick out these great, mighty, mountain-peaks of doctrine, and realise there who God is, and what He has done for us in the person of His dear Son, and in spite of our sin.

That, at any rate, is the object which I have in my mind. I am not doing this in order to give you some intellectual knowledge or information that you did not have before. God forbid that I should attempt to do

that, or that anybody should think of what we are doing in that way. 'Knowledge,' says Paul, 'puffeth up, but charity edifieth [builds up]' (1 Cor. 8:1). So the atmosphere of this series of discourses or discussions on biblical doctrines will not be that of the classroom. There will be no examinations at the end to determine how much you have learned, and no diplomas given to you! No, no. We are concerned with God—to know Him. It is worship. Any consideration of the Bible is worship and to me there is nothing so dangerous as to approach the Bible and its teaching as you approach any other text book.

People often say to me, 'What is wrong with these theological colleges? I have known many a good man who has gone in all right, but look at him when he comes out!' Now, that may not always be true—people often say things like that—but if it is true sometimes, I think I can tell you why it is. It is that in such places they far too often approach the Bible as if it were a text book. They far too often approach these great doctrines as if they were human thoughts and ideas. They do not come to them always in the atmosphere of worship and of awe. They are interested in translation and in intellectual knowledge. That is essential, but we must not stop at that.

The doctrines of the Bible are not a subject to be studied; rather we should desire to know them in order that, having known them, we may not be 'puffed up' with knowledge, and excited about our information, but may draw nearer to God in worship, praise, and adoration, because we have seen, in a fuller way that we have ever seen before, the glory of our wondrous God. May He give us cause to do this, and grant that as a result of these doctrines, we may all come to know Him, the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent—and as a result may all be revived. And so I express the hope that through us, and others like us, the whole Church may be revived, and that we may witness again in our midst the manifestation of God's glorious power.

Revelation

It would be well for us, perhaps, to bear in mind the words which are to be found in Acts 14:15-17:

Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with, food and gladness.

Now, any consideration of the biblical doctrines, and of Christian doctrine in general, is obviously concerned ultimately with this great question: How is God to be known? The cry is there in the human heart, as expressed so perfectly by Job: 'Oh that I knew where I might find him!' (Job 23:3). We take for granted what has often been pointed out—that there is in the entire human race what you may describe as 'a sense of God'. Many say that they do not believe in God, but, in saying that, they have to fight against something fundamental and innate within themselves which tells them that God is, that they have dealings with Him and that somehow or another they have to come to terms with Him, even though those terms may for them be a complete denial of Him. Here, then, I say, is something that is basic to human nature, and fundamental in the whole of humankind. And this sense of God, this feeling of God, is something that either blesses men and women or else torments them. And everybody has to face it.

Those who are concerned about this, and who are anxious to find [p 12] God and to know Him, are confronted by two possible ways of doing so. The first way, and the one that comes instinctively to us because of our fallen condition, is to believe that we, by our own efforts and seeking, can find God; and from the very beginning of history men and women have been engaged in this quest. They have done so by two main methods. One is to follow this kind of instinctive, intuitive feeling that we have, and that is put in various forms. People sometimes talk about an 'inner light', and say that all you have to do is to follow that light and its leading.

This is the way of the mystics and others. They say, 'If you want to know God, then the best thing to do is to sink into yourself; within everyone there is an inner light which will ultimately lead to God. You do not need knowledge,' they say. 'You do not need anything but a resignation of yourself and your powers to this light and its leading.' Now that intuitive method is something with which we are all familiar. It takes numerous forms, and is present in many of the cults in the modern world.

The other method that has been adopted has been the one that is based upon reason and wisdom and understanding. People may start, perhaps, with nature and creation, and they reason on from that. They maintain that as a result of that process they can arrive at a knowledge of God. Others say that by looking at history, and by reasoning on the course of history, they can arrive at a belief in God. Yet others say that the way to arrive at God is to indulge in a process of pure reasoning. They say that if you sit down and reason truly and properly you must arrive at a belief in God. It is illustrated, you remember, by the moral argument: that because I am aware in this world of moral good and better, then that implies that there must be a best somewhere. But where is it? I do not find it in this world, it must therefore be outside the world, and the belief is that that is God.

Now again, I do not want to go into these things. I am simply reminding you that those are the ways in which many people think that they can find God, and arrive at a knowledge of Him. But the Christian answer is that that method is inevitably doomed to failure. The apostle Paul puts it in those memorable words: 'The world by wisdom knew not God' (1 Cor. 1:21); and it is significant that he said that to the Corinthians, who were Greeks, and who were therefore familiar with philosophical teaching. But in spite of Paul having said that, people still rely on human ideas and reasoning to find God.

[p 13] It seems to me that this is not a matter to argue about, because it is just a question of fact; and the fact is, that one cannot arrive at a knowledge of God along those lines, for two very obvious reasons. The first is (as we hope to see later as we consider these particular doctrines) the nature of God Himself:

His infinity, His absolute character and qualities, and His utter holiness. All that in and of itself makes it impossible to have any knowledge of God by means of reason or intuition.

But when you add to that the second reason, which is the character and the nature of men and women as they are in a state of sin, the thing becomes doubly impossible. The human mind is too small to span or grasp God and to realise Him. And when you understand that because of the fall all human faculties and powers are affected by sin and by natural enmity, then, again, a knowledge of God by human endeavour becomes a complete impossibility.

Now the Bible has always started by saying that, and yet people in their foolishness still try these outworn methods which have already proved to be failures. So we must start by laying down this postulate: our only hope of knowing God truly is that He should be graciously pleased to reveal Himself to us, and the Christian teaching is that God has done that. So clearly the first doctrine which we have to consider together is the biblical doctrine of revelation. I cannot arrive at God by my own unaided efforts. I am dependent upon God revealing Himself. The question is: 'Has He done so?' The answer is: 'Yes, He has,' and the Bible tells us about this.

So, before we come to consider these various doctrines and truths concerning God and our relationship to Him—which is the ultimate quest upon which we are all engaged—we must be perfectly clear about the question of revelation. What is revelation? Well, I think that this is as good a definition as you can get: Revelation is the act by which God communicates to human beings the truth concerning Himself, His nature, works, will or purposes, and it also includes the unveiling of all this—the drawing back of the veil that conceals this, in order that we may see it.

Now, according to the Bible, God has revealed Himself in two main ways. The first is what we call *general revelation*; the other, obviously, is *special revelation*. So, first, let us look at general revelation. What is this? Now I have already referred to the fact that certain people by observing nature think that they can arrive at God by a process of reasoning and the Bible agrees to this extent: it tells us that **[p 14]** God has revealed Himself, in general, and first, through creation and nature. Paul made a most important declaration on this subject to the people of Lystra. He said, '[God] left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.' Immediately before that, Paul had said, 'He made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein' (Acts 14:17, 15).

The other classic statement on that same point is to be found in Acts 17:24; again, you find the same thing stated in Romans 1:19–20: 'Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse'—another momentous passage. All those statements remind us that God, after all, has left His marks, His imprints, in nature and creation; they are 'the works of His hands'. And, of course, running as a theme through the Bible is the message: 'The heavens declare the glory of God' (Ps. 19:1) and so on. Everything that has been made is in itself a revelation of God. That is the first definition of general revelation.

But, of course, you get the same type of revelation in what is commonly called *providence*: the ordering of things in this world, their maintenance, their sustenance, and the fact that everything keeps on going and continues in life. How is it all to be explained? Well, ultimately it is a question of providence. I do not want to go into this now, because when we deal with the doctrine of the providence of God we shall look at the whole question in greater detail. But let us just remember in passing that, through the ordering of providence, the seasons, the rain and the snow and the fructification of crops are all manifestations of God.

The third aspect of general revelation is history. The whole history of the world, if we could but see it, is a revelation of God.

But now we have to say that in and of itself general revelation is not sufficient. It ought to be sufficient, but it is not. And that, it seems to me, is Paul's argument in that first chapter of Romans, where he says, 'They are without excuse' (v. 20). The evidence is there, but that has not been enough. Why? Because of

sin. If men and women had not been sinners, by looking at the miracles and the works of God in creation, in providence and in history, they would have been able to arrive, by a process of reasoning, at God. But because of their sin, [p 15] they do not; they deliberately turn their backs upon doing so. That is the great argument in the remainder of Romans 1, which I trust you will read carefully for yourselves. Paul says, 'Because that, when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools' (vv.21–2). And he goes on to say that they began to worship the creature rather than the creator.

So we can sum that up like this: the evidence that is provided in creation and so on is enough to render men and women inexcusable when they stand before God and do wrong. But it is not enough to bring them, as they are in sin, to a knowledge of God. So the question is: Is there any hope? This rational way of looking for God, even at its best and highest, would only, as Paul argues, bring us to a knowledge of God as creator. His power, says Paul, is manifest in this way, but that is not the knowledge of God for which we long and which we covet. Men and women cry out for a more intimate knowledge. We want to know God in a more personal sense. We want to be related to Him. When we are awakened, that is the knowledge that we want, and such knowledge, creation and providence and history at their best cannot provide: they can simply teach us that God is all-powerful and that He is the creator.

Well, then, we ask again: Is there any hope for us? And the answer is to be found in the second type of revelation of which the Bible speaks, and that is what we call *special revelation*. And the special revelation which we find in the Bible has a very distinct and definite object, which is to reveal to us the character of God, the nature of God, and especially the character and nature of God as they are revealed in His saving grace. That is the thing about which we are concerned: how to know God and to be loved by Him and to be blessed by Him.

Now the Bible makes a unique claim at this point; it claims that it and it alone gives us this special knowledge of God. The Bible claims for itself that it is the record of God's special revelation of Himself and of all His gracious and saving purposes with respect to men and women. The Bible claims more than that for itself, but we shall only deal with this first claim now. And, of course, it has a great deal to say about this subject. In a sense, that is the great message of this book from beginning to end: it is God revealing Himself. It is not the great religious quest of mankind. No: it is the great eternal God drawing [p 16] back the veil and giving an insight into and a knowledge of Himself and of His great and gracious purposes. That is the subject matter of the Bible.

Let me interject a remark at this point. When we study the Bible it is of vital importance that we should always keep this idea, this concept of revelation, clearly before our minds. It is the only way to understand the message of the Bible; we become lost in it if we do not do that. We must realise that the one great object and intention throughout is God revealing Himself; and you and I must discover the ways in which He has been pleased to do this.

Let me summarise them. Many classifications are possible, but it seems to me that this is the one that follows most closely the Bible's own order. First and foremost, the Bible tells us that God has been pleased to reveal Himself to men and women through what are called theophanies—manifestations of God, the various appearances of God.

Take, for instance, Exodus 33, which is a most important passage when considering this doctrine of revelation. God told Moses that He was going to accede to Moses' request, and that He would manifest His glory to him. Moses had uttered that great desire: 'Show me thy glory'. 'You are giving me', he said in effect, 'this great task of leading these people. Who am I, and who are the people who are going to do it with me? Before I can do this great work', said Moses, 'I want to know that your presence will accompany us'. Then God said, 'My presence shall go with thee', but Moses became bold, and said: May I go further—'Show me thy glory', Let me see it.

And then God told Moses: You cannot see Me face to face, for no man can see Me in that sense and live. Nevertheless, I will reveal My glory to you.

So God took Moses and placed him in the cleft of a rock, and then He covered him with His hand. I am bound to introduce the term, am I not? That was a marvellous piece of *anthropomorphism*: that God, the eternal Spirit, should condescend to speak of Himself in human terms, and to act in a human manner. He covered Moses with His hand, and then He passed by, and Moses, we are told, was only allowed to see the back parts of God. He was not allowed to see His face. He saw God, in a sense; he saw the glory of God; he saw the back parts of God passing by. This is a staggering statement. You see how vital it is to this whole question of revelation—that the great, eternal God thus granted this glimpse of Himself to a human being so that men and women might know something about Him.

[p 17] Then you also have very frequent references to the *Angel of the Covenant*. I have no doubt but that they are right who say that every reference to the Angel of the Covenant is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. He appeared in this world before the incarnation. He was not incarnate, but He appeared. He took on Himself certain forms, in order to give a revelation. Gideon was granted such a revelation—study it for yourself in Judges 6. And then the father and mother of Samson were also privileged to see one of these theophanies, in order to strengthen their faith. God has been pleased to give many of these appearances of Himself.

Then the next manner in which God has been graciously pleased to reveal Himself has been by means of *direct speech*. We are handling immensities and profundities here. But the Bible tells us that the voice of God has been heard in this world. Adam and Eve heard it in the Garden of Eden. God uttered words. And you get the same thing, of course, in connection with the giving of the law to Moses. The voice of God was again heard, and this is something with which we have to deal, and upon which we must meditate and ponder deeply and seriously as we are thinking of this whole question of revelation. Think and find out for yourself other examples of this direct speech and voice of God.

My next heading is that God has been pleased to reveal Himself by means of *miracles and signs and wonders*. Now you get this in the Old Testament and New Testament alike. There are miracles recorded in the Old Testament: think of the miracles worked through Moses in the presence of Pharaoh, for instance, think of the dividing of the Red Sea, and the miracles that certain of God's servants, such as Elijah and Elisha, were able to perform, and so on. These were miracles, and miracles are always manifestations of God's power, and therefore of God Himself. God caused thunder and lightning to appear at very special times, such as the phenomena in connection with the giving of the law, and the mount that was on fire; all these were revelations and manifestations of God. He has done certain extraordinary things in nature and creation.

Then when you come to the New Testament, you find the miracles of our Lord, and their main function was revelation. You find, too, the miracles which were worked by the first apostles and by the first preachers; and we have the authority of Hebrews 2:4 for saying that these were done by the apostles because God was thus attesting their gospel. The writer says that they preached the gospel, 'God also **[p 18]** bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost'. In that way God affirmed that they were His servants, and that the gospel was true. And, of course, towering above every other miracle was the great and grand miracle of the resurrection.

We shall have occasion, later, to look at some of these things in detail, but here I am concerned to emphasise that these 'signs and wonders and divers miracles' show the obvious intention of God to tell men and women that He was revealing Himself—and they looked at these things. How often are we told in connection with these miracles that the people 'glorified God'. They feared; they were filled with a sense of awe; and they glorified Him. Why? Because they knew that the miracle was a manifestation of the power of God, and therefore they had had a glimpse into the character and the being of God Himself.

But let us go on to some further ways in which this special revelation has come to men and women. The next is that God has been pleased to reveal Himself at times by means of *visions and dreams*. The classic passage about this is Job 33:15–16, where we read this: 'In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instructions'. And how often God spoke through dreams and visions! You remember the dreams that were given to Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of our Lord. And as you go back through the Old

Testament you find that God constantly spoke like this. Through these visions and dreams God told people to do certain things, or warned them of things which He was going to do, and the result was that they realised that God *is*. It was God who gave them the vision or the dream or the warning or the prophecy, or whatever it was, and therefore they were revelations, they were proofs of the being of God.

Then I must put in a category on its own—*inspiration*. This is a most important question. We will have to touch on it again, later, but we must put it in at this point. We are told in the Bible that God can inspire people: inspire them to write His word; inspire them to understand; give them a message in that particular way. That is the whole basis, ultimately, of prophecy. So in doing that God was again revealing Himself, revealing the truth concerning Himself, the fact that He is, and what He is going to do.

But, after all, when we are dealing with this question of special [p 19] revelation, the great and mighty thing is what we may describe as the biblical account of God's redemptive acts. Nothing is so momentous a revelation of God as this. What am I speaking about? Well, I am thinking of Noah and the flood. God manifested Himself to Noah; gave him a revelation; gave him to understand what He was going to do; and then proceeded to do it in the waters of the flood and the judgment upon the earth and the marvellous saving of Noah and his family, the eight people in the ark. This was a tremendous act, not only of revelation, but of redemption. All the ancient world was condemned and destroyed but this family. So it was a part of salvation and redemption. The separation of these people was essentially a part of the act that culminated in the coming of the Son of God into this world.

And you have the same revelation, of course, in an almost equally striking manner, in the call of Abraham and the events of his life. God took that man, when he dwelt among the pagans; He singled him out and drew him out. Abraham did not know where he was going, but God led him. God was again bringing to pass this great plan and purpose of redemption. It had started away back with Noah, now it was becoming still more special in Abraham. And everything that God said and did to Abraham was a marvellous piece of revelation.

Then there was another manifestation of this in the call of Moses. We have already referred to one appearance of God to Moses. But what about the burning bush (Exod. 3)? What about that bush, all aflame and afire and yet not consumed? What was it? It was God, God revealing Himself. Not only God revealing Himself, and the fact that He is, to Moses, but God taking another momentous step in this great question of redemption. It is part of the great redemptive plan—a great redemptive act.

And it leads on to the Red Sea (Exod. 14), to that event which is so frequently referred to in the Scriptures. You find that the psalmists, every time they give a list of what God has done for Israel, always emphasise what God has done at the crossing of the Red Sea. You will find it occurring as a kind of theme in many of the psalms (e.g. Ps. 106). Why? Well, because it is momentous. It is central. God was saying to the people that He had separated them unto Himself from the captivity of Egypt, and led them out. It is all a part of the process of redemption, and you get it again in the captivity of Babylon, and the return of the remnant to the land.

Of course, all this is vital and important, though it seems to pale [p 20] into insignificance when we come to the fact of facts, the focal point of all history, the central point of the whole course of humanity: 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son ... To redeem them that were under the law' (Gal. 4:4–5)—the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This, of course, is going to occupy us at great length, but it is essential that I should, at this preliminary stage even, mention the name that is above every other name. For in times past, says the writer of Hebrews, God spoke in thoughts or visions, here a little and there a little, but now He has spoken in His Son, the effulgence and the holiness, the ultimate revelation, the essence of the great act of redemption; and, in particular, in connection with our Lord, we must emphasise the resurrection as another great redemptive act, which proclaims the sufficiency of His work and announces and reveals that God is satisfied and that mankind can be saved.

Likewise, we must include the day of Pentecost, and we must never stop short of that, for what happened, when the tongues as of fire descended upon those people, was all a part of the great redemptive action of God. It was a vital act, in which the Holy Spirit came upon the Church to do His great and glorious work; to apply the redemption that had already been worked out.

But, in addition to all that I have mentioned, God has spoken to men and women and has instructed them concerning Himself and His purposes. He did not only reveal Himself through His actions and the appearances and the dreams and the visions—God taught about Himself directly, literally. He spoke to Adam. He spoke to Cain and to Noah. He spoke in a special way to Abraham, the friend of God, as he is called. God told Abraham His secrets because he was His friend. He gave the great promise to him, the promise in that sense starts with Abraham, and that is why you find so many references to it throughout the Scriptures. God told him the secret and what He was going to do. ‘Abraham’, says our Lord, ‘rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad’ (John 8:56). God taught him about it.

Now I want to emphasise this for those of you who are interested in modern theology and in the difference between the so-called Barthian and evangelical theology. So I am underlining the difference at this point. The Barthian theologians deny the fact that God has revealed what they call ‘propositional truth’. Propositional truth means that there are statements of truth, of doctrine, in the Bible which I can accept and believe. We contend that God has done that, that here there are propositions of truth revealed by God.**[p 21]**

He did so, of course, in a very striking way in the giving of the law to Moses; the purpose of that was that the children of Israel should live in a given way. The primary function of the law was to give expression to the holiness and the character of God, and the people were to live in that way because God is God, because He is like that. So God was teaching about Himself in giving the law. Furthermore, 2 Samuel 7, in which His promise is given specifically to David, is one of the most important chapters of the Old Testament. Then the prophets—the foretelling, the teaching given to them about God and His holiness and His law—all that was part of the revelation of future events: truth communicated.

But, of course, in the New Testament we find the basis of our belief in the authority of the New Testament Scriptures. The truth was given by God through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, even as the Lord Himself in John 16 had promised it would be.

Thus in the Bible we have the record of God’s greatest redemptive acts. But we have also God’s comment upon those acts; God’s exposition of them; God’s explanation of the way of salvation as well as the unfolding of the way itself. And the Bible claims that it and it alone has this revelation—there is no other. If God does not reveal Himself, I cannot know Him; but He has revealed Himself, and that revelation is to be found in this book. Whether I see it or not, it is here. It has been given, and the question that arises is: Can I trust this book? Is it reliable in what it says, and what it claims? Am I entitled to believe its claims and to submit myself to its authority? We must, therefore, continue by discussing the authority and the reliability of the Scriptures.

3

The Authority of the Bible

We come now to consider the whole question of what the Bible has to say about itself. This is inevitable if we follow the biblical sequence in our consideration of the doctrines, but we also arrive at it in this way. As we have seen, the ultimate end and object of all who are concerned about the Christian faith is to know God. We have also seen that if we are to know God, then God must be pleased to reveal Himself. And He has revealed Himself, not only in creation, history and providence, but more. He has revealed Himself in the way recorded in this book, the Bible, which is the record of God's revelation of Himself. So we have considered the various ways in which, according to the Bible, God has done that.

But obviously, therefore, the questions that at once arise are: Can we accept the Bible's testimony? Can we regard it as authoritative? How do we justify our claim as evangelical Protestant Christians that it is here, and here alone, that we have an authoritative statement with respect to God's revelation to men and women? Why do we look to this book rather than to the Church, to some tradition, to some 'inner light' or to our own reason and understanding? That is our position, and that is our claim. And it is, therefore, necessary that we should justify that, and the way to do so is to consider what the Bible itself has to say about this matter.

Now you notice that I emphasise that, because in dealing with biblical doctrines we must keep ourselves to that. There are other things that could be said. There are other arguments that could be adduced and it is the province of theology to do that. But we are trying to keep ourselves to a positive exposition of biblical doctrines. I shall not, therefore, conceive it to be a part of my business to consider [p 23] the so-called 'higher criticism' movement. Theology and apologetics both do that. But here we are trying to be more positive, so let us bear in mind our definite and limited objective.

Now the Bible claims that it is not only the record of divine revelation; it goes beyond that. It claims that it is God's Word. It claims to be divinely inspired, and its authority is based upon that. Now it is important that we should be clear in our minds as to the difference between revelation and inspiration, because the two things are not the same. Everything that is in the Bible is not revelation, but everything in the Bible is inspired.

Let me explain what that means. Revelation means God's unfolding of Himself. You will see at once that there are many things in the Bible which are not revelation. Take, for instance, the book of Ecclesiastes, or the statements recorded in the Bible which were uttered by sinful, ungodly people. There is no revelation in such statements; nevertheless, the Bible says that all these statements, as they are recorded, are done so in an inspired manner. The statements do not help us to know more about God. They do not in any way at all help us to gain a knowledge of God. There is no revelation, no self-disclosure on the part of God. But what the Bible claims is, that all it contains is an inspired record and therefore an infallible and an inerrant record.

Obviously, then, the first question which we must consider is: What is meant by inspiration? When we say that the Bible is divinely inspired, what exactly do we mean? Let us start again with a negative. We do not mean that certain portions of the Bible are inspired and that others are not. There are some people who think that. There are, they say, portions and particular statements and teachings, especially those concerned with the Lord Jesus Christ, that are inspired. But, they say, those historical books and various other sections are not inspired. Now that is not what we mean when we say the Bible is divinely inspired.

Neither do we mean simply that the men who wrote were writing in an exalted or creative way. When a poet has produced a masterpiece, you have often heard people say that the poet was 'inspired'. But we do not mean that the writers of the books of the Bible were inspired in that way when they came to write these books. Others say they regard inspiration as just meaning that the ideas which were given to the writers were inspired. That is true, of course, but we mean much more than that. Neither does it mean that

the books—the writings as such—[p 24] are the product of human origin on to which the divine breath or *afflatus* has come.

So, what do we mean? We mean that the Scriptures are a divine product breathed out by God. Inspired really means ‘God-breathed’. We mean that God breathed these messages into men and through them, and these Scriptures are the result of that divine action. We believe that they were produced by the creative breath of the almighty God. Put in a simpler form, we mean that everything we have here has been given by God to man. And, of course, this obviously carries with it the idea that this is true of the particular words. So I shall try to demonstrate to you that the Bible claims for itself what is called *verbal inspiration*. It is not merely that the thoughts are inspired, not merely the ideas, but the actual record, down to the particular words. It is not merely that the statements are correct, but that every word is divinely inspired.

Now again we could spend time in discussing the various theories about inspiration, but I am concerned rather to expound what the Scripture itself says—and it claims this verbal inspiration. Yet we must make it clear that when we say that the Bible is verbally inspired by God in this way, we are not teaching some sort of mechanical dictation. We do not mean that the writers sat down, as it were, as a shorthand-writer does, and that God dictated all the words to them. The difference of style between the writers is evidence that that is not the case. You notice that each one seems to have his own idiosyncrasies and habits, his own individual style. You can tell at once that something has been written by Paul rather than by Peter or John.

Moreover, if you read the introduction to the Gospel of Luke, you will find that Luke says that he himself had read various other records in order to examine certain reports. And you often find the same thing in the Old Testament. So our whole conception of inspiration must allow not only for the individual writer and his characteristics, but also for his research and for his consulting of other authorities. What, then, does inspiration mean? It means that the writer has been controlled by the Holy Spirit of God in such a way that he cannot be guilty of error in what he writes.

There have been many illustrations of this. To me the best is the one that thinks of it in terms of a man on horseback riding from one place to another. Today he rides one horse, then tomorrow he takes the same journey but on a different horse. The horse he rides today is high-spirited, full of verve and of power. The horse he will ride [p 25] tomorrow is rather older and has become tired and lethargic. Now in both instances the man riding the horse goes to and from the same places, but the particular way in which the two horses carry him may be altogether different. One may prance about a good deal, but he is kept on the route until he reaches the destination. The mannerisms—the style, as it were—vary tremendously, but both horses are guided and controlled by the same rider, and the result is the same.

Verbal inspiration means that the Holy Spirit has thus overruled and controlled and guided these men, even in the choice of particular words, in such a way as to prevent any error, and above all to produce the result that was originally intended by God.

How, then, does the Bible claim this? I suggest to you that the following headings will be of some help. Incidentally, I am attempting the impossible in trying to cover it all so briefly; it is a subject upon which great books have been written. I am simply trying to give you a scheme whereby you can work this out for yourselves in your study of the Scriptures. If you want a very great and learned book on the subject, it is called *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, by Dr B. B. Warfield. Those of you who like studying a masterpiece on any subject will be well advised to get a copy of that book. And there are many other books on this subject which you can consult for yourselves.

My first heading is this: the Bible makes specific claims in this matter of inspiration. Take, for instance, certain terms which the Bible uses of itself, such as the term *Scripture*. That designates ‘holy writings’; not ordinary writings; special—holy writings.

Then take the description it gives of itself as the *Word of God*. How often you find the Bible using that term about itself! Now here is a striking and interesting fact—and someone has taken the trouble to count all this—the words, ‘The Lord said’, ‘The Lord spake’, ‘The word of the Lord came’, and cognate expressions are actually used 3,808 times in the Old Testament alone!

But let us come to some more specific claims. Take again that great prophecy, which is very crucial in this matter, spoken by Moses and recorded in Deuteronomy 18:18. These are the words: 'I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.' Not only is that a prophecy of the coming of our Lord, it also tells us much about Moses himself and his own ministry. Then, of course, all the prophets of the Old Testament make this [p 26] claim. They do not say that they suddenly decided to write; they say, 'The word of the Lord came ...' (see, for example, Ezek. 1:3; Hos. 1:1; Jonah 1:1), and they tell you exactly when it came. They were called, they were commissioned, and the word was given to them. So they are constantly saying something like this: 'Thus saith the Lord'. That is their claim.

Another interesting fact, and a very valuable argument, is that some of these prophets tell us quite honestly that at times they were reluctant to speak. Jeremiah often did not want to speak but he was compelled (Jer. 1:6-7). The very reluctance is seen in the way in which he disclaims his own authorship, but the 'burden' came. It was placed upon him by God, and he simply delivered what God had given him.

Still another important fact is that you will find the prophet saying that he does not understand even what he himself is writing. Take the statement in Daniel 12:8 where Daniel says, 'I heard, but I understood not.' You find Peter saying the same thing:

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

1 Pet. 1:10-12

Then the apostle Paul makes a crucial statement. He says, 'Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth ...' He is referring, you see, not only to the subject matter, not only to the doctrine, but to the way in which he speaks it. The words with which he speaks, he says, are not after man 'but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual' (1 Cor. 2:13). The whole of that chapter is very important in this connection.

Then there is that interesting and to me always very fascinating statement which you will find in 2 Peter 3:15-16, where Peter, referring to 'our beloved brother Paul' says this: '... even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest'—notice—'as they do also the [p 27] other scriptures, unto their own destruction.' By using that phrase, 'the other scriptures', the apostle Peter there equates the epistles of Paul with the Old Testament Scriptures and puts them on the same basis.

Then there is that important statement in Ephesians 2 where Paul says that Christians 'are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets' (v. 20). Now you and I are built upon that foundation. We do not regard as authoritative anything that has been said subsequent to the New Testament canon. Here is our foundation and we do not accept any teaching of any church or of any tradition as being divinely inspired. This is the basis, and the Church is to be built upon this teaching because of its unique authority.

Now this brings me to what I would call the crucial passages. The first is in the second epistle to Timothy. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Tim. 3:16). So runs the *Authorised Version* but the *Revised Version* is different; it reads, 'Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching ...' This is a very serious matter because there is no question at all that at this point the *Revised Version* is not only wrong but is tragically and lamentably wrong. It suggests at once that there are scriptures that are not divinely inspired. The *Authorised Version*, however, is quite clear about it: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God.'

So what can be said at this point? Well, the *Revised Version* makes the apostle Paul guilty of what is called tautology, saying the same thing twice over, expatiating upon the obvious. To render it 'All scripture [every scripture] inspired of God is also profitable' makes the thing ridiculous because every scripture inspired of God is of necessity profitable, and there is no need to say so. But the *Authorised Version*, you notice, does not say that. It says, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ...' which is a very different way of putting it.

Again, the *Revised Version*, of course, simply contradicts what the Scripture says about itself. The Bible does not differentiate between parts and portions; it does not say that certain Scriptures are divinely inspired but others are not. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Furthermore, the *Revised Version*, when it introduces that word 'also', is doing something that it does not do elsewhere. The [p 28] authorities are very easily able to convict these translators of being inconsistent with themselves. For instance, in Hebrews 4:13 you find this statement: '... all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' Now to be consistent with themselves, the *Revised Version* translators should have translated that like this: 'All naked things are also opened unto the eyes of him ...' But they did not do it there, and thus they have not carried out their own principle, because they saw it was obviously ridiculous; if everything is 'naked' it must be 'open'.

There are various other examples which could be given of the same thing, but we must move on. However, we need to remember that certain important members of the committee that produced the *Revised Version*, such as Archbishop Trench and Bishop Wordsworth and others, strongly protested at the time. Dr Tregelles, who was one of the greatest Bible students of the last century, made a similar protest, as other authorities have done. Let us therefore always remember when we are dealing with that verse that we must adhere resolutely to the *Authorised Version* and the statement there is as definite as this: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.'¹ There is no exception.

The second crucial passage is 2 Peter 1:20–1: 'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' A most vital statement. Now the interpretation of this is, of course, important. What does Peter mean by saying that 'no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation'? Well, he is not simply saying that no one has a right to his or her own particular interpretation of the Scriptures. No, Peter is concerned here about the origin of prophecy, the origin of Scripture, and what he means is that no prophecy of the Scripture gives any individual's private understanding or interpretation of things. In other words, he does not mean that prophecy arose in the way that some of the so-called higher critics have been teaching during the past century. They have said something like this: 'Now these prophets were very great and able men. They were profound thinkers. They looked out upon life and upon history, and then they meditated and ruminated upon it, and as a result of this, they evolved a theory, elaborated an idea, and then they wrote it.' [p 29]

But here Peter is telling us that prophecy does not come like that. It is not anyone's private interpretation of life and of people and of God and of history, because prophecy 'came not in old time by the will of man'. It was not man at all, he says, who produced it.

What is it, then? 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' There are various translations of this word 'moved'. Some say that it should be 'carried along'; others would say that it means 'borne along'; some would even say 'driven along'. Probably all are right; the word can carry all those various meanings. What is important for us is that they all agree in this—that when these prophecies were written, it was not a case of a man in control of himself, using his natural powers and propensities and abilities, thinking things out and then writing as best he could. Not at all! The whole time he was controlled by this gale of the Spirit, by this wind of God, this divine energy. This divine afflatus came upon him, and it held him and carried him, and he was borne along by the Spirit. And it was as a result of that process that these prophecies and these Scriptures came into being.

¹ Compare also the *New International Version* which reads, 'All Scripture is God-breathed ...' (Ed.)

There, then, are what I call the great specific claims which are made by the Bible for itself in this matter of verbal inspiration. They put it at that, and nothing less than that. That is the origin of the Scriptures; they say, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God.'

But now let me give you a second heading. It is always fascinating to me to notice the things that the Bible assumes about itself and its own statements. I put first the statement which was made by our Lord Himself. When He was facing certain dissenters and quoting Scripture to them, He said, 'Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?' (John 10:34–6). The crucial statement is, 'The scripture cannot be broken', which means it cannot be annulled or withstood; it cannot be denied.

Then consider also Galatians 3:16, which is again a vital statement in this whole question. It says, 'Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.' You see the importance of that? The apostle there attaches significance just to one single letter—'Now to Abraham and his *seed* were the promises made.' With regard to this whole question of verbal inspiration, this is one of the most [p 30] important statements of all. The whole argument of the apostle depends upon the fact that the Scripture says 'seed' and not 'seeds'. If it had said 'seeds', then this particular argument would have been irrelevant, but because it uses the singular and not the plural, it is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot possibly attach too much importance and too much weight to that particular argument.

Then sometimes you will find that the Bible combines a statement from the New Testament with one from the Old Testament, and refers to the two together as 'Scriptures'. Take, for instance, 1 Timothy 5:18: 'For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.' Now two Scriptures are there—the first is from Deuteronomy 25:4, and the second is a statement by our Lord that is recorded in Luke 10:7. Yet you notice the way in which Paul puts it—'For the scripture saith'. That, again, is significant because it shows that the Bible regards both the New and the Old Testaments as holy writings—the Scriptures.

Then another important piece of evidence is the way in which the New Testament quotes the Old Testament. It is very difficult to know which are the best passages to choose, but here is one out of the book of Acts: 'And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said ...' (Acts 4:24–5), and then there is a quotation from Psalm 2. What they are saying is that it is God who said this by the mouth of His servant David. Or take another example from Acts: 'Wherefore he saith also in another psalm ...' (Acts 13:35)—a reference again to God, showing that He, as it were, is the author of the psalms. The psalms of David are the psalms of God; it is God who worded them.

But perhaps there is nothing more interesting than the way in which you find this in the epistle to the Hebrews. Here is one example: 'Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice' (Heb. 3:7), which is a quotation from Psalm 95. Work through your New Testament and observe the way in which it quotes from the Old Testament and attributes the words to God and the Holy Spirit or uses the expression, 'It saith'—which always means the same thing.

My final general heading is that as we read the Bible we can make certain other obvious deductions which clearly prove this doctrine of inspiration. Sixty-six books were written over a period of at least [p 31] sixteen hundred years, by over forty authors, and yet there is only one type of doctrine in the whole Bible and only one type of morality in the whole range of the Scriptures. Can you explain it in any other way?

Take the Old Testament. Look at the one spirit that pervades it—the hope of the Messiah. Over all the centuries, with these differing men, there is one messianic hope. And in the New Testament there is only one great theme—Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It all points to Him—focuses upon Him. The variation between the writers makes no difference; there is still this one great theme.

But the most vital testimony which we must adduce is the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Read your Gospels and notice the way in which He constantly quotes the Old Testament. Notice the way in which He assumed that it is authoritative, that it puts a matter beyond argument and beyond any dispute whatsoever. He just said, 'It is written,' and that is final (see, for example, Luke 19:46; John 6:45). He obviously accepted the Old Testament *in toto* as authoritative, final and supreme.

There are certain specific statements which He made: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matt. 5:17–18). And in a sense that is the whole of the Old Testament—Moses and the prophets—'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' Then you will find Him, for example, saying this: 'And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female' (Matt. 19:4). We will have to come back to this, but let us remember that that quotation alone is sufficient to show that our Lord regarded what we read in the early chapters of Genesis as being authoritative for the whole question of man and woman and their appearance in the world. So if you begin to play fast and loose with the authority of the Scriptures, and with the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, you are of necessity involved in difficulties about the person of the Lord Himself.

Then you will find many other statements. Let me ask you to read for yourselves Mark 12:26–7, and then consider also Luke 24:44: 'And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.' It is the whole of the Old Testament again. The law [p 32] of Moses is not merely the Ten Commandments and the moral law; it is the five books of Moses. Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, He accepted it all and asked the disciples to consider its teaching concerning Him. And He expounded it to them.

And again I refer to John 10:35, where He tells us, 'If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken.' So, in the last analysis, our authority for our understanding of inspiration is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That was His view of the Scriptures.

Now I know that there are many who want to ask a question at this point. What about the various differences? What about certain discrepancies, and so on? Well, there is a very comforting answer to all that. There are, as we have them in our versions, certain things which we simply cannot explain, and it is our business to say that quite readily and frankly. But let me hasten to add that most of these so-called difficulties and discrepancies which the critics bring forward can be explained; indeed, most of them have been explained. Many of them have been explained in the last few years as a result of archaeology, and of further linguistic understanding of the Scriptures.

Still, there are a certain few differences that remain, but it is significant that they are never with respect to doctrine or historical facts. It is a matter of figures or something which is comparatively unimportant and which can be explained quite readily—the mistake, perhaps, of a copyist, or of some translator. There is nothing which in any way interferes with vital, essential doctrine. So what we affirm and state is this: the original documents, as originally written, are inerrant and infallible. We say even of this *Authorised Version* that apart from a mere handful of minor discrepancies, which hitherto have not been explained and which are completely unimportant, this is the word of God and the only infallible rule for faith and conduct.

There are other arguments also that one can produce, but they do not arise from biblical statements—the style, the elevation of thought, what the reading of the Bible has done for people throughout the centuries, the testimony of the saints to the Bible. But finally you cannot prove to anybody that the Bible is uniquely and divinely inspired. Ultimately, people have to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. So let me finish by quoting a passage from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which states it all perfectly:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high [p 33] and reverend esteem of the holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments

whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

Chapter I:V

4

How We Find the Doctrines

As we approach our third study, it would be well for us to keep in the forefront of our minds verses 18–21 in the second chapter of the first epistle of John:

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

I call your attention to that particular statement because it does present us with the exact context in which we must consider another general point before we come to deal with the particular doctrines which are taught in the Bible. We can summarise the position we have arrived at like this: the ultimate goal of our quest is a knowledge of God. We are not interested in doctrines merely as doctrines, but simply as they bring us to know God. The supreme 'end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever' (*The Shorter Catechism*).

The problem, therefore, is: How are we to know God? By our own efforts we cannot arrive at God. God must reveal Himself, and in His infinite grace and kindness He has done so, not only in creation and in history and in providence, but supremely in this book which we call the Bible. And then we went on to consider some aspects of inspiration. We took a very general view of it, and saw that it could be [p 35] divided up quite naturally into certain groupings.

Then that in turn led us to the question: Can we rely upon this book and its proffered revelation? We considered that, and came to the conclusion that the Bible is a divinely inspired book. We saw that the Bible itself teaches what is known as the doctrine of verbal inspiration. We therefore accept it as full and final and infallible in all matters of faith and practice.

'Very well,' says someone, 'having done all that, why don't you start by immediately taking the first great central doctrine—the doctrine of God?'

But I cannot do that, and I will tell you why. The problem that arises at the moment is this. 'Now,' you say, 'here is a book that contains these doctrines that are essential to a knowledge of God.' Very well, I take my Bible and I open it, but I do not find that the Bible is just a collection of stated doctrines. There is a lot of history here, a great deal about kings, princes, births, deaths, and accounts of marriages, and so on. If the Bible were just a collection of doctrines plainly stated, there would be no difficulty at all, and all that we would have to do would be to find page one, then look at the first doctrine, expound it and consider it together.

But the Bible is not like that—merely literature. We do not go to the Bible in that way. The question, therefore, arises: How are these doctrines to be found in the Bible? How is one to discover them? Now that is no idle question, as I think I can show you very easily. But it is never enough to say, 'I am not interested in doctrines. I'm a Bible person. Let these clever people argue about doctrines if they like; you give me the Bible and I am satisfied.' That is a very foolish, indeed, a ridiculous, statement to make, because people who come to the Bible must believe something as the result of reading it. The question is: Are they believing what they ought to believe?

Most of the cults which are so prominent in the world today claim that they are based upon the Bible. 'Of course,' they say, 'we believe everything that the Bible says; our teaching is based upon it.' Indeed, you will find that some of these people appear to know their Bibles very well. So it is no use just saying to them that you do not believe as they do because you believe the Bible. We must know how doctrine is to be found in the Bible if we hope to deliver these people in any way at all, if we are anxious to make them true Christians and to bring them to a real knowledge of God. We must be in a position to explain to them

where they go wrong and where they are not biblical, and to [p 36] help them to understand the source of their error.

Now you notice that in the early Church that very position obtained. There were a number of people in the Christian Church all claiming to believe the truth, but some, says John, had left them: 'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us' (1 John 2:19). They were guilty of error and of heresy somewhere or another.

As it was in the days of the early Church, so it is still, and there never has been a time when it has so behoved God's people to know what they believe, and why they believe it, as at this present hour. So how do we arrive at a knowledge of these doctrines? What are we to do? Given that we have the book which we now believe is authoritative and divinely inspired—God's oracles, God's word, God's truth, revealed in a unique way—how do we find the doctrine that is in it? Now it seems to me that the best thing we can do is to consider the three main propositions which will guide and help us in this matter.

The first we will have to deal with, whether we want to or not, is the place that reason, understanding and intellect have in these matters. I admit that this is a very difficult subject. But it is vitally important and we must have some clear ideas in our minds as to what our position ought to be with respect to this. We already touched upon it in a very general way in our introduction. The point we then established was that by means of reason alone no one can arrive at God. The intellect is insufficient. 'The world by wisdom knew not God' (1 Cor. 1:21). That is a fact which can be proved. And you notice, incidentally, how all these clever people in the world today are, one after another, now becoming ready to admit that people, who were so highly regarded during the post-war period, are confessing the utter inadequacy of the human mind and reason, and confess the need for something beyond it. But now I am rather anxious to emphasise this same general concept in a slightly different manner. So I put it to you in the form of a number of propositions.

The first thing we must do, in view of all that we have seen together, is agree to grasp the Bible as our full and final authority in all matters of revelation. Having seen that we cannot get anywhere without the Bible, then the obvious thing to do is to say, 'Very well, I accept the Bible. I don't know anything apart from it. I have no knowledge of God apart from what the Bible tells me. I may theorise, and [p 37] other people may do the same thing, but I really do not know anything apart from what I find in this book.' So the first decision we must make is that we are going to be, as John Wesley put it, men and women 'of one book'. Here is my only source, my only authority.

But I want to underline this and even to emphasise it still further. I must submit myself *entirely* to the Bible, and that will mean certain things. First, I start by telling myself that when I come to read the Bible and its doctrines, I am entering into a realm that is beyond the reach of my understanding. By definition, I shall be dealing with things that are beyond my power to grasp. The very idea of revelation, in and of itself, I suggest to you, must carry that implication. We are going to try to know God, and to study the doctrine concerning Him, and it must be the case that these truths are beyond our understanding. If I could understand God, I would be equal with Him. If my mind were able to apprehend and to span the truth about God, then it would mean that my mind is equal to the mind of God, and that, of course, is altogether wrong.

For instance, in our next lecture we hope to be dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity. Now there by definition is a doctrine that no one can possibly understand, but let us agree to say that before we come to the doctrine. Let nobody think, however, that this means committing intellectual suicide when we take up the Bible. It simply means that we recognise that there is a limit to reason. We agree with the great French mathematician and philosopher, Pascal, that the supreme achievement of reason is to teach that there is an end and a limit to reason. Our reason takes us so far and then we enter into the realm of revelation, where God is graciously pleased to manifest Himself to us.

But now I am anxious to emphasise the second point. It means that we must accept truths where we cannot understand them and fully explain them. Not only must we agree that we cannot, of necessity, understand everything, but also, when we come up against particular doctrines and truths, we must accept

them if they are in the Bible, irrespective of the fact that we can or cannot understand them. Now I rather like to think of faith in that way. I am not sure but that the best definition of faith we can ever arrive at is this: faith means that men and women decide quite deliberately to be content only with what they have in the Bible, and that they stop asking questions.

You can tell very soon if a man is a true man of faith or not. Just listen to him. Some people are always asking questions: 'But I do not see [p 38] this, and I cannot understand that.' But faith means that we are content to be shut up to this book, and that we say quite readily, 'God has revealed everything He wants to reveal, and everything that is good for me to know is in the Bible. If it is not in the Bible, I am content not to know it.' Bear that in mind, for instance, when you are discussing the problem of evil—how it entered into this world. The Bible does not tell us why God ever allowed it, and therefore if you take the faith position, you will not even ask questions about it. You are just content to say, 'I do not know; the Bible doesn't tell me, and I know nothing beyond what the Bible does tell me.' This is a most important principle.

But let me go on to elaborate it a little more by putting it in this way: there is nothing that we must avoid so strenuously as the constant temptation to mix philosophy with revelation. Now you may think, some of you, that this does not apply to you. 'I am not interested in philosophy, I have never read a book on philosophy in my life,' you say. But, my dear friend, that does not mean that you are not a philosopher! We are all philosophers. You should not confine the term philosopher to people who make it their business or their duty in life to study or to teach it. Everyone who has an opinion about anything is automatically a philosopher. And I think I can show you in a minute that every one of us is not only a philosopher, but that we are always getting into trouble because we philosophise too much. So I am warning everybody against this danger of mixing philosophy with revelation.

Now this is the way in which we do it. We are ready at all times to reject certain doctrines, or, perhaps, if we do not actually reject them, we hesitate to believe them, though they are clearly taught in the Bible. We do this because we cannot understand them, or because we cannot explain them, or because they do not seem to fit into our scheme of things. Quite often when you confront people with a specific statement from the Bible, instead of saying, 'Well, I am prepared to believe that though I do not understand it,' they say, 'But, if that is right, then how can God be a God of love?' or something like that. The moment they speak like that they are speaking as philosophers, and I think that if you examine yourselves you will find it is something that you do quite frequently.

Indeed, I am afraid that those of us who are evangelical are very often guilty of being most inconsistent at this point. We argue with a so-called modernist and we say, 'Fancy! He doesn't believe in [p 39] miracles, and he doesn't believe in the supernatural, because he says he cannot understand a miracle'—and we denounce that. Yes; but sometimes when we come up against some of these great terms, which you will find in the first chapter of Ephesians, like *predestined* and *elect according to the foreknowledge of God*, we evangelicals begin to say, 'Well, if that is right I don't see how God is fair,' and so on.

But that is exactly the same thing as your modernist friend was doing with regard to miracles. We see it very clearly in his case because we happen to be all right on the question of miracles. But when it is a doctrine we do not take to so readily, we use exactly the same argument as the modernist who brings out his philosophy. So this is something that must apply to all of us. I must not hesitate to believe a doctrine because I cannot fit it in; neither must I reject a doctrine because I cannot understand it. If this is the truth of God, and the thing is clearly taught, then I am to accept it whether I understand it or not.

Then one final point I would put under this heading is this: we must never allow ourselves to be governed by our own logic or by our own desire to have a perfect system. It is a danger to which we are all exposed. We instinctively like to have a complete system; we do not like gaps or ragged edges. It is again because we are all philosophers. It is because the philosopher always wants a complete whole, wants to be able to understand everything, wants to be able to state everything, and we are all like that. The danger is, you see, that we press our own logic and our own schemes to a point which goes beyond the teaching of the Scripture. At that point we are again guilty of sin and of error. We must give full weight to every statement of Scripture. We must never minimise one or ignore it in order that our scheme may be complete.

I could give you many illustrations of that. There are people, for instance, who have always been described as hyper-Calvinists, and that is their trouble. They go beyond the Scripture and are driven by their own logic and by their own arguments, and they claim things which cannot be demonstrated from the Scriptures. They are so anxious to have a perfect scheme that they fall into that very subtle and dangerous trap.

So, then, the ultimate thing which we would say under this heading would be this: we must submit ourselves not only to the authority of the book, but also to the guidance, the inspiration and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. I should never read the Bible in exactly the [p 40] same way that I read any other book. If all I have said about it is true, then I must come to it realising my inability, realising that any natural capacity I may have is not enough here. I must see that spiritual things must be understood in a spiritual way, and therefore I should start always by asking God by the Holy Spirit to enlighten me, to illumine me, to keep me from error and subtle dangers and to lead me into all truth. Then, having done that, I come to my Bible; and, with a mind which already knows its limits, and which is thus enlightened by the Holy Spirit, I begin to discover the doctrines of the Bible.

Very well, then, that brings me to my second main heading, which is the method by which one arrives at the doctrine. Again, I would remind you that the Bible is not a mere collection of doctrines, and as we now come to seek our doctrines in the Bible, it is not going to be a mere matter of stringing a number of texts together. Some people seem to think that this is the way. Having discovered a number of statements about a given matter in every part of the Bible, they give you a string of texts and leave you at that. Now that is not the way to arrive at the doctrine, because patently that is not going far enough.

Rather, I suggest we should do this: we do collect our texts; we discover every statement that we can find in the Bible on a particular subject. Then, having gathered them together, and having collated them, we proceed to discover the doctrine which lies at the foundation. That is what we are concerned about. Here are these various statements. What is the doctrine they are propounding? What are they telling us? What is this basic something that is common to all these statements? That is our doctrine.

Now as we do that, there are certain rules which must be observed most carefully. First of all, let us look at a number of general rules. Here is the first. Any doctrine that we claim to believe from the Bible must always be clearly found in the Bible. It must be capable of demonstration from the Bible. If I cannot prove to you that the doctrine which I hold is found in the Bible, or that the Bible proves it or demonstrates it, then I must reject it.

Let me give you some illustrations of what I mean. You will find, as we have seen, that people come to you saying that they believe the Bible. Then they propound their doctrines to you, and you ask: 'But where did that doctrine come from?'

'Ah,' they will tell you, 'someone once had a vision or a message.' You are familiar with such statements. But what I would emphasise here is that we must say that we are not prepared to accept any such [p 41] statement. We do not care who says it, nor what marvellous experiences that person may have had. It is quite immaterial to us if it cannot be proved and established in and from the Scripture.

But wait a minute—I am not only referring to the cults. This is our evangelical reply, for instance, to the Roman Catholics. You see, they come and tell you certain things. 'But,' you say, 'I don't find that in the Scriptures.'

'Of course not,' they reply, 'but we have our tradition; revelation did not stop at the end of the New Testament canon—the truth has been received directly from God since then. The Apostolate and the apostolic understanding have continued, and we therefore argue that the Church and her tradition and her teaching are of equal authority and value with the Scriptures.'

And again we say a firm and resolute, No! We do not care what authority a teaching may claim for itself. If it cannot be proved from Scripture, we reject it.

And we say exactly the same thing, of course, to any claim for any doctrine which may originate from human ability or understanding. Take, for instance, the Roman Catholic doctrine about transubstantiation.

Roman Catholics teach that as the result of the action of the priest, the very bread at the Communion Table has been turned into the literal body of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'But,' you say, 'it still looks like bread!'

So they reply, 'Of course it does,' and then they bring in their philosophy, by which they tell you that there is a difference between the *substance* of a thing and the *accidents*. What they mean by 'accidents' are qualities like colour and texture. And they say that the substance has been changed but the accidents remain the same. A marvellous bit of philosophy! But we do not accept any doctrine, however subtle and clever the explanation may be, if we cannot find it in the Scripture itself, or prove it from the Scripture.

But let me go on to a second point. Our doctrine must be *exclusively* scriptural. Not only must we reject all doctrine that has patently come from outside the Scriptures, but we must not even accept a doctrine that is partly scriptural and partly something else. It must be pure, unadulterated Scripture. This is another most important point in view of the constant tendency of philosophy to creep in by the back door.

Then the third point I would make under this heading is that the doctrine must be plain and clear in the Scriptures. May I introduce [p 42] you to a technical term. I am trying not to do this, but this is a great term—one that was used by our Protestant fathers. They talked about the *perspicuity* of the scriptural doctrine, by which they meant that true scriptural doctrine is always plain and clear. Scripture itself emphasises that everywhere. It presumes it.

We often make a great mistake when we come to study the Scriptures because we do not stop to remind ourselves of the type of people for whom they were written. It would have saved a lot of ink and a lot of trouble if everybody who became an expositor of St Paul's epistles had reminded himself, before he started expounding, that the epistles were not written to students or to professors of doctrine at Oxford and Cambridge, but to slaves, and to common, ordinary people! 'Not many wise men ... not many noble, are called,' said Paul (1 Cor. 1:26). It was to such people that the epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians and so on were written; and it is because we forget this that we get into difficulties. When St Paul wrote these epistles he took it for granted that the people to whom he was writing would understand them. They did not have these learned professors to expound them. No, no. He was writing to them that he might teach them, and he knew that they would understand. This is what the fathers meant by the *perspicuity* of the Scriptures.

Now that is why I am afraid that sometimes I express a certain amount of impatience with people who always seem to base their doctrine on the meaning of a Greek or Hebrew word. In the light of what we have just said, that, of necessity, must be wrong. We should be able to arrive at the meaning of the doctrine from the text of the passage. So I would put it like this: we need no special authority to guide us in these matters. The apostle John says that we have no need of teaching in that sense because of this anointing. 'Ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie ...' (1 John 2:27). So we reject the Roman Catholic suggestion that ordinary people are not fit to be reading their Bibles and that only the Church can truly expound it. No, we say that these documents were written to people like ourselves, and we and they were meant to understand them.

In the same way, we disclaim altogether the idea that there is any absolute need of some special philosophy or linguistic understanding, or knowledge of any other language in order to understand these matters, as long as we are given a plain and accurate translation. So I say again that we reject the Roman Catholic teaching. [p 43]

We also reject much of the theology of the last one hundred years because it has been mostly philosophical theology. And we reject many types of theology that are very popular at this present time, because before you can understand them you have got to understand the special meanings given to the words 'history', 'time' and 'myth'. You have to be clever and philosophical, and by definition this must be wrong. We can trust to the plain teaching, we believe in the *perspicuity* of scriptural doctrine.

Those, then, are my general rules, so now we turn to the particular. Now that we have collected our texts together, what do we do about them? Well, you will find that there are two main things we have to do. Sometimes it is quite a simple matter to deduce the doctrine from the statements. You just look at the

statements, and you say, 'That quite inevitably means so and so.' That is deduction—you draw out the meaning.

But there is another method, and that is called 'induction'. Take for an example of induction the doctrine of the Trinity. You will not find the doctrine of the Trinity stated either implicitly or explicitly anywhere in the Bible. But you will find that there are references to 'God the Father',—'God the Son', and 'God the Holy Spirit'—and, having come across these statements, you say to yourself, 'Now I adduce the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is one and three Persons. That is not deduction, it is induction. You are building up the doctrine from certain statements. So you arrive at your doctrine by the two processes of deduction and induction.

Let me give you some simple, practical points. We must never found our doctrine on just one statement in the Bible, still less on part of a statement. There are people who have gone wrong because they have done this, sometimes even relying on half a verse. They forget the other half because this is the one that suits them. That is something we must never do.

And the other rule is that we must never arrive at any conclusion from Scripture which makes us contradict something which is stated in Scripture. We must always compare Scripture with Scripture. We must be 'workmen' who are 'rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Tim. 2:15). That is a scriptural exhortation. So if I have arrived at a doctrine, and then find that something else clearly stated in the Bible is contradicted, then I know that my doctrine must be wrong. You see the importance of doing what we did in the last lecture, the importance of establishing the doctrine of verbal inspiration, of saying that **[p 44]** *all* this book is God's book? The Bible is one great message. It always forms a complete whole, so that never must one point contradict another. It is amazing to notice in the history of the Church how some of the chief heresies have arisen because great men have forgotten that simple rule.

But now I have to deal with one final question. 'In view of all that you have been saying,' you say, 'surely every Christian should be able to agree with every other Christian about every single biblical doctrine? And yet,' you add, 'there is nothing so plain and clear as the fact that there are differences among Christians. What have you to say about that?'

Well, I just want to make a number of comments. Why are there these differences of opinion? The first reason is that people will persist in falling into the various errors that we have already enumerated. They drag in their philosophy, or they base their doctrine on one text or on half a text, or on something like that. If people will do these things, there must be differences of opinion, because some of us will refuse to do that, and therefore you have two schools of thought without going any further.

But then there is another cause for such differences. There is always this tendency on our part to start with a theory, and, having started, we try to force Scripture into our theory. I have already referred several times to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. That is surely the essence of the Roman Catholic errors. Having postulated a given Church and a given order, everything has to be forced to fit into that scheme. They do not base all their doctrine upon the Bible. They claim that some doctrine has come to them from outside the Bible, and that what is given is equal to what is found in the Bible.

This, again, is not something that applies to Roman Catholics only. It is just as applicable to many Protestants. If you start out with a particular theory about free will, or something like that, then I assure you that you will get into difficulties about certain biblical doctrines. We must be careful that we do not come with preconceived ideas and prejudices and philosophical theories. This is a very prolific cause of trouble and disputation.

Another way in which people arrive at these differences is that very often they elaborate their theory on details about which we cannot be certain. Now if you want an illustration of that, let me mention the word 'prophecy'. Perhaps this is the greatest danger where this subject is concerned. When we study prophecy we tend to elaborate on **[p 45]** details about which no one can be absolutely certain. People say, 'I am certain,' and then out comes the theory. But if we cannot demonstrate the points from the Bible, we have no right to elaborate a theory.

Another cause of trouble is that people will persist in taking as literal that which is obviously meant to be symbolical. For example, some time ago, I was travelling in a train and after a while I found myself involved in a discussion with a Roman Catholic. Of course, he inevitably brought me to this point: he said that surely the Bible says, 'This is my body.'

I said, 'But our Lord was there at the time; He obviously could not mean that the bread was His actual body when He was speaking in the body. It must be symbolical.'

'Ah,' he replied, 'that is the trouble with you Protestants—you always say things like that. But you must take it literally.'

'Very well,' I said, 'if you say that, this is what I say to you. Our Lord said, "This is my body which is given for you".'

'Yes,' said the Roman Catholic.

'Yes, but then,' I said, 'He went on to say, "This cup is the new testament in my blood." He did not say the wine in the cup. He said, "This cup". Are you telling me that He was referring to the cup in a literal sense?'

And, of course, he had to admit that he could not say that. 'So,' I said, 'why not be honest enough to say that it is all symbolical? The cup stands for the wine, and the wine is the symbolic representation of the blood.' If we once take as literal what is meant to be symbolic, we are bound to be in trouble.

But again let me remind you that this is not only true of Roman Catholics. Have not we known people who do this with a book like the book of Revelation, which tells us that all is symbolical? And has not there often been grievous trouble because people will take the symbols and deal with them literally? It is exactly the same procedure. So we must beware of this in every area.

Our Lord Jesus Himself had to tell some of His own disciples, 'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life' (John 6:63). He had been telling them that unless they ate the flesh of the Son of Man and drank His blood, they had no life in them. And they said, 'How can we do this?' They were materialising it, literalising it. He said, 'My words are spirit; the flesh profiteth nothing.' [p 46]

And lastly, of course, the thing to avoid above everything else is the party spirit. It is the greatest curse of denominationalism that we start with certain prejudices because we were brought up with them, and our fathers believed in them, and we say they must be defended at all costs. That is a terrible way to approach God's truth. So let us pray to be delivered from the party spirit and the prejudices that are always characteristic of such a spirit.

So then, my next point is that there are certain matters in the Scriptures about which we cannot speak with finality. There are certain things about which equally good and capable men and women are not agreed and cannot agree. When we come to such matters, surely it is our business to say that we do not know. We cannot prove them, and we are content to wait until we arrive in glory and all things are made plain and clear to us. At the moment we see and understand in part, only 'through a glass, darkly' (1 Cor. 13:12). Our knowledge is not full. It is not final. Let us be content with the revelation that is given.

But there are certain doctrines about which we are and must be absolutely final, and they are the doctrines that are essential to the way of salvation. I am not referring to the mechanism of salvation. When you come to that you find good people often differing. I accept that. I am prepared to say, 'I believe this and I am not prepared to believe that.' And another man says, 'All right—as long as we both agree about the way of salvation.' When we come to this doctrine I shall emphasise these points further. But there must be no disputing about the person of Christ, about the miraculous and the supernatural, about the substitutionary death upon the cross and about the literal, physical resurrection. There is no argument there. This is final; this is absolute.

But with regard to all other matters, where we cannot be final and absolute, let us be sympathetic. Let us be tolerant. Let us admit our inability to prove, and let us together enjoy the great salvation in which we

all participate, and look forward to the day when the hidden things shall be made plain, and we shall know even as we are already known.

5

The Existence and Being of God

'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' (Rom. 11:33). That is how the apostle Paul ends the eleventh chapter of Romans, and we can do nothing better, as we study these biblical doctrines, than to hold those eloquent words in our minds. For having completed the general introduction to the whole subject, we can now proceed to the particular doctrines. A great deal more could be said by way of introduction, but we must move on, and the first doctrine to which we must pay attention, a doctrine that is placed first in the Bible itself, is the doctrine of God.

Now that is not quite as obvious as it sounds, because if you consider the typical approach to theology and to biblical matters over the past hundred years or so, you will find that almost invariably the starting point is with man. Everything associated with what is sometimes called modernism is always characterised by that; the theology is always subjective; it always starts with man himself. Because modernism is interested in itself, and in its so-called psychological ideas of origin, inevitably it starts either with man or with the world, and from that goes on to study the doctrine of God.

But that is not what the Bible says. The Bible starts with God; you remember its great opening statement which really tells us everything: 'In the beginning God ...' It is very important that we should emphasise this and grasp it clearly. The knowledge of God is ultimately the sum of all other doctrines; there is no sense, there is no meaning or purpose, in any other doctrine apart from this great central, all-inclusive, doctrine of God Himself. There is no point in considering the doctrine of salvation, nor the doctrine of sin, unless we have started with the doctrine of God. But quite apart from such, [p 48] more or less logical, considerations, we start with the doctrine of God because God is God, and because if we put anything or anybody before Him we are thereby dishonouring Him. We are failing to worship Him as we should and failing to conduct ourselves in His presence as the Bible teaches us to do.

So we inevitably start with this tremendous statement with which the Bible opens: 'In the beginning God.' Now, obviously, as this doctrine is all-inclusive, we are face to face with an endless theme, a theme which cannot possibly be exhausted. And as I understand the teaching of the Bible, and as seems quite inevitable from the nature and being of God, it is a theme which will occupy God's people throughout the endless ages of eternity. But, even so, it is vital that we should try to classify our knowledge as far as we can go; we must try to have our thoughts concerning God arranged in an orderly fashion. This will help us in every part of our Christian life and especially in our worship. There can be very little doubt, it seems to me, but that God Himself has given us His book, the Bible, with its revelation, in order that we may do that very thing. But, as we have already agreed, it is not enough merely to take the Bible in a general kind of way. We must underline the great outstanding principles and, knowing these, we can then proceed to worship God.

Clearly, the first matter with which we must start is this: the *existence of God*. We say we want to worship God and to know Him, so the first thought that comes to our minds is the existence of God, because, as we all know full well, there are many people who tell us that they do not believe in it. It is not so much that we are concerned with them and their arguments, as that, from our own standpoint, it is essential that we should be clear in our thinking about this subject.

Now the only point I want to make under this heading can be put like this: the Bible does not argue about the existence of God, it declares it. The Bible does not give us any proofs of the existence of God, it assumes it. Take that opening phrase; Genesis does not start by saying, 'Well, by the following proofs we establish the existence of God, and because He was existent, we establish that at the beginning He created ...'—not at all! 'In the beginning God created ...'; it just states His existence and His being. Of course, in Acts 14 and 17, and in Romans 1, the Bible does teach us that, because of the goodness of God, disbelief in God is entirely without excuse. But it only puts it like that, negatively; it does not say, positively, that by reference to nature, and so on, the existence of God can be proved. It says that if [p 49] someone does not believe in God, there is evidence that can be brought against him, because God has left His marks in nature.

Therefore, as Paul argues, man in unbelief is inexcusable. In Romans 1:20 he writes, 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.'

I do not want to stay here with the question of proofs, but I am anxious to be practical, and I have no doubt that many of you have read about the 'proofs' of the being and existence of God, and feel that they have some value, so it does behove us to say a little about our attitude towards them. There are a number of arguments, and you will find that most text books on biblical doctrines and theology go into them in great detail. There is the so-called *cosmological argument* which is an argument from nature: that every effect has a cause. Then there is the argument from order and design called the *teleological* argument, which says that everything leads up to something—that is clearly evident. Then there is the *moral* argument, which concludes that our awareness of good and bad, our sense of right and wrong point to the existence of a moral God. Next there is the so-called argument that people everywhere, even in the most primitive races, *think and feel* there is a God. It is suggested that there must be some ground for thinking so, and that that is a proof of the existence of God.

Now what the Bible teaches about such arguments is that they can never create faith. They are useful in a negative sense but they will never lead to faith and, according to the Scriptures, no one can believe in God without faith, without the inward work of the Holy Spirit that leads to faith. You remember the way it is put in Hebrews 11:6 where we are told that someone coming to God 'must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' so that, ultimately, no one will believe in God without the gift of faith, which is the gift of God Himself.

When men and women believe in God by faith, the proofs are of value in supporting their faith, so they are of some help, but I doubt if they have any further value. If you are interested in them, you can make use of them in that way, to strengthen and support your faith and to show to people with whom you are discussing these matters that these things render them inexcusable.

Then the next matter that must come before us is *the possibility of knowing God*. There is God from eternity to eternity, and the Bible [p 50] obviously starts there. But God having made the world, and having put us in the world, the question for us is: Is it possible to know this God who is held before us in the Bible, the God whose existence the Bible asserts? This is a very important aspect of the whole subject. This question of knowing God is the end, the supreme end, of all religion; it is the great thing that should be in the forefront of the mind and heart of every one of us. What is your need, what is your object, why are you studying these doctrines?

Well, according to the biblical teaching, our supreme need should always be to know God, so the question is: Can He be known? For there are people who believe in the existence of God, but who suggest to us that He cannot be known. Such teaching was very popular some two hundred years ago. It is known under the name of *deism*, and there are quite a number who believe that teaching today. They believe that God made the world as a watchmaker makes a clock. Then He wound it up and, having wound it up, He put it down, and had no more interest in it and nothing further to do with it. According to that theory, obviously God cannot be known.

Now we see many reasons for saying that these ideas are totally wrong, but the aspect of the matter I am anxious to emphasise is this—and it is one that needs to be stressed most of all to those of us who are evangelical Christians—we must always be careful to emphasise that the knowledge of God comes before any particular blessing that we may desire from Him. The goal of all our seeking and all our worship and all our endeavour should not be to have a particular experience; it should not be to petition certain blessings; it should be to know God Himself—the Giver not the gift, the source and the fount of every blessing, not the blessing itself.

I think you will agree with me that we always need that reminder. We are all of us so prone to start with ourselves and our problems. Sometimes I am almost filled with alarm as I get the impression from certain people and books that really they are not interested in God at all except as an agency who can give them blessings, for that is surely wrong and utterly unbiblical. Listen to our Lord Himself saying it: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God'—that is the *summum bonum*; that is our end and

object and goal. That statement in Matthew 5:8 is one of the great beatitudes, the one that sums them all up. There is nothing beyond that; it should be the thing above everything else which we covet, and all our efforts should be because of that.

Or take again our Lord's definition of eternal life. What is eternal [p 51] life? I wonder what our answer would be if we were faced with that question. Our tendency would be to describe it in some sort of subjective manner, something we have received, an experience we have had, and so on, and it does include that. But our Lord's definition is: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3).

So let us keep this in its right position. Oh yes, it is right to feel we should like to know we are forgiven; it is right to feel we should like to be delivered from that sin—all that is perfectly legitimate—but if those things come before desiring to know God, then our whole attitude is very wrong and faulty. Could it be that most of our particular problems arise from the fact that we do not start with this desire to know God and put this before everything else?

So, then, the question is: Is it possible? And here I have to introduce a term, a big and yet vital word. The Bible teaches what is called the *incomprehensibility of God*. It means that God cannot finally be comprehended or understood by human beings; it means that we can read around the doctrine of God and try to grasp it with our minds, but, by definition, God is incomprehensible, we can never know Him in the ultimate, final and complete sense. Read it as it is stated in 1 Timothy 6:16, or again in Romans 11:33, or in Isaiah 55:8–9. God dwells in that light which no one can approach. God in His eternal and absolute being is incomprehensible.

Yet we see that though God is finally incomprehensible, He is nevertheless knowable; He cannot be comprehended, but, thank God, He can be known. Let us be clear about this. There are those who would have us believe that God cannot be known in His real being, that He can only be known in His dealings with men and women. But that is a position that is quite wrong when you put it into the light of biblical teaching. God, of course, is known most easily in His dealings with men and women, but, as we have seen, the Bible does teach that God can be known, even in His essential being.

Now I am not denying the doctrine of incomprehensibility when I say that—let me show you how I reconcile it. The knowledge that we have of God's being will never be anything but a partial knowledge, but though it is partial, it is nevertheless real; though it is not complete, it is a true knowledge, enough to lead us to glorify Him. And we have this knowledge of God because it has pleased God Himself to give it to us. Surely that is the point and purpose of all the teaching we have in the Bible. Here we find the revelation that God [p 52] has given of Himself in the light of various statements He has made; surely these are meant to teach us about the being of God as well as His dealings with mankind.

Then, too, there is another term, *anthropomorphisms*: those statements in biblical teaching where God is spoken of as if He were man. They refer to God saying this and feeling that and, surely, they, too, are designed to lead us to know something about the being of God Himself.

A further argument which I would adduce is the various visions which are recorded in the Scriptures as having been seen by some of God's prophets and other servants, like, for example, that which happened to Moses when he was placed in the cleft of the rock—the vision of God (Exod. 33:18–23). What were these? Well, surely, they were but examples and illustrations of God manifesting something of His own glorious being. These were not His dealings with men and women in salvation and so on, but God was granting to His servants just a glimpse of His transcendent glory, and they never forgot it. So we argue that although God is incomprehensible, He, by His infinite grace and kindness and condescension, can be known. He is known.

If, then, that is so, the next question is: What do we know about God? What can we know about Him? And here I think it is right to start with what the Bible teaches us about God in His own essential nature and being. Now at this point I must pause for a moment. I said when we began these studies, and I want to go on repeating it constantly, that we are studying these things together not simply to entertain one another intellectually. If I thought that anybody had that motive—I say this quite seriously and solemnly—

then I would not go on with these studies. Our object is to know God, and to know God is to worship Him, and here am I, a little pygmy man, a preacher in time, talking about the essential nature and being of God!

No, at this point there is only one thing to do, we must do what Moses did when he saw the burning bush. At first he said, 'I will now turn aside, and see this great sight' (Exod. 3:3), and he was going to investigate this remarkable phenomenon, this bush that was burning and not consumed. But the word came to him, 'Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (v. 5). More and more, as I consider these things, and spend ever-increasing time in reading my Bible, I understand why the ancient Jews never mentioned the name Jehovah. They were filled with such a sense of awe and reverence, they had such a [p 53] conception of the majesty of God, that in a sense they dared not even utter the name. I much prefer that, to hearing people saying, 'Dear God'. I do not find such an expression in the Bible. I do find 'Holy Father', but never 'Dear God'. We must approach Him 'with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:28-9).

So then, bearing all that in mind, let us approach this subject in that spirit, and let me remind you of some of the things that the Bible tells us about the essential nature of God's being. Here it is very interesting to observe that we can, in a sense, only deal with negatives; because of our finite condition and God's transcendent greatness and glory, even our positive statements are in and of themselves negative. Take, for instance, the first statement. The Bible teaches us about the *infinity* of God—God's nature is infinite. Now that really means not finite; you cannot put it positively. It means He is an absolute being; He is not derived from something else nor conditioned by anything else—'I am that I am' (Exod. 3:14). 'Who shall I say,' said Moses to God, 'is sending me to do this work?' and God told him to say, 'I am hath sent me unto you.' What a staggering thought; an ultimate, absolute being!

In other words, God's infinity suggests to us that He is the cause of everything else; all existence, all being, derives from Him. His infinity also reminds us that He is free from all restrictions and all bounds; there is no limitation whatsoever where God is concerned, He is everything, everywhere, unlimited. Or perhaps the best way of thinking of it is this: the exaltedness of God, the sublimity of God, the ineffable majesty of God, or the transcendence of God, above and beyond everything: 'I am that I am.' We read in Revelation 4:8, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come'—the infinity of God is emphasised everywhere in the Bible, from beginning to end, and we should never pray without reminding ourselves of that. So often we are misled by the very anthropomorphisms for which we thank God, but let us try to remember that the being whom we approach in prayer is this infinite, absolute being.

Then the next quality which is always emphasised in the Scripture about God's essential being is His spirituality. This was stated once and for ever by our Lord Himself. 'God is a Spirit,' He said, and strangely enough this tremendous statement was made not to someone like Nicodemus, but to the woman of Samaria. Of course, our Lord said that to her partly because she had obviously got a false conception of God—'Should we worship,' she asked, 'in this mountain, [p 54] or in Jerusalem?' 'No,' said our Lord, 'God is a Spirit...' (John 4:24). Stephen said the same thing in his famous address in the seventh chapter of Acts, 'Howbeit the most High,' he said, 'dwelleth not in temples made with hands' (Acts 7:48). And Paul preaching to the people of Athens used exactly the same words: 'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands' (Acts 17:24). What do we mean when we say that God is a Spirit? Well, so far as our language can express it, it excludes the whole idea that God is corporeal, that He is confined to a form or to a body. In His essential being God has none of the properties that belong to matter. And that leads us to say—and this is most important from a practical point of view—that He can, therefore, never be discerned by the bodily senses. People who seem to think they have visions will always do well to bear that in mind—'No man hath seen God at any time,' writes John (John 1:18). 'Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible...' says Paul writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:17), and it is because of the spirituality of God's being that the Old Testament frequently forbade the making of images and likenesses. You find this in the first two of the Ten Commandments and it is repeated elsewhere.

Why is this? It is because the moment you begin to do that you are obviously forgetting the spirituality of God—the essential spiritual nature of His being. But perhaps the most striking proof of the spirituality

of God is another truth concerning Him which we shall be considering later, namely His omnipresence, the truth that God is everywhere, and that He is everywhere at one and the same time.

I anticipate a question at this point. Someone may say, 'All that is right, but what about the incident where God put Moses in the cleft of the rock, and then told him he should see His back parts (Exod. 33:23)? And what did our Lord mean when He said, 'Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape' (John 5:37)? There are two simple answers to that question. The first is that though God is spiritual in His essential being, when He so chooses, He may also give appearances of Himself. We are told how our Lord before His incarnation appeared as the Angel of the Covenant, so, when He chooses to teach something about Himself, He can give appearances of Himself and yet it is not His true self.

Second, let me put it like this: God, in order to tell us about Himself has spoken a language that you and I can understand. It is almost impossible for us to grasp the idea of infinity and spirituality, so God [p 55] speaks as if He were man. He is only doing it that we might understand; so that we may know and trust Him, He speaks as if He were a man—that is the whole idea of anthropomorphism. And so let us sum up. God is invisible, without parts, without body, free from any and every limitation.

That, then, brings us to the last characteristic of God's essential being and that is *personality*. The actual term is not used in the Bible but it is implied throughout, and thank God that it is. What does personality mean? Personality exists where there is mind, intelligence, will, reason, individuality, self-consciousness and self-determination. Where you have these things, there you have personality, and the Bible asserts that God is a person. How vitally important this is. It was important when our Lord was here in this world, because of the problem of pantheism, which is still popular in various forms. Believers in pantheism say that everything that is, is God, and God is everything that is. They say that we must not talk about the person of God, because He is not a person. The pantheist worships nature for that reason; he finds God in nature.

Now people do not talk so much about pantheism today. They say they believe that God is a great Mind or a great Force or a great Energy. Mind with a capital 'M'. But He is not a mind, He is a person. Neither is He a Force with a capital 'F', nor Energy with a capital 'E', because all these conceptions deny consciousness. To say He is just energy, unconscious energy, unconscious might, force and dynamism is not biblical. The Bible says that God is a person and this is absolutely vital to any true sense of worship, and to our having a feeling of confidence about ourselves and about the world.

How, then, does the Bible teach us that God is a person? It does so directly and indirectly. Indirectly, it tells us that God has left marks of Himself and of His mind and sensibility in creation. You see there the evidence of His mind and His will and His ordering. What about the laws of nature? Where do all our wonderful inventions come from? They have simply been discovered because we have found out that there are such things as 'laws of nature'. And the answer is that they originate from God; in the laws of nature, from design and order, we see the work of God, as Paul argues in Romans 1. They are all an indication of the mind and the will of God in operation.

But there is a great deal of direct evidence for saying that God is a person. Have you not noticed how the presence of God is always described in a personal way? Take the name of God that we have [p 56] considered: 'I am', that is a personal statement, it is a person who can say, 'I am', and God says that He speaks of Himself in this manner. Every single representative of God has declared that God is a person and not simply an unconscious force. Then take the way in which the Scriptures contrast God with the idols. Read it in Psalm 115—you notice the contrast? These idols, says the psalmist, have eyes, yes, but they cannot see, they are not persons; mouths they have, but they cannot speak; they have hands but they cannot handle; and God is contrasted with all these dumb idols. Paul says of the Thessalonians that they turned from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9). Not only that, the Bible teaches us that people converse with God and that He is able to have specific dealings with men and women, He chooses particular people and He blesses particular people—again, all that is personal.

But, of course, the final proof is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In the incarnation, in the person of His Son, God has declared that He is personal. Our Lord said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9), and, 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:30); therefore God must be personal, because it was a person

who was speaking. Furthermore, our Lord's teaching of God was always in terms of this personal quality. He spoke of Him as 'the Father' and you see this in its most glorious form when you take a look at the Lord Jesus Christ praying. In John 17, for example, what is He doing? He is praying, not to 'whatever gods may be', but to 'Holy Father', the person. And thus in every way, everywhere, the Bible asserts that God is a personal being.

And finally the Bible teaches also that God is *one unity*: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. 6:4), and when we come to the doctrine of the Trinity, we shall deal with that. We refer to it now, to make our consideration of this doctrine, as taught in the Bible, complete—"There is *one God*' and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2:5).

And so we see that the glorious truth we have been trying to look at together is just this, that this infinite, absolute, sublime, transcendent, glorious, majestic, mighty, everlasting being who is Spirit, who is truth, who dwells in light no one can approach, this God has been graciously pleased that you and I should know Him, that we should talk to Him and that we should worship Him. And He is prepared to listen to us, to meet with us, and receive our unworthy and poor worship, and our praise and adoration. Blessed be the name of God!

6

The Attributes of God's Absolute Personality

As we resume our consideration of the great and central doctrine of God, let me remind you that we have seen that the existence of God is not argued in the Scriptures. It is assumed. Furthermore, we saw that we can deduce from the Scriptures that God is knowable but incomprehensible. We can know Him but that does not mean that we can understand God fully or exhaustively. And then we went on to consider something about the essential being and nature of God. We mentioned His infinity, His spirituality, His personality, and the essential unity of the Godhead.

But fortunately for us, the Bible does not stop at that; it goes further. Having revealed that God, in His ultimate being and essence, is quite incomprehensible, for the very reason that He is characterised by those qualities which I have just enumerated, the Bible goes on to tell us more about Him, and obviously its object is that we may know God and worship Him more truly. And that is really our reason for considering this great doctrine of God, because unless we do understand what the Bible tells us about God, our worship can never be real.

Our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, 'Ye worship ye know not what...' (John 4:22). They thought they knew God. And in the same way, the apostle Paul said to the Athenians, 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you' (Acts 17:23). They were worshipping an unknown God. And this is vital—though we may say that we believe in God and believe that we are worshipping Him, we are not of necessity doing so. And we can never worship truly until we worship in the way in which our Lord taught the woman of Samaria. [p 58] He said, 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24); and He also said, 'For the Father seeketh such to worship him' (John 4:23).

So this is not some mere theological discussion that we are engaged upon. I would go on reminding you that our intention is essentially practical. The whole object of these considerations is that we may learn how to worship God, and how truly to be God's people. God has stooped and condescended to meet us, and He has been pleased to grant us further and more detailed revelations concerning Himself.

Now these further revelations are customarily divided into two main sections. The Bible tells us something of what are called the *attributes* of God and it also gives us certain *names* by which God has revealed Himself. The great theologians and Bible students of the past, especially in the Middle Ages, at the time of the Reformation and in the seventeenth century, spent a great deal of their time in discussing which of these should be taken first. This is a very interesting discussion which cannot finally be settled; it ultimately becomes a matter of one's own choice and predilection. For myself, I feel that we are more or less bound to take first the attributes and then the names.

My reasons are these. It seems to me that our approach to God should be something like this. The Bible reveals to us that God is in a glory that no man or woman can ever approach, in a light that is utterly inaccessible, that is, God in His ultimate nature and being—and we tried to look at this in the last lecture. The next thing to say, obviously, is that there are certain things that characterise God, which He has been pleased to reveal to us, and those are His attributes. But God has even come nearer to us than that. He has given certain names to Himself, and the object of these names is, as it were, to bring God still closer to us, that we may not be left baffled and bewildered, but may know that at any rate God has told us this and that about Himself.

Now that is my personal reason for looking at the attributes before we come to a consideration of the names of God. And again I would remind you that we are entirely dependent upon the biblical revelation for our knowledge of both. But, you see, already we are beginning to find that the Bible is nothing but a great book in which God has been pleased to reveal Himself. You cannot get away from revelation. It is God showing Himself, manifesting Himself, in order that we may know Him, in order that we may worship Him, in order that we may have fellowship with Him.

So, then, once more we bear in mind the injunction to take our [p 59] shoes from off our feet because the ground whereon we are standing is holy ground; once more we remind ourselves that God is not a phenomenon which we are to investigate, and that when we approach the attributes of God's great and eternal personality we are as far removed as can be imagined from the scientific procedure of dissection. No, no; we simply take what God has been pleased to tell us about Himself. We note it. We try to bear it in mind. And humbly, and full of worship and praise, we thank Him for His condescension.

Let us, therefore, realise that analysis, which is indeed absolutely essential if we are to know what we are doing, must nevertheless not be the ordinary kind of scientific or logical analysis. I am so afraid of going astray at this point. I am so afraid of myself, apart from any of you, because the mind, though it is a gift from God, can, because of the fall, be very dangerous to us. I want to make this abundantly clear, and let me put it, therefore, in this particular way. We normally think of analysis, do we not, as something like this: you analyse a flower. You pull off the petals and stamens, and you count them and check them off, and at the end you have nothing left. That is our usual conception of analysis. But we are going to do nothing at all like that now. God has been pleased to give this revelation in order that we may have some concept of Him. So these are not separate parts which go to make up a whole. They are aspects of God, particular views of God, and if I may use such a term, even portraits of God. But there is no division in the personality. So, while we are compelled by the inadequacy of language to talk about analysis, let us remember what we are doing.

So, we start by considering some of the attributes of God and by attributes I mean some of the perfections of God or, to put it another way, some of the virtues of God. Peter says in his first epistle '...that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Pet. 2:9). That is it. The Christian is meant to show forth the attributes of God—these perfections, these excellencies of God.

Or, if you like, here is another definition of God's attributes: they are things about God, certain aspects of His great and glorious eternal nature, which He has been pleased to reveal to us, and which, in a measure, we can lay hold of. Now here again, the authorities have been very busy trying to classify these attributes, trying for their own sakes and for the sake of others to put them into certain categories. But once more I would suggest to you that it is something which is [p 60] finally impossible. All sorts of classifications have been suggested. Some have said that the division should be into the natural attributes of God and the moral attributes of God, that is, into attributes which belong to God in and of Himself, and those which have a kind of moral implication.

Well, it does not matter very much what we may call them. I would suggest some classification like this: first, the attributes of absolute personality which belong to God, and second, the moral attributes of God.

In the last lecture we said that God is a person; He is a personality in an absolute sense. Now what are the attributes that belong to His personality? They are, of course, expressive of His eternal being, and the first one, therefore, which we have to note, is the *eternity* of God, and with it the *immutability* of God. God is without beginning and without ending; He is everlasting. You will find a great statement of that in Psalm 90: 'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God's' (v. 2). You will find it in the same way in Psalm 102. His eternity is something which we just assert and wonder at.

But we must look a little more at the immutability of God. This means that God is absolutely unchangeable. He can never be different in essence. God is always everlastingly the same. It is never possible that God should differ in any respect from what He always is and always has been. One of His great names suggests that: the name of Jehovah¹—I am that I am—which means, I am always the same; I am the unchangeable One. It is not possible, in other words, that God should possess one attribute at one time, and another attribute at another time. Now I think you will see at once the importance of emphasising that, because we ourselves are very changeable; we are one thing one day and something else

¹ Jehovah is the AV translation of the Hebrew *Yahweh*.

another day, though we are still the same person. We are not immutable—we are mutable. But that is something that is inconceivable in God. God in His absolute perfection is always the same.

James makes a great statement of this when he talks about ‘... the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning’—or—‘that is cast by turning’ (Jas. 1:17). That is God in His nature and in His character, He is not only without change but utterly without even the possibility of change. [p 61]

At this point somebody probably wants to ask this question: ‘Does not the Bible tell us that God repented of certain things? Do we not read in Genesis 6, ‘And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth’? Do we not also get the idea of God repenting in the book of Jonah, when He did not destroy the city of Nineveh? How can you at one and the same time say that God is immutable and unchangeable, and still tell us that the Bible talks about God repenting, because repentance means to change one’s mind?’

And clearly the answer is this: God’s character never changes, but His dealings with people change. What we are asserting, and what the Bible asserts everywhere, is that God, in His character, in His being, is always eternally the same, but, obviously, in His dealings with human beings, God varies His procedure according to whether they repent or not. In other words, when we use a term like ‘immutability’ we must be very careful that we do not deny the idea of the personality of God. As someone once put it, I think very well, ‘The immutability of God is not the immutability of a stone.’ A stone is immutable; it never changes at all. A stone is always a stone and never will be anything else. But that is not the immutability of God. His is not the immutability of lifelessness or a machine. His is the immutability of absolute perfection. Because God is personal in His dealings with men and women, He varies His actions.

Now this is, I think you will agree with me, one of the most profound and glorious doctrines of all. I know nothing, in a sense, in my Christian life and experience which is so comforting as the doctrine of the eternity and immutability of God. Of course, to the sinner it is one of the most terrifying of all the doctrines. In other words, God is eternally righteous. God is eternally holy. Is there anything more wonderful, especially in the modern world as it is?

Change and decay in all around I see,

Oh Thou who changest not, abide with me.

H. F. Lyte

Is it not a wonderful and a glorious thing to know that God never changes? We are so changeable; other people are so changeable; everything is changeable. But you can be absolutely certain that the everlasting God is always the same. High doctrine, yes, but a most practical and comforting doctrine. I would like to stay with it, but we must go on.

The next attribute of God (and let me remind you that we are still [p 62] dealing with attributes that belong to His essential, eternal being) is His *omnipresence*. This means that God is present everywhere. Now you remember that we have already agreed that God is Spirit, so when we say that God is everywhere we are not speaking in a bodily sense. It is almost impossible to grasp these ideas, is it not? Yet they are taught us so plainly in the Bible that it is our duty to face them and to take hold of them and to possess them with our minds and our understanding.

We must say also that He is not of necessity present in the same way everywhere, because the Bible tells us that heaven is His dwelling-place (1 Kgs. 8:30). (You remember that great term I have already had to introduce—the term *anthropomorphism*. These terms are absolutely essential in order to give us some understanding.) So we have to say that God is present everywhere, and yet there are certain places—almost that word is inadequate—where God is specially present. We have to say that in order to safeguard ourselves against pantheism, which, as we saw in our last lecture, says that God is a kind of permanent captive in everything, but which denies His personality.

Now this is how the Bible tells us about the omnipresence of God: take, for instance, Jeremiah 23:23–4: ‘Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord’ He fills the heavens. He fills the

earth. He is everywhere. Then in particular on this point take Psalm 139: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me' (vv. 7–10). It does not matter where I go, God is there. And Paul makes the same point in preaching to those learned Athenians: 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being...' (Acts 17:28). You cannot get out of the presence or the sight of God—the omnipresence of God.

Here again, I suggest to you, is a great and comforting doctrine. The psalmist in Psalm 139 looks on it, of course, as a warning; and he is right. All these great questions which we are considering are warnings. These attributes of God, they are at one and the same time warnings and comforts. If you have sinned against God, you will find it impossible to get away from Him. Read again Francis Thompson's poem, 'The Hound of Heaven': 'I fled him down the nights and down [p 63] the days ...' You cannot get away wherever you are, down 'the labyrinthine ways' of your mind or anywhere else. Yes, but is it not a wonderfully comforting thing to think and to realise that it does not matter where your circumstances may put you, God is still with you. There is no place anywhere in which you may ever find yourself but that God will be there.

And that in turn brings me to His next great attribute: the *omniscience* of God. God knows all things, and His knowledge is always absolute knowledge. It is perfect knowledge, a complete knowledge of everything.

There are very many statements of this, of course, in the Scriptures. Take, for instance, Psalm 147:5: '... his understanding is infinite.' Then in Proverbs 15:3 we read, 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good'.

So then, let us divide it up like this. The Bible tells us quite a lot in detail about this knowledge, this omniscience of God. For instance, it tells us about God's knowledge of nature: 'He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names' (Ps. 147:4). But let me give you another example. Do you remember those tender words of our Lord in which He tells us that not a single sparrow falls to the ground without our Father (Matt. 10:29)? Everything in the realm of nature is known to God. It is quite inconceivable to us, but the Bible asserts that it is true of God. Look up into the heavens on a starry night and see all that multiplicity of stars. He knows them, every one, and He has a name for every one. There is nothing in creation but that God knows it in that intimate and personal sense.

But we are obviously more interested in God's knowledge of us and of our human experience, and here again Psalm 139 is very eloquent. Incidentally, in this particular psalm you get a perfect exposition of the attributes of God; they all seem to have been grouped together. The psalmist says, 'Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off' (v. 2). My very thought! He knows all about me. 'Thou compasses my path ... and art acquainted with all my ways' (v. 3). Indeed, he goes further in verse 4 and says this: 'For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.' What an exact and detailed knowledge God has of us! We read of how He said to Moses, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people' (Exod. 3:7). He knew what His people were suffering there in Egypt, He knew of the hardships.

Now God's people, alas, in their lack of faith and of knowledge, are [p 64] often tempted to think that God does not know. You will find that in many a psalm. Does God not know? asks the psalmist: 'Has God forgotten to be gracious?' (Ps. 77:9). Does He not realise what is happening to us? But we must never think that. It is our ignorance that makes us speak like that. God knows all about us. Let me again quote our blessed Lord; He says, 'But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered' (Luke 12:7). Can you think of a more detailed knowledge than that? God knows us in detail to that extent.

Then there is that mighty statement in Hebrews 4:13: 'Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' There is not a more grand and more eloquent statement of the omniscience of God than that. It sums it up perfectly. That is God's knowledge of us and of our human experiences.

But, further, of course, the Bible everywhere tells us that God has a perfect knowledge of all human history past and future. Take the prophets, for instance, and the prophecies; take the second chapter of the book of Daniel, with its foretelling of the kingdoms that were to come. There God reveals His complete and perfect foreknowledge. The eighth chapter of Daniel does exactly the same thing; and there are many other examples of this same principle. In Acts 15:18 you find this stated explicitly in these words: 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.' God sees the end from the beginning; He knows everything from eternity to eternity.

Now we have to use terms like foreknowledge, and so on. In a sense they are quite meaningless when you are speaking about God, for with God there is no time; there is no past, present and future where He is concerned, all is one great, living, eternal present. We cannot grasp that, but the Bible teaches it. We are living in time and we think in such terms. But God is above time. He is in eternity, and He sees everything in one, as it were. Thus there is no difficulty about speaking of the foreknowledge of God. He sees the whole of history as He looks at it. He is in it always. So we are not surprised that Paul cries out saying, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' (Rom. 11:33).

The mention of the word *wisdom* brings me to another subsection of this same heading of omniscience, because we read a great deal in the Bible about the wisdom of God; and the wisdom of God is a part, an aspect, of His perfect knowledge. So bear that in mind while I draw a few distinctions between knowledge and wisdom. I think it is [p 65] essential to do this because you find the two things mentioned so often in the Bible.

What, then, is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? I feel that this is one of the most urgently needed distinctions at this present time. If I understand anything at all about the modern world and its educational systems, I would say that we have gone wrong because we have failed to draw the vital distinction between knowledge and wisdom. We today go in for knowledge. We are growing encyclopaedias. It is the age, is it not, of digests—collections of knowledge—and we are a most knowledgeable people. I suppose that modern men and women know far more than any of their predecessors have ever known. Yes; but what is so obviously lacking in the modern world?

Let me suggest a few things for you to reflect upon. First, the source of knowledge is study; the source of wisdom is discernment. You get your knowledge by studying, but you do not get wisdom that way. People can study a great deal but not get wisdom, because they lack discernment, because they lack the ability to see.

Second, knowledge is what is commonly called discursive in its character, whereas wisdom is more intuitive. Knowledge is something that you can arrive at by conversation and talk and consideration. Whereas wisdom is, in a sense, almost something that someone is born with as a gift. We all realise that, do we not? There are some people who seem to be born naturally wise people. They may not have very great knowledge, but if you want advice you go to them. There are other people who have a great deal of knowledge, but you would never dream of taking their opinion, because you feel they are lacking in wisdom. You will often find, for example, that many a member of the legal profession may make a good advocate but a very poor judge, though he may have a great knowledge of law. The two things are very different.

Then there are further differences between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is generally theoretical; wisdom is always practical. Knowledge, as such, is not really concerned about life and living; it is simply interested in the knowledge of things for the sake of knowing them. But wisdom always has a practical objective. It is the capacity to make use of the knowledge you have; to apply it; to bring it down to the practical level. It wants to live. It wants to do something.

And my last distinction is that in knowledge you have the mind acting apart from the will, whereas where wisdom is concerned you [p 66] have the mind acting in subservience to the will. In other words, wisdom is the right kind of knowledge. And I think you will agree with me that this kind of knowledge is seriously needed in the modern world. You have great numbers of clever people, but, oh, what a tragic lack of wisdom!

Well, the Bible emphasises the wisdom of God. God applies His knowledge; He brings it to bear. And you will see it, supremely, in three main respects. You see the wisdom of God in creation. I hope to discuss this when we come to the doctrine of creation. But there are many people who are troubled about the hypothesis and theory of evolution, and what troubles them, they say, is that they see a kind of similarity of pattern all along. Yes, I agree, I see the same thing, but what I see there is not evolution, but the wisdom of God in creation, in the design and perfect arrangement, and in all the harmony, all the co-operation. Look into the book of nature, and if you have eyes which are at all Christian, you will see everywhere the marvellous wisdom of God. The multiplicity is a manifestation of wisdom; the way He repeats Himself—spring, summer, autumn, winter—and always does things in the same way.

But if you want to see the wisdom of God you must come and look at it as it is manifested in redemption. That is the great argument, is it not, in 1 Corinthians 1: ‘The Greeks seek after wisdom’ (v. 22). Why, says Paul, if you want wisdom look at the Lord Jesus Christ, who is ‘the power of God, and the wisdom of God’ (v. 24). ‘But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption’ (v. 30).

Then you also see God’s wisdom in His providential arrangements—the providence of God. Again, I hope to deal with that separately; I merely mention it at this point. But as you consider what the Bible has to tell about the great providence of God, you will see this extraordinary display of His perfect wisdom.

I must come next to the *omnipotence* of God: God is all-powerful. The omnipotence of God is that by which He brings to pass everything He wills. So when you are considering this, you must sub-divide it into two main sections: first, the will of God, and second, the power of God.

The omnipotence is the will of God being put into operation. How often we read in the Bible about the will of God—for example, Paul writes of ‘him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will’ (Eph. 1:11). What is the will of God? It is the final ground of everything, of all existence. It is the final explanation of everything [p 67] that has ever happened or everything that will happen. And the Bible teaches that the will of God is sovereign; in other words, it is not determined by anything but by God Himself. It is the expression of His Lordship, His absolute being.

But remember, His will is never arbitrary. It is never exercised except in perfect harmony with all the other attributes of God’s great and glorious being. It is the same God who is omniscient, who is omnipresent. It is the same God who is glorious and wonderful. It is the same God who is love and compassion and mercy. We must not divide these things, though we distinguish them for the purposes of thought and understanding.

Furthermore, you will find that the will of God expresses itself in two main ways. He declares certain things which He Himself is going to do: that is called the *decretive will* of God. He also prescribes certain things for us to do: that is the *prescriptive will* of God. The terms are not of great importance, but constantly in the Bible you see these two aspects of God’s will: God tells us what He Himself is going to do and He gives commands to us about what we are to do.

As for His power, it is endless. He is omnipotent. ‘Is any thing too hard for the Lord?’ God asked Abraham (Gen. 18:14), and the angel Gabriel said to Mary, ‘For with God nothing shall be impossible’ (Luke 1:37). His might, His power, His strength are endless. The Bible is full of this! He made everything out of nothing—He spoke and it happened. He said, ‘Let there be light: and there was light’ (Gen. 1:3). He sends His frosts and His snow. Read the psalms and you will find that they glory in the endless power of God.

This sovereign will and power of God have been manifested most of all, and most clearly, in three ways: in creation, in salvation and in providence. And I suppose there is no greater manifestation of the power of God than the one to which Paul refers in the first chapter of Ephesians: ‘... his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead’ (vv.19–20). This idea of omnipotence is staggering! There are many things we do not understand about the will of God. But we are not meant to understand them; we are meant to look at them with reverence and with awe and worship. We are meant to realise that there would be no hope for us at all were it not for the omnipotence of God. I say it with

reverence, nothing less than the omnipotence of God could save a single soul. But, thank God, He is omnipotent, and we are saved by the power of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.[p 68]

Then, finally, the Bible also tells us about the *absolute blessedness* of God. It speaks about His utter, absolute perfection. God is the sum total of all excellency. There is nothing higher or greater or better than God. Every conceivable perfection is in God in an absolute manner, and He is exalted above all shortcomings and all limitations. The Bible therefore speaks of the perfection of God and it also speaks of the blessedness of God. Take those many expressions in Paul's epistles—for example, Paul's words, 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God' (1 Tim. 1:11). What does Paul mean when he refers to God as 'blessed'? Well, he means that God's own perfection is the object of God's own knowledge and of His own love. He rejoices in Himself. He delights in Himself and is perfectly and absolutely self-sufficient. God is, according to the Scriptures, well-pleased within Himself and His glorious being: the blessedness of God.

The last thing is the *glory* of God and this is the biblical way of describing His greatness, His splendour, His majesty. We read of the glory of God filling the house—the Temple (1 Kgs. 8:11), and of the glory of God being manifested in dimmed vision to certain people. This means they had some conception of the greatness, the splendour, the majesty, the might of His being.

So we have looked together at some of the attributes of God. We have not started considering the so-called moral attributes of God. We have dealt only with the attributes of God that belong to His essential being and personality. And unless we are at this moment more anxious than ever before to fall at His feet, to yield ourselves utterly and unreservedly to Him, realising that the greatest privilege that has ever come to us is to worship Him and to commune with Him, then we have spent our time in vain. We have been looking at the blessed God who dwells in that light that is unapproachable (1 Tim. 6:16), whom no one has seen nor ever can see, and who has been graciously pleased to tell us about Himself. So let us thank Him and worship Him.

The Moral Attributes of God

We are dealing, let me remind you, with the attributes of God. We have considered those which belong to His absolute personality and we come now to consider what are commonly called the moral attributes of God, sometimes described as the *communicable* attributes of God. Those attributes which we have just dealt with belong only to God; they are incommunicable and, I say with reverence, even God cannot convey them to His people. The attributes that we shall now consider—the moral attributes—are, in a sense, communicable. Something corresponding to them is to be found in men and women.

What are these? Well, first we must place the *holiness* of God. What is holiness? I think we almost inevitably tend to deal with it in negative terms, and we define it as meaning that God is entirely separate from and apart from sin. Holiness primarily means separation—separation from evil.

But, of course, holiness is also something positive. It is essential, absolute purity. The Bible teaches us everywhere that God is holy, and a part of the manifestation of this holiness is His hatred of sin and His separation from sin, from the sinner and from all that is evil.

Let me give you certain outstanding examples and illustrations of the Bible's teaching on this. God has revealed His holiness by granting visions of Himself to certain people. There is the great case of Moses, in Exodus 34 and in other places, where God appeared, as it were, to Moses, and Moses was overwhelmed by the sense of His holiness. The same thing happened to Job, to Isaiah and to Ezekiel. Anyone who has ever come anywhere near to God has always been impressed by His absolute holiness. The Bible teaches this in certain terms that it uses; it refers to God as 'the Holy One' (Isa. 40:25), and we have [p 70] God's injunction: 'Be ye holy; for I am holy' (1 Pet. 1:16), which is a specific, explicit statement of God's holiness.

Now we often forget, I fear, that in a sense, the great business of the Old Testament is to reveal the holiness of God. We have been far too influenced, many of us, by the false teaching of the past century, which would have us believe that Old Testament history is just the history of man's search for God. It is not. The Old Testament is primarily a revelation of the holiness of God, and of what God has done as a result of that, and, therefore, you find this teaching everywhere. What was the purpose of the giving of the law if not to reveal and to teach the children of Israel about the holiness of God? There He separated a people unto Himself, and He wanted them to know what sort of people they were. They could only know that as they realised and appreciated His holiness: so the giving of the law was primarily to that end.

Then take all the various instructions about the making of the tabernacle—the division into the outer court and the holy place, and the holiest of all, into which the high priest alone was allowed to enter once a year, and that not without blood. The tabernacle was simply designed to represent, as it were in actual practice, this great teaching about the holiness of God. Then, take all that you read about the ceremonial law and about the clean and unclean animals. Why all this? Well, the reason given is: you are a holy people and I am a holy God; you are not to eat what everybody else eats. There was to be this division, this separation, between clean and unclean. All that long list of rules and regulations is also a part of the teaching of the holiness of God.

Then, of course, the prophets constantly taught about God's holiness. This was their great burden and message. It is summed up perfectly in the book of Habakkuk, where we are told, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity' (Hab. 1:13).

And, again, you get the same emphasis in the New Testament. Our Lord, for instance, addressed God as 'Holy Father' (John 17:11). That is the supreme teaching about the holiness of God. Even He, who was equal with God, and had come out of the eternal bosom, even He addressed Him as 'Holy Father'. And there is a definition of this in 1 John: 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). So the Bible is full of this teaching. It refers to God the Father as the 'Holy One of Israel' (Ps. 71:22; etc.). The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as 'thy holy child Jesus' (Acts 4:27), and the 'Holy One' (Acts 3:14). Then we speak of

the 'Holy Spirit', thus the three Persons [p 71] in the glorious Trinity are constantly referred to and described in terms of this quality of holiness.

But I suppose if you were to be asked to say where the Bible teaches the holiness of God most powerfully of all you have to go to Calvary. God is so holy, so utterly holy, that nothing but that awful death could make it possible for Him to forgive us. The cross is the supreme and the sublimest declaration and revelation of the holiness of God.

I should like to tarry with this great theme, but I cannot; we must move on. Let us just remind ourselves that surely the purpose of the biblical revelation of God's holiness is to teach us how to approach Him. It is not mere theoretical knowledge that we are asked to try to grasp with our understandings. Its purpose is very practical. In the words of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, we are to approach God 'with reverence and godly fear' (Heb. 12:28). He is always to be approached in that way, wherever you are; when you are alone in a room, or when you are meeting as a family to pray, or when you are in a public service, God is always God and He is always to be approached 'with reverence and godly fear'. No such expression as 'Dear God', for example, is to be found in the Scriptures.

There are many illustrations of this. Think again of Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3); then there is the terrible case of that man Uzzah who put out his hand to steady the Ark as it was being carried on a cart (2 Sam. 6). That is a terrible declaration about how we are to approach God and worship Him. Read the account of how the law was given; how the mount was burning with fire, and nothing was allowed to approach it (Exod. 19:16–25): the holiness of God.

This doctrine also teaches us, of course, the terrible nature of sin. You will never have a knowledge of sin unless you have a true conception of the holiness of God. And that is perhaps why the modern conception of sin is so inadequate. We do not spend sufficient time with the doctrine of God, and with the holiness of God. That is the way to see sin—not primarily by self-examination but by going into the presence of God. People sometimes say, 'But you don't expect all of us to feel that we are miserable sinners, do you? You don't want all of us to say with Charles Wesley, "Vile and full of sin I am"? That may be all right for drunkards and people like that, but it's not true of us!'

Some people are troubled by this. They say, 'I have never really felt I am a sinner. How can I, when I have been brought up in a Christian home, and have always gone to a place of worship? Surely I'm not expected to have that awful sense of sin?' But the answer to all that [p 72] is this: If you really came into the presence of God and had some conception of His holiness, you would soon know yourself as a vile, terrible sinner. You would say with Paul that there is no good thing in you (Rom. 7:18). The way to appreciate your own sinfulness is not to look at your actions, nor your life, but to come into the presence of God.

And finally, of course, God's holiness shows us the absolute necessity of the atonement. That is the reverse of what I was saying just now about the cross as the manifestation of the holiness of God. Yes, but as it manifests that, it also shows us that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, that God's holiness insists upon it, demands an atonement for sin.

The next moral attribute of God that the Bible emphasises is the *righteousness* or the *justice* of God. Now this follows, of course, inescapably, from the holiness of God. What is righteousness? Well, it is holiness manifested in God's dealings with us. I think that is as good a definition as you can get. Or, you can look at it like this: it is that quality in God which always reveals God as doing that which is right. It is that in God which makes Him incapable of doing anything which is wrong. Righteousness and justice are the carrying out of God's holiness and the expression of it in the government of the world.

There are many ways in which this conception can be analysed and a good one is this: righteousness is the demonstration of God's *legislative holiness*. God gives His laws in order to impose upon us His righteous demands. He legislates for us. Justice, on the other hand, is God's *judicial holiness*, by which, of course, He exacts penalties from those who have been guilty of breaking His law, those who have been guilty of sin.

A further definition still is that the righteousness of God is God's love of holiness, and the justice of God is God's abomination of sin. And I think that that is the definition that most commends itself.

Now the righteousness and the justice of God, of course, are revealed almost everywhere in the Scriptures. The wrath of God is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. Our Lord Himself taught it; one of the cardinal doctrines of the whole Bible is that God has a hatred of sin which He expresses in His wrath. If anyone does not believe, says John, then 'the wrath of God abideth on him' (John 3:36). We are all by nature, says Paul, 'the children of wrath' (Eph. 2:3).

But God's righteousness and justice are not only manifested in His [p 73] wrath. He reveals these same qualities in forgiving us our sins: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). Having prepared the way of forgiveness, if we conform to it, the justice of God comes in, and by His Justice God forgives us. And God prepared the way of forgiveness by providing propitiation for our sins—and this is the most remarkable thing of all. The classic statement of that is in the epistle to the Romans: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God' (Rom. 3:25). It was God's justice, coupled with His love, His mercy and His compassion, that provided the offering and the sacrifice—the propitiation—that was necessary.

Another way in which God manifests His Justice and His righteousness is that He always keeps His word. What He has promised He always fulfils. I shall come back to that again later on. But He always shows us that He is the vindicator of His people. Now that is the whole message of the prophet Habakkuk. You remember his problem: 'How,' says Habakkuk to himself, 'can God possibly allow His own people to suffer in this way, and those heathen, those sinful Chaldeans, to be the very people who are going to punish them and to destroy them? How can God do this kind of thing?' And his answer to the problem is this: 'It is all right,' he says. 'Don't only look at the immediate and the present; take the long view and you will find that God will manifest His righteousness and His justice. The children of Israel deserve punishment at the moment, and He is using these Chaldeans temporarily; later on, they will be routed, and destroyed. God is absolutely just, and if you take the long view you will see it.'

He also rewards the righteous. Listen to Paul putting it at the end of his life, in 2 Timothy 4:8: 'Henceforth,' he says, 'there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.' I am not worrying about that, says Paul. He is a righteous judge, and the crown He has promised, He will certainly give. Henceforth this wonderful grace is given in Christ. God in the cross, then, is doing that.

Next, we read in Romans 3:25 that God *declares* His own righteousness and absolute justice. He is justifying His own forgiveness of the sins of those who repent. This is a very great and exalted conception. We see it finally, in this respect: God not only forgives the sins [p 74] of the sinner in salvation, He goes beyond that. He declares sinners to be righteous; He makes them righteous. That is a very vital truth. If we are not clear about this question of the righteousness of God and the justice of God we might think that all that God does to us is to forgive us our sins. Not at all! Because God is righteous, we must be made righteous also; and He *declares* us to be righteous in a legal or forensic sense. That is justification by faith. But He also *makes* us righteous. That is our sanctification. This will continue until ultimately we shall be without spot and blameless, without rebuke, righteous and holy, even as He is Himself.

But let me come now to the third great attribute of God under this section of moral attributes, and here we come to the *goodness* or the *love* of God. You notice the order in which we are taking them—holiness, righteousness and justice, goodness and love. It is a dangerous and terrible thing not to put these attributes in the right order. People have often been guilty of that, and the result is that they have made shipwreck of their faith.

So we come now to the goodness and the love of God. In the Scriptures these two words are more or less interchangeable; sometimes the truth is put in terms of the goodness of God, sometimes in terms of the love of God; and the same points are covered by both these terms.

Yet there is a kind of distinction between them, and I suggest it is something like this: the goodness of God is that perfection of God which prompts Him to deal bounteously and in a kindly way with all His creatures. 'Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God,' says Paul (Rom. 11:22). 'The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works' (Ps. 145:9). Watch the terms 'good' and 'goodness' as you read your Scriptures, and you will find they generally cover that conception of God's bounty.

God's love is that attribute in God by which He is eternally moved to communicate Himself to others. The Scriptures make it quite clear that the love of God is something that communicates itself; God is eternal, and God is eternal love. That, incidentally, will be our introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. The very fact that God is love is proof, in a sense, of the Trinity. Because God is eternal and eternal love, there must have been someone whom He always loved. That makes the doctrine of the Trinity an absolute necessity. However, for now, we are trying to define the difference between goodness and love.

How, then, do these glorious qualities in God reveal and manifest [p 75] themselves? For convenience, I have tried to put them under certain headings. First, God manifests His goodness and His love towards His creatures in general. You find this, for instance, in Matthew 5:45: 'For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.' That is the goodness of God to all His creatures, indiscriminately. Then we are told in Matthew 6:26 that He feeds 'the fowls of the air'. In Acts 14:17 you will find Paul arguing at Lystra that God 'left not himself without witness' in this respect, 'that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness'. All this is a manifestation of the goodness of God. Even when men and women have forgotten Him, and have lost their knowledge of Him, God continues to be good to them in that way.

But having said that, let us come to something more particular and still more glorious. The second way in which the goodness and the love of God manifest themselves is by means of what the Bible calls the *grace* of God. I am not surprised that the great Philip Doddridge, when he thought of this word, burst out saying, 'Grace—it is a charming sound, harmonious to mine ear!' There is no more glorious word than the word 'grace.' Grace, this great word that you find so constantly in the Scriptures, is the goodness or the love of God towards those who do not in any way deserve it. It is the unmerited goodness or love of God towards those who have forfeited every claim upon Him and His love, and who deserve judgment and condemnation.

The Bible teaches that the grace of God is the source of every blessing that is ever bestowed upon us. Everything comes out of the fountain of eternal and everlasting grace. I do commend to you a close and careful study of this word in the first two chapters of the epistle to the Ephesians. Oh, it is all goodness, all of His grace, this amazing grace of God! 'The grace of God,' says Paul to Titus, 'that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men' (Titus 2:11). And then read Titus 3 as well; it is again a most magnificent statement about the grace of God. So read these chapters and rejoice and abandon yourself in worship as you begin to understand the wonderful love and goodness of God which He has revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the next thing in the manifestation of the goodness and the love of God is the *mercy* of God. If you like alternative terms, it is the *loving-kindness* of God, the *tender compassion* of God. All these words have their special meaning. Have you noticed how, in the salutations in many of the epistles, you have, 'Grace, mercy and peace'? [p 76] So mercy and grace are not the same thing. What, then, is mercy? It can be defined as the goodness or the love of God towards those who are in misery or distress as the result of their sin, and irrespective of their deserts. Be alert to that word 'mercy', and you will find that it means that. Psalm 103 has some glorious statements about the mercy of God. And in the introduction to Luke's Gospel, you find these words: 'He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy' (Luke 1:54). Then verses 77 and 78 read like this: He is sent, 'To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God.' And you find God's mercy constantly stated in the New Testament epistles. Paul says, 'Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth' (Rom. 9:18). But you will find it most of all in the salutations in the introductions to the epistles.

One other subdivision of this goodness and love of God—and what a glorious one this is again!—is the patience and longsuffering of God. Not one of us would be here tonight were it not for this! If God were not

longsuffering we should all have been blotted out. But God is longsuffering. What does it mean? It means that He bears with the froward and the evil; He shows forbearance towards sinners who, in spite of all His benefits and mercies, still sin against Him. Paul puts it like this: 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' (Rom. 2:4). He says again, 'What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction' (Rom. 9:22). Peter puts it clearly when he tells us that God has been patient with those spirits and beings, 'Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah' (1 Pet. 3:20). And there is that famous statement in his second epistle where he says that we must 'account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation' (2 Pet. 3:15).

Now that brings me to the fourth moral attribute of God, and that is God's *faithfulness*. This, in a sense, is included in His righteousness and justice, and also in the idea of the immutability of God. Yet I feel, with many others, constrained to put it as a separate heading because of the emphasis which is so frequently placed upon it in the Scriptures. What does it mean? Well, I have never met with a better definition of the faithfulness of God than this: when you say that God is faithful you mean that He is one upon whom you can safely lean. It [p 77] means one on whom you can absolutely rely; one upon whom you can depend; one upon whom you can stay yourself, without ever being in any doubt that He will suddenly let go and let you go.

The Bible has some glorious statements about this. It tells us that the faithfulness of God reaches unto the clouds (Ps. 36:5). It tells us endlessly that God always keeps His promises, and never breaks His covenants. It tells us that God will always fulfil every word that has ever gone out of His mouth (Isa. 55:11). It tells us that God will always faithfully and certainly defend and deliver His servants at all times of trial, testing and conflict. It tells us that God can be relied upon to confirm and to establish all whom He has called, guarding them from the evil one, and keeping them and guiding them until His purposes are fulfilled in them.

Listen to one great statement of all that: 'God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord' (1 Cor. 1:9). Whatever else may happen, whatever may be going wrong, Paul tells those people to be sure of this—God is faithful. Or, again, he says, 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:23). Then notice, 'Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it' (1 Thess. 5:24). It is absolutely certain: nothing can frustrate Him; nothing can make Him forego what He has promised; nothing can cause Him to change what He has purposed with respect to you. If you are a child of God, your ultimate destiny is absolutely sure.

Then there is another statement of this and what a comfort it is! We have sinned against Him; we cannot forgive ourselves and we do not know what to do. But this is our hope: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ...' (1 John 1:9). He has said He will do it, and because He has said it, He will do it. He is faithful. You need not worry, therefore; cast yourself on the faithfulness of God, and tell the devil that you have been forgiven, that you have confessed your sins, and that the faithfulness of God guarantees your forgiveness.

So I would sum up this section on the faithfulness of God in this way: our Lord once turned to His followers and said, 'Have faith in God' (Mark 11:22)—that is the *Authorised (King James) Version*. But the great and saintly Hudson Taylor¹ always said that that should be [p 78] translated not so much, 'Have faith in God,' as, 'Hold on to the faithfulness of God.' It became the motto of his life and work. Of course, that is to have faith in God, but, you see, if you put it in that way—'Have faith in God'—the emphasis seems to be on your faith. 'It is not that,' said Hudson Taylor, 'it is the faithfulness of God that matters. When you have no faith in yourself, hold on to His faithfulness.' God is immutable. God is faithful. He will never change. That is what faith in God really means. Whatever may be happening to you, wherever you are, hold on to the faithfulness of God.

¹ The nineteenth century founder of the China Inland Mission, now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

So then, far too hurriedly, I am afraid, we have dealt with the attributes of God. Before I leave them, let me again stress this: though for the sake of clarity, and for intellectual comprehension, we have to take them one by one, we must be very careful never to isolate any one of them in our thinking about God. God is altogether in every one of His attributes at the same time; so that we must never put up one of the attributes against another. We must never contrast the holiness of God and the mercy of God. God is holy, God is mercy—altogether, always, at the same time.

I must emphasise this because, owing to our limited minds and our limited comprehension, we have to make these distinctions. But God forbid that we should divide anything in God Himself! We cannot actually do it, of course, but we can do it falsely to our own destruction. So remember at all times that the whole of God is in every attribute, and that God is all of these things at the same time. His love is a holy love. The tragedy of forgetting that, and of pitting His love against His justice! No, no! Everything in God is loving. Everything in God is just and righteous altogether, always. We must always preserve in our thinking the perfection of balance that is in God Himself.

8

The Names of God and the Holy Trinity

We have just been considering the so-called moral or communicable attributes of God, and as we did this we reminded ourselves that we are not merely concerned with some intellectual or theoretical pursuit. All this is necessary in order that we may know God, in order that we may worship Him truly, in order that we may have communion with Him, and be blessed by Him. So while we are concerned with very high doctrine, it all has a very practical purpose. The history of the Church throughout the centuries shows us very clearly that it is because people have ignored some part of the biblical teaching or revelation concerning these great doctrines, that errors and heresies and calamities have come into individual lives and into the life of the Church as a whole. So that all along we are carrying these two great thoughts together. We desire to know God—yes; but not merely that we may have knowledge, it is also that we may come into conformity with Him and with His plan for our lives. We also remind ourselves that in order to know God, we are entirely dependent upon God’s revelation of Himself.

So the next thing we have to say is this: God has given us the truth about Himself and His attributes in a very special way, by applying special names to Himself; and so we come to the great subject of the names of God. You cannot read the Scriptures without noticing that certain names are given by God to Himself and the purpose of these names is again to focus attention upon some aspect or another of the being of God, the character of God. So we can regard these names of God as defining the attributes of God still more specifically.

The name always stands for the character. We often say about a man that he has ‘a very good name’. We may be speaking about a **[p 80]** doctor or a lawyer, and when we say that about him we mean that he has a good character in that respect. He has certain qualities and abilities that we like. A name, therefore, stands for who the person really is; his character, his propensities, and perfections. And whenever you find these names used of God in the Bible, you will always find that that is exactly what they do; and so you find that there are certain people in the Bible who ask God His name.

The famous incident concerning this is that of Jacob at Peniel, that fateful night when he was going back to his own country. He had become a wealthy man, everything seemed to be perfect. Yes; but there was one great difficulty. He knew that his brother Esau was coming to meet him, and he remembered his sin against him, and he was afraid. So he sent his wives and his goods—everything—across the river and remained behind alone on the other side. Then a man began to struggle with him and Jacob realised that this was something very unusual. He was conscious that there was something divine in this, so he said to the person with whom he was struggling, ‘Tell me, I pray thee, thy name’ (Gen. 32:29), by which he meant: Who are you? Tell me the truth about yourself. ‘I have a feeling,’ he said in effect, ‘that you are somebody unusual. I want to know exactly.

That the name of God stands for the character of God is seen again in Psalm 22:22, ‘I will declare thy name unto my brethren ...’ And, in the New Testament, you will find that our Lord’s great claim just before His death upon the cross was, ‘I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me’ (John 17:6). Later He said, ‘I have declared unto them thy name’ (v. 26). To declare the name of God is to tell the truth about God. It is to put this great truth about God’s being in a form that men and women can grasp and apprehend.

So then, let us note some of the names which are ascribed to God in the Scriptures, and the meaning which they carry. First of all is the name *El*. This means being first, being supreme. It carries the idea of strength and of power—mightiness. Then the next name is *Elohim*, which is plural in form. This again carries the idea that God is someone who is to be feared as well as someone who is powerful, and this is the name that God generally uses when He is speaking of Himself in terms of creation. Then the next name is *Elyon*, which means the high and exalted One. You see, each one of these names tells us something in particular about God and as it is used in the narrative, it is meant to convey a particular impression with regard to God’s person and personality. **[p 81]**

Then there is the great name *Adonai*, meaning the Almighty Lord, the Ruler to whom everything is subject and to whom people are related as servants. It is the name that was, therefore, frequently used by God when addressing the children of Israel. Now all these names describe God as a transcendent God, great and high and mighty and uplifted in His glory.

But then, again, we thank God that He has not stopped at that, because God has given Himself certain other names which are designed to show the relationship of that exalted, eternal, almighty being to His creatures and His creation. For instance, there is the term *Shaddai*. Now this describes God as possessing all power in heaven and in earth, but especially God as subjecting all these and making them subservient to the work of His grace. Now you see the importance of that. This name describes God in His power over the elements, in His power over nature and creation. Yes, but not merely His power, it particularly emphasises God's control of all these things for the purpose of His grace and of His mercy, and of His dealings with men and women. For example, He controls the wind, the rain and the snow in order that we may have food to eat. That is the meaning of *Shaddai*.

But, after all, the most important and the most significant name for us is the great name *Yahweh* (translated *Jehovah* in the AV). This, the Bible itself tells us, is the best name of all. It means that God describes Himself as *I am that I am*. Or you could translate it as *I shall be what I shall be*. And both are true. The name describes, therefore, His unchangeableness, and especially His unchangeableness in His relationship to His people. Perhaps the best way to think of it is this: the name carries the meaning that God is the self-existent One—I am who I am; I shall be whom I shall be—who nevertheless does reveal Himself to His people. It carries both the ideas together.

Thus you can describe this name *Jehovah* as the great covenant name of God. You find the Bible saying that God has entered into covenants with His people. He made a covenant with Adam. He made a covenant with Noah. He made a covenant with His own Son. God is a God who makes covenants—He promises, he covenants, to do certain things. Now when He does that you generally find that He describes Himself by that great name *Jehovah*. And what a wonderful conception it is! This almighty being, whom we worship, who is self-existent in Himself, nevertheless chooses to reveal and manifestly to bind Himself to mere creatures of time like ourselves; to those whom He has brought into being. [p 82]

But you will find in the Scriptures that certain qualifying terms are very often added to this great name of Jehovah. Take, for instance, the name *Jehovah-sabaoth*—‘the Lord of hosts’ (1 Sam. 1:3). Now there has been a great deal of discussion as to the meaning of the term *sabaoth*. Some say it means the stars in the heavens; others say that it means the armies of Israel. But I think we are probably safer in thinking that the ‘hosts’—Jehovah of hosts, Jehovah of *sabaoth*—refer to the angels. He is the Almighty self-existent One, who is the Lord of all the angelic hosts.

Then there is the great name *Jehovah-jireh*, the name which God gave to Abraham when he was about to offer his son Isaac. The provision for the sacrifice—the ram—was found in the thicket, and Abraham spoke this name *Jehovah-jireh*—‘The Lord will provide’ (Gen. 22:14).

Then, also, a name was given by God to Moses just after the Exodus: *Jehovah-ropheh*—the Lord that heals. God said to the people after He had sweetened the bitter waters of Marah for them, ‘If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that healeth thee’ (Exod. 15:26).

The next name is *Jehovah-nissi*: the Lord my banner. The children of Israel had been fighting the enemy, and God reminded them that He was with them, and that He would be with them. He would be their banner under which they would conquer and prevail (Exod. 17:15).

Then *Jehovah-shalom* was the name by which God revealed Himself to Gideon. You will find it in Judges 6:24: it means, the Lord sends peace; the Lord our peace. He is indeed the God of peace. It was as the God of peace that He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20) and He had revealed Himself as the Lord of peace way back in the lawless time of the judges.

Then there is the very beautiful name in Psalm 23: the Lord my Shepherd—*Jehovah-ro'eh*. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.' And in Jeremiah 23:6 you will find *Jehovah-tsidkenu*: the Lord our Righteousness. You will find it in capital letters in many Bibles—THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. And then, *Jehovah-shammah*: the Lord is present. That is in Ezekiel 48:35: 'The Lord is there.' So you see that [p 83] every one of these names carries with it a very great and wonderful meaning, full of comfort and consolation. And the purpose, in a sense, of preaching the Scriptures and expounding them is that these names of God, and their meaning and significance, should be brought home to us.

As our blessed Lord Himself said, 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world' (John 17:6)—He had been revealing God in all these characteristics. He had been teaching His followers how to think of God, and how to know Him. He had shown them that God must not be thought of as some vague Energy. No, no. God is personal and as a person He acts and reveals Himself. It is through the names that God gives to Himself that He tells us this wonderful truth about Himself. And it is as we come to know God in terms of these names that we will find peace and comfort and joy in believing.

Our trouble is that we will believe that preaching God is sufficient, without really troubling to find out all that He has told us about Himself. But God has given us all this revelation about Himself, and finally He has revealed Himself in the person of His Son, the greatest name of all, the Lord Himself. He is Emmanuel—God with us, the mighty ruler, the eternal God, who has come down among us and into time.

Well, I am afraid I shall have to leave this question of the names of God. But as we read our Scriptures and as we meditate upon these names, we shall find that they have a great wealth of teaching. Sometimes we realise very little of this and thereby impoverish our experience.

But now, having said that, let me go on to what many would say is the greatest, the most vital and the most important aspect of this exalted doctrine of God, and that is, of course, the doctrine of the blessed *Holy Trinity*. Even in considering the names of God and His various attributes, we have, in a sense, been preparing ourselves for this great doctrine. But whether you recognise that or not, no one can read the Bible without, of necessity, coming face to face with this doctrine of the Trinity. Now I have said more than once during the course of these lectures that I have felt very much like Moses at the burning bush, and I have heard a voice saying to me, 'Be careful; take your shoes from off your feet because the ground whereon you are standing is holy ground.'

Well, if we have felt that hitherto, how much more must we feel it [p 84] as we consider this exalted doctrine of the Holy Trinity. For it is beyond any question the most mysterious and the most difficult of all biblical doctrines. There is no doctrine which shows so clearly what we agreed about at the very beginning—our absolute dependence upon the revelation that we have in the Scriptures. No human being would have thought of the doctrine of the Trinity. It comes directly from the Bible and from nowhere else at all. Men and women have thought of God; they have their gods; but no one has ever thought of the Trinity.

Another comment I would make, as we approach this doctrine, is that there is no question at all but that the doctrine of the Trinity is the most distinctive doctrine of the Christian faith. This may come as a surprise to some of you, but I hope to establish it as we go along. Does it not occur to you, therefore, in the light of this, that it is rather a curious thing that we hear so little about this doctrine? I speak in particular to those who are evangelical Christians: Why is it that we have emphasised this doctrine so little?

I have no doubt that the answer is because of its difficulty, because of its mystery. But that is no excuse. Indeed, every doctrine which we find in the Scriptures we must regard as from God, and there is none more important than this. I fear it is another example of the laziness that has come upon us—the desire for comfort, and the tendency to rest upon experiences, and to avoid anything that demands intellectual effort. But if we have neglected the doctrine of the Trinity, shame on us! It is, in a sense, the most exalted and the most glorious of all doctrines; the most amazing and astonishing thing that God has been pleased to reveal to us concerning Himself.

How, then, do we approach this doctrine? I start at once by saying that we must not attempt to do so in terms of philosophy. I put it like that because many people think they can explain the doctrine of the

Trinity in those terms. They have used illustrations like this: they have said that the doctrine of the Trinity is comparable to the sun and the rays coming out of the sun; others have compared it to the seed and the soil and the flower, you see the unity and yet the division, the three in one and the one in three, they say.

But I feel that all these attempts to understand the doctrine of the Trinity philosophically not only do not help us, but are probably very dangerous to us. It seems to me that there is only one thing to do, and that is to acknowledge that we stand before the mystery which is revealed in the Bible. We cannot hope to understand it. We cannot [p 85] hope to grasp it with our minds; it is entirely beyond us and above us. We are simply meant to look at it with wonder, with awe and with worship, and be amazed at it.

If I would venture to say even half a word philosophically, I would say that, as we have said in passing, the doctrine of God as love, or emphasising that one of God's attributes is love, does seem to me in and of itself to imply a plurality of Persons in the Godhead. If the eternal God is love, then He has always loved, before creation, before time. But who has He loved? Does this not almost of necessity insist upon the Trinity? And that is really what the Bible teaches, that the three blessed Persons in the Trinity have loved one another perfectly from all eternity. But you need not even accept that. I simply put it to you as a suggestion in passing.

No, let us come back and look at the word, and discover what the Bible itself has to tell us. Now you will notice as you go right through it that no single explicit statement of this doctrine is made. Nowhere in the Bible will you find a statement that God is three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But by implication the doctrine of the Trinity, as we shall come to see, is to be found in the Old Testament and in the New. It is suggested everywhere and in the most unlikely and unexpected places.

But before I give you that evidence, let me lay down certain points which are of vital importance in this connection. The doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that there are three Gods—what is called *tritheism*. We have to make this negative statement, because the Unitarians are always ready to charge Christians with believing in three Gods. They say, 'You call us Unitarians; we call you Tritheists, with your doctrine of Father, Son, and Spirit. You are really talking about three Gods.'

Now we reject tritheism completely. The particular emphasis throughout the Old Testament is that there is only one true and living God. We read, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. 6:4). That was the message that was repeated constantly to the children of Israel, and it was absolutely essential, of course, because the children of Israel were the one nation in the world who had been given this information and this knowledge. They were surrounded by nations who believed in a variety of gods. The problem in the time of the Old Testament was the problem of polytheism; people believed in the various gods of war and peace, and so on—Baal, Asherah, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury—all these various gods—and above everything else [p 86] the children of Israel were called to proclaim the unity of God and the fact that there is only one God.

Our Lord, in effect, said the same thing when He used the words, 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:30). Not two. Then you will find that James also makes this point. He says, 'Thou believest that there is one God ...' (Jas. 2:19). So, then, as we consider this great and blessed doctrine of the Holy Trinity, whether we finally understand what we are saying or not, we must keep on saying that we do not believe in three Gods. There is only one God.

But, second, I lay down this postulate: while God in His innermost nature is one, He nevertheless exists as three Persons. Now we are already in trouble, are we not? Do you not want to ask me at this point: Are you saying that there are three Persons, different in essence? If you are—then there must be three Gods? To which my reply is this: 'Hear, O Israel: Jehovah, our God, is one Jehovah.' I must say that.

What is the trouble, therefore? Well, the trouble, once more, is due to the inadequacy of language. We have to talk about 'person' because we cannot think of a higher category than persons, and as we think of persons we think of individuals, and we are separating them. But as the Bible uses these expressions, they obviously mean something different. Now I do not pretend to understand. Nobody understands. The greatest minds in the Church throughout the centuries have been grappling with this and trying to explain

it, and they cannot understand it. So they can do nothing beyond what we are doing now. They say that God is one, but nevertheless that God, who is one, in His ultimate innermost nature exists as three Persons.

Let me give you the statement of the famous *Westminster Confession of Faith* with regard to this doctrine: 'There are three Persons within the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.' I would strongly recommend that you buy a copy of the *Westminster Confession*. You will find some of these great definitions there in their most convenient form. That is what it says about this great doctrine of the Trinity, which I can put like this: the Father is God, the Son is also God, not two Gods, but the same God in essence. The same eternal being is Father and Son.

We must say this; the first verse in the first chapter of the Gospel of John makes us do so: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' It seems to be contradictory, [p 87] but it is true. That is what I am trying to say. The Word is God as the Father is God, and yet there are not two Gods—there is only one Godhead. Again, I remind you that our Lord said, 'I and My Father are One.'

You will also find the apostle Paul saying, 'Christ ... who is over all, God blessed for ever' (Rom. 9:5). In Colossians 2:9, Paul says, 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.' Then in Titus 2:13 we are told to look for 'that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' Jesus Christ is God. Not only is the Father God but the Son is God. There are explicit statements of that.

But not only that; you cannot read your Gospels without finding that attributes are ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ which can only be ascribed to God, His eternity, for instance: 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58); He does not hesitate to say it. Then there is His holiness; also His life. Our Lord says, 'For as the Father hath life in himself: so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself' (John 5:26). And He also says, 'As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him' (John 17:2). That is only true of God. Then there is His immutability: 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever' (Heb. 13:8). You may remember that we considered that in considering the attributes of God.

Next His omnipotence: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth' (Matt. 28:18). Nothing is impossible to Him. Then His omnipresence: 'Lo,' he says, 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world' (Matt. 28:20). His omniscience: Jesus knew everything; nothing was hidden from Him. He knew what was in a person, and He did not need anybody to tell Him (see John 2:25). He knew people's thoughts. He could say to Nathanael: 'When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee' (John 1:48). He could read the innermost thoughts and imaginations of men and women. It was through Him that all things were created. It is by Him that all things subsist. He has a right, He tells us, to judge (John 5:27), and He will be the judge. Thus you see that attributes of deity and of the Godhead are freely ascribed to Him. So we say that the Father is God and we say that the Son is God.

Yes, but we must also say that the Holy Spirit is God. Do you remember the terrible words that were spoken by Peter to Ananias and Sapphira? He said, 'Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to [p 88] the Holy Ghost ... thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God' (Acts 5:34). You have been lying, he said, to the Holy Spirit, and because you have been lying to the Holy Spirit you have been lying to God.

Then we are told in the New Testament about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: our Lord said, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men' (Matt. 12:31) and you will find the same in the parallel passages.

There is also the baptismal formula found at the end of Matthew's Gospel: '... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19). And the apostolic benediction says, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost', be with you all' (2 Cor. 13:14). So, you see, the Bible asserts that the Holy Spirit, in the same way as the Father and the Son, is also God. There are also many other examples in the Scriptures where the three Persons refer to

one another. You find our Lord referring to ‘another Comforter’ (John 14:16), whom He and the Father are going to send; and so on.

There are those who have tried to deny the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in this way: they say, ‘There are not three Persons, there is only one Person, there is only one God; but that one God can reveal Himself in different ways. He once revealed Himself as the Father; then at other times He reveals Himself as the Son; and again at other times He reveals Himself as the Holy Spirit.’ And they try to use human analogies to help us to understand: they say, for example, that the same man can be a husband and a father and a preacher—one person in three relationships.

But the Bible rejects all that. Father, Son, and Spirit are not merely modes in which God appears. No, no. There are three Persons in the Godhead. The Persons refer to each other; Christ spoke about the others and referred to the others, not meaning Himself but the other Persons in the Holy Trinity. So we reject any teaching that there is only one God who shows Himself in these different forms. Furthermore, this can be proved quite conclusively, since we find the Scriptures naming the three Persons together. For instance, when the annunciation was made to the virgin Mary about the birth of her Son, the three Persons were mentioned: the power of God, the power of the Spirit, and the power of the Son who would be born (Luke 1:26–38).

You see this again at the baptism. There was the Son in the river; the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove; and the [p 89] voice of God the Father was heard saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matt. 3:13–17). Then in this connection, study very carefully chapters 14, 15 and 16 of John’s Gospel. In John 15:26 you will find that put perfectly in this way: ‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.’ Here the Son is speaking about the Comforter, whom the Father is going to send. And again I would remind you of the baptismal formula and the apostolic benediction.

Even in the Old Testament there is much teaching about the Holy Spirit and about the Son. Now you would not expect to find the doctrine of the Trinity expounded as clearly in the Old Testament as in the New, for the reason that I have given—the constant threat of polytheism. But, in addition to that, you obviously could not have had a complete or explicit doctrine of the Trinity until the Son had appeared incarnate, and until He had sent the Holy Spirit. It was only then that men and women could possibly receive the doctrine, and even now, as we have found, it is a holy and a mysterious doctrine, and difficult to grasp.

But it is there in the Old Testament. In the very first chapter of Genesis you will find the doctrine of the Trinity quite plainly, if you will look for it. Take that name of God—*Elohim*. It is a plural term. God speaks of Himself in the plural. Do you remember what He says about the creation of man in Genesis 1:26: ‘Let us make man in our image.’ Why is that? There is only one adequate explanation; it is because of the blessed Holy Trinity. Then when man had sinned, it is stated of him in Genesis 3:22 ... Behind, the man is become as one of *us* ...’ And then in connection with the Tower of Babel, in Genesis 11:7, we read: ‘Let *us* go down, and there confound their language ... And then you find it in Isaiah chapter 6:8: ‘Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?’ You see, these very terms suggest the Trinity.

Then you remember that in one of the earlier lectures we referred to the Angel of the Covenant, to whom so many references are made in the Old Testament, and we were driven to the only possible conclusion—that the Angel of the Covenant is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Yes; in that form He revealed Himself. It was not His incarnation; it was a theophany, an appearance of the Son as the Angel of the Covenant.

And you remember, too, the references to the Holy Spirit away [p 90] back at the beginning of Genesis. We are told that the Spirit ‘brooded’ upon the waste. It was the Spirit who enabled the prophets to speak. It was the Spirit who came upon Bezaleel and enabled him to do skilled work in the building of the tabernacle (Exod. 31:2–5). Thus you see that there is a wealth of teaching in the Old as well as the New Testament with regard to this great doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Let me ask a final question: What is the relationship between the three Persons? The answer in the Scriptures everywhere is that they are co-eternal; there is no subordination as such. When the Son is called the Son, it does not mean that He is subordinate or any less than His Father. The fact that He is the Son means that He is equal to the Father. He is 'the express image of his person' (Heb. 1:3)—not subordinated to Him or different from Him. He is the same as and equal to the Father of whom He is the Son.

Very well, I can sum it up like this: the Trinity has existed in the Godhead from all eternity. A statement of the *Athanasian Creed* with regard to this gives a perfect definition: 'The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God. The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Ghost is Lord, and yet there are not three Lords but one Lord. For as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the same truth to say that there are three Gods or three Lords.' And in reality you can never get beyond that. The scriptural truth, the Christian truth, insists upon our saying that there are three Persons, and yet we must not say that there are three Gods. This is a great and eternal mystery.

But—and in many ways this is the most glorious aspect of this doctrine—though the three Persons in the Trinity are co-equal and coeternal, for the purposes of our salvation you have what has sometimes been called the *economic Trinity*. A division is made among the three Persons, and, for the purposes of this work and of this salvation, there is a kind of subjugation of the three Persons. The Father creates; the Father elects; the Father planned salvation. The Son was sent by the Father to work out this salvation. The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to apply the salvation.

Now that is a staggering thought. That these three blessed Persons in the blessed Holy Trinity for my salvation have thus divided up the work. The Son has put Himself at the disposal of the Father, and the Spirit has put Himself at the disposal of the Father and the Son. The Spirit does not speak of Himself, but testifies to the Son. The Son did **[p 91]** not speak of Himself, but received His words and His works from the Father, though He was equal and eternal—the economic Trinity. So that while, in a sense, we can say that it was the Father who sent the Son, and the Son who came and did the work, and the Spirit applied it, we must at the same time say this: God was in it all. 'God was in Christ' reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them' (2 Cor. 5:19). There was a kind of division of labour and yet a unity in purpose and a unity in doing it all.

Well, I told you when I began that we were approaching the greatest mystery in the Bible and in the Christian faith—the most exalted and the most sublime truth. May I beg of you, do not try to understand all this with your minds. It is for us humbly and as little children to receive the truth as it is revealed; to stand in worship, in adoration and amazement. It is beyond us, but it is true. And it is all true in a special way for us and for our salvation.

The Eternal Decrees of God

In our consideration of these biblical doctrines we come now to a new section of the particular doctrine with which we have been dealing, namely the doctrine of God. You will recall that we have considered what the Bible tells us about the being, the nature, and the character of God as He has been pleased to reveal that to us in the Scriptures. We have also considered the names which God has applied to Himself as a part of this revelation of His essential being, and His relationship with creation. And that, in turn, brought us to the consideration of the great, mighty and inscrutable doctrine of the blessed Holy Trinity.

Now, still considering the doctrine of God, we come on to the next section, which is obviously this: the works of God; the activity of God; what it is that God has done. This is a kind of subsection or branch of this general doctrine concerning God Himself. And the question is: What comes next? What do we proceed to consider? We are about to consider the works of God, so if you were asked the question: 'What do you think comes next in the biblical sequence and in the logical order?' I wonder what your answer would be. I may be wrong, but I think if I were to put the question many would be likely to say that obviously we come on immediately to the doctrine of creation.

Now, of course, there is one sense in which that would be the correct answer, but actually it seems to me that it is not, although you will find, if you look up certain books which deal with these matters, that that is precisely what they do. You could quote quite a number of authorities who do go directly from the doctrine of God's nature and character to the question of creation. But that seems to me to be quite wrong. It is unscriptural, and therefore it is not the right and true thing to do.

[p 93] Before we come to consider the doctrine of creation, there is something that we must consider first, and we do so because the Bible tells us about it. It is this: the Bible, before it tells us what God has done, leads us to the character of all God's activities. There is a great deal in the Bible, as I want to try to show you, about the way in which God does things, and it is important that we should consider that before we consider exactly what He has done.

There are certain great principles which underlie and characterise all God's works. In other words, before God proceeded to create the world and man, God had thought, God had willed and had determined on certain things. So this consideration must come in at this point. Certain things were decided in the eternal mind and counsel of God before He did anything at all in the matter of actual creation, and it does seem to me therefore that this is the obvious chronological (if one may use such a term), certainly the obvious logical sequence which should be followed.

Now the description which is given in the Bible of God's manner or method of working, is what is commonly called the doctrine of the *eternal decrees of God*. These are things which God determined and ordained before He had done anything at all. Now I want to admit very frankly that I am again calling your attention to an extremely difficult subject. I do not apologise for that because, as I shall show you, this is not a question of choice. The business of someone expounding the Bible is to expound the whole Bible. But I do admit that it is a very difficult subject, and I imagine that that is why many of the books do not include it. But it is so scriptural that it must be faced. It is like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—beyond our minds, in a sense. But as we saw with that doctrine, we must not avoid it just because it is difficult.

For your encouragement, however, I think I can promise you that some of these primary, preliminary doctrines are the most difficult because we are dealing with the mind of the Eternal, and are therefore considering something which is beyond our finite understanding and the grasp of our puny and pygmy intellects. From one standpoint the doctrines of man and of creation and salvation, are of necessity very much easier.

'But,' somebody may say, 'in view of its difficulty and inscrutability, why consider it at all? Why not take us straight on to the doctrines of creation and of man and of the fall? That is what we are really interested in; that is what we want to know.' Well, certain answers **[p 94]** must be given to such an

objection. My first reason for calling your attention to this doctrine, as I have said, is that it is revealed in the Bible, and because of that, it is obviously meant for our consideration and study.

May I put it like this: Is it not rather surprising to notice and to consider how prone we are to read only parts of the Bible? I wonder whether you read the ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans as often as you read the eighth? If you are a haphazard Bible reader you probably do not. Now we have no right to pick and choose with the Bible. We have already agreed that it is the inspired Word of God. If I believe that about the Bible from cover to cover, I must take my *whole* Bible. The fact that there are parts which baffle me must not keep me from it. I must read the whole and must grapple with it all; I must try to understand it all. And as this great doctrine of the decrees of God is in the Bible, then it is my business to study it.

Another reason is this—and I think you will agree with me when we have finished with it—that it will reveal to us fresh aspects of the glory of God Himself. It will give us, as it were, a greater and a grander conception of God, and that in turn will promote our worship of God. I am never tired of saying that the real difficulty of evangelism today is that we do not spend sufficient time with the doctrine of God. We are so interested in a subjective experience and subjective salvation that we forget this great doctrine of God Himself; and it accounts for many of our troubles and problems. The more we know about God in His infinity, the more we shall worship Him.

So another reason for considering this doctrine is that it will save us from many errors. Most of the errors into which men and women have fallen throughout the centuries, and many other questions which have arisen, have been due to the fact that they have never quite realised as they should the Bible's teaching with regard to the eternal decrees of God.

And my last reason for calling your attention to it is that, speaking for myself, I know of nothing that gives me greater consolation than this particular doctrine. I do not hesitate to say that nothing gives me greater comfort than to know that behind me, little creature as I am passing through this world of time, there is this doctrine of the eternal decrees of God Himself.

Very well, then, if that is why we are considering it, let me say just a word on how we are going to consider it, and this is most important. The first thing you always have to do when you are considering this [p 95] doctrine is to get rid of your prejudices and any kind of party spirit. By 'party spirit' I mean that we all tend to take up certain positions and, without knowing it, we are sometimes much more concerned to defend what we think we have always believed, than to find out the truth.

The other negative is that we must not approach this subject philosophically. I know I keep on talking about this! Philosophy is a great curse in the realm of the Christian faith, because philosophy by definition is always something that tries to understand everything as a whole. That is the quest of philosophy—to span everything with the human mind. But we are now dealing with something for which the mind is utterly inadequate. So we must realise that as we approach this subject there are aspects of it which, by definition, we are not going to understand.

Therefore, positively, we must approach the subject with humility; we must approach it with reverence; we must approach it by faith, and with a ready admission of our own limits. We must approach it with an open mind, seeking and searching for the teaching of the Scriptures. We must come in a childlike spirit, ready to receive what is revealed to us, and ready, may I add, not to ask questions beyond the revelation of the Scriptures.

Indeed, I am increasingly coming to think of faith in this way: faith is a readiness to submit oneself to the biblical limits. It is a readiness not to ask questions about things which are not revealed in the Scriptures. Faith is saying, 'Very well; I will take all that is given, and I do not want to know more than that; I am content with the revelation.' We must approach this great doctrine in this way.

Above all, we shall have to realise that there are certain things which we, with our finite minds, will not be able to reconcile with one another. Now I am trying to avoid the use of technical terms as far as I can, but here I must introduce the word *antinomy*—not antimony. What is an antinomy? It is a position in which you are given two truths which you yourself cannot reconcile. There are certain final antinomies in the Bible, and as people of faith we must be ready to accept that. When somebody says, 'Oh, but you cannot

reconcile those two,' you must be ready to say, 'I cannot. I do not pretend to be able to. I do not know. I believe what I am told in the Scriptures.'

So, then, we approach this great doctrine like this: in the light of the things we have already considered about the being, the nature, and the character of God, this doctrine of the eternal decrees must follow [p 96] as an utter, absolute necessity. Because God is who and what He is, He must work in the way in which He does work. As we have seen, all the doctrines in the Bible are consistent with one another, and when we are considering any particular doctrine we must remember that it must always be consistent with everything else. So as we come to study what the Bible tells us about the way in which God works, we must be very careful not to say anything that contradicts what we have already said about His omniscience, His omnipotence, and all the other things that we have agreed together are to be found in the Scriptures.

Now, having said all that, let me come to a positive statement of the doctrine, and in order to make it clear I shall put it in the form of a number of principles. The first is that *from eternity God has had an unchangeable plan with reference to His creatures*. The Bible is constantly using a phrase like this—'before the foundation of the world' (see Eph. 1:4). As the apostle Paul said about our Lord's birth, 'When the fulness of the time was come ...' (Gal. 4:4).

We can put this negatively: God never does anything half-heartedly. There is never anything uncertain about His activities. If I may put it in still another form, God never has an afterthought. Remember that we have agreed that He is omniscient and omnipresent, that He knows everything from the beginning to the end, so He cannot have an afterthought. Nothing is accidental, haphazard, uncertain or fortuitous. God has a definite plan and purpose about creation, about men and women, about salvation, about the whole of life in this world, about the end of it all, about the ultimate destiny. Everything that God has done and has brought to pass is according to His own eternal plan, and it is fixed, certain, unchangeable, and absolute. That is the first statement.

The second is that *the plan of God comprehends and determines all things and events of every kind that come to pass*. If you believe that God has determined certain ends, then you must believe that He determines everything that leads to those ends. If you believe that God decided to create at a given point, that He decided that the end of the world, according to time, is to take place at a given point, surely, if the end is determined, everything that leads to that end must also be determined; and you realise that there is also a kind of interrelationship between all events and things that happen, and that all are leading to that end. So the doctrine of the eternal decrees of God says that all things are ultimately determined and decreed by Him.

[p 97] Therefore, if everything is determined by God it must include, of necessity, the free actions, the voluntary actions of free and voluntary agents. Now that is a fundamental statement; let me break it up a little and give you the scriptural evidence. With regard to the whole system, this is put very plainly by the apostle Paul. He says, 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will' (Eph. 1:10-11). Now that applies to everything. Paul is speaking there of the whole cosmos being united in Christ, and he says that God is going to bring this to pass in that way.

Then there is further scriptural evidence to show that God, in this way, governs and controls and determines events that appear to us to be quite fortuitous. In the book of Proverbs we read, 'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord' (Prov. 16:33). We call a 'lot' a matter of chance and of accident, do we not? You 'cast' a lot. Yes, says this passage in Scripture, 'but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord'. Or in the New Testament we read that our Lord says, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father' (Matt. 10:29). A little sparrow drops dead and falls on to the ground. Accident, you say. Chance. Not at all! 'Not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father.' The life of a little sparrow is in the hands of God. But, He continues, 'The very hairs of your head are all numbered' (v. 30). There are events which appear to be quite accidental, but they are controlled by God.

Then take our free actions. Read Proverbs 21:1: ‘The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.’ The king appears to be free, but God is controlling him as He controls the very rivers. Ephesians 2:10 tells us, ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’ And in Philippians 2:13 we are told, ‘For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’

But come to something more extraordinary and striking: the Scripture teaches us that *even sinful actions are in the hands of God*. Listen to Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem: ‘Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye [p 98] have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain’ (Acts 2:23). Then Peter puts it like this in Acts 4:27–8: ‘For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together’—notice—‘for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done’ The terrible sin of those men was determined beforehand by the counsel of God.

And then you have a striking example of the same thing in the book of Genesis, the famous statement of Joseph to his brethren. Joseph, retailing the facts of his story, turned to his brothers and said, ‘So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God ...’ (Gen. 45:8). From our standpoint it was they who had done it. They had done a dastardly thing, a very wicked thing, for mercenary motives and as the result of their own jealousy. ‘But,’ said Joseph, ‘it was not you that sent me hither, but God.’ These sinful actions came under this great eternal decree of God.

Now let us be clear about this. In view of what we have already agreed about the holiness of God, we must at once say this: God does not cause evil in any sense or in any degree. He does not approve of evil. But He permits the wicked agents to perform it and then He overrules it for His own wise and holy ends.

Or take it like this if you prefer: the same decree of God which ordains the moral law that prohibits and punishes sin, also permits its occurrence. But it limits it and determines the precise channel to which it shall be confined, and the precise end to which it shall be directed, and overrules its consequences for good. The Bible clearly teaches us that. Listen again to this account of Joseph and his brethren in Genesis 50:20: ‘But as for you,’ said Joseph, ‘ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.’ And I suppose in many ways the most striking example of all is to be found in the betrayal of Jesus by Judas: a free and voluntary action, and yet a part of God’s great eternal purpose and plan.

Now that brings me to my third general proposition, which is that *all the decrees of God are unconditional and sovereign*. They are not dependent in any sense on human actions. They are not determined by anything that people may or may not do. God’s decrees are not even determined in the light of what He knows people are going to do. They are absolutely unconditional. They do not depend upon anything except God’s own will and God’s own holiness.[p 99]

But—and I want to make this quite clear—that does not mean that there is no such thing as cause and effect in life. That does not mean that there are no such things as conditional actions. There is such a thing in nature and in life as cause and effect—yes. But what this doctrine says is that every cause and effect, and free actions, are part of the decree of God Himself. He has determined to work in that particular way. God has decreed that the end which He has in view shall certainly and inevitably be brought to pass, and that nothing can hinder or frustrate it.

Now let me give you my evidence for all this. Take the prophecy of Daniel: ‘And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?’ (Dan. 4:35). Nothing can stay the hand of God or even question it. Or listen to our Lord stating this very thing in Matthew 11:25–6: ‘I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.’ Why has God withheld these things from the ‘wise and prudent’, and ‘revealed them unto babes’? There is only one answer—it is that ‘even so’ it seemed good in His sight.

Paul also says the same thing: 'Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will' (Eph. 1:5). I do commend to you a careful study of the first half of that first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians. Observe all it says, and you will know that everything that God has done is always 'according to the good pleasure of his will'. Nothing else at all. It is entirely of grace.

But, of course, you find this doctrine stated most clearly of all in that great and mighty ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. I want at this point especially to emphasise verse 11. You will find that it is a verse in brackets; but what a verse! What a statement! '(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.)' Paul's argument is that God had decreed that the elder should serve the younger because before either of them were ever born he had said, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated' (v. 13).

'Why,' you ask, 'did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Was it because of what they did?' No. Before they were ever born, before they were **[p 100]** ever conceived, God had chosen Jacob and not Esau. It had nothing to do with their works in any respect.

God's purpose is unconditional and absolutely sovereign. Listen to Paul again: 'What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid' (Rom. 9:14). God forbid that you should even think it! It is impossible:

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Rom. 9:15-18

Let me come on to the fourth principle, which is that *the decrees of God are efficacious*. Now this, of course, follows of necessity. Because God is a sovereign Lord, because of His omnipotence and His almightiness, His purposes can never fail. What God determines and decrees must infallibly be brought to pass. Nothing can prevent it. Nothing can frustrate it.

And that brings me to the fifth: *the decrees of God are in all things perfectly consistent with His own most wise, benevolent and holy nature*. I think I need not argue that. In other words, there is no contradiction in God. There cannot be. God is perfect, as we have seen, and He is absolute, and all that I am saying now fits in perfectly with all that we have previously considered. As I warned you in the introduction, you and I here upon the earth, with our finite and sinful minds, are confronted with a problem. It is this: Why did God decree to permit sin? And there is only one answer to that question: We do not know. We know that He did decree to permit sin, or sin would never have taken place. Why, we do not know. It is an insoluble problem. But we shall see it all clearly when we are in glory and face to face with God.

Two things we can be certain of and must always assert: first, God is never the cause of sin. In Habakkuk 1:13 you will find it said, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil.' James says, 'God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man' (Jas. 1:13). Second, the purpose of God is, in all things, perfectly consistent with the nature and the mode of action of His creatures. In other words, **[p 101]** though we cannot reconcile it, there is an ultimate reconciliation. The decrees of God do not deny the existence of free agents and free actions. All we say is this: though God has granted this freedom, He nevertheless overrules it all in order that His ultimate ends may come to pass.

How can God decree everything and yet hold us responsible for what we do? Here is the answer:

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.

‘But,’ you may ask, ‘how do you reconcile those two?’

I answer, I cannot. I know the Bible tells me the two things: that man, in a sense, is a free agent, and on the other hand, that God’s eternal decrees govern everything.

Now I must come to my last proposition, which is that *the salvation of men and women and of angels, and of certain of them in particular, was determined by God before the foundation of the world*. He does this entirely of His own good will and His grace. I would again refer you to Matthew 11:25–6. And in John 6:37 we read, ‘All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.’ In verse 44 our Lord says, ‘No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.’ In Acts 13:48 I read this: ‘And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.’

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 you find, ‘But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.’ Then in his letter to Timothy Paul says: ‘Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began’ (2 Tim. 1:9).

But especially I want to emphasise again that great statement, which I have already quoted, from Romans 9:20–3. The apostle Paul, [p 102] preaching this great doctrine of the eternal decrees of God, imagines somebody in Rome asking a question, and saying: I do not understand this. It seems to me to be contradictory, to be unfair. If what you are telling me about these decrees is true, it seems that God is unjust. The questioner says to Paul, ‘Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?’ (Rom. 9:19).

And Paul’s reply is, ‘Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.’

That is the apostle’s answer. That is the scriptural answer. That is God’s answer, therefore, to us and for us while we are in this world of time. It is beyond us. We cannot grasp the ultimate working of God’s mind. It is no use asking, Why this? and, Why that? Why did God raise up Pharaoh? Why did He choose Jacob and not Esau? Why does He punish us if all things are determined and decreed? The answer is, ‘Nay but, O man, who art thou?’ You are pitting yourself against the mind of God. You are forgetting how small you are, how finite you are, how sinful as a result of the fall. You have to leave the ultimate understanding until you arrive in glory. All you have to do here in time is to believe that God is always consistent with Himself, and to accept what He has plainly and clearly told us about His eternal decrees, about what He has determined and decided before He ever created the world.

And, above all, realise that if you are a child of God, it is because God has determined it, and what He has determined about you is certain and safe and sure. Nothing and no one can ever take you out of His hands, or make Him forgo His purpose in respect to you. The doctrine of the eternal decrees of God before the foundation of the world! He knew me. He knew you. And our names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the world was ever made, before you and I or anybody else ever came into it.

Let us bow before His Majesty. Let us humble ourselves in His holy presence. Let us submit ourselves to the revelation that He has so graciously been pleased to give.

10

Good Angels

Before we come to deal with the doctrine of creation there is still another doctrine which we have to consider. We are approaching these great biblical doctrines in an order which seems to me to be quite inevitable. We are concerned with God—not with man, as the present tendency is. We are concerned with God's revelation of Himself. We have considered His being, His person, and His character. We have arrived at the great doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and then, naturally, we have asked the question: What has God done? And we have seen that before God actually did anything, He determined certain things, and planned what He was going to do. God's actions are not haphazard or accidental; there is nothing contingent about them. God, being God, by His very nature (if one may speak with reverence) must work in a given way, and the Bible tells us that He does so.

So, then, the next step I think, quite logically, is this: What was God's first action? We use the term 'first' because we obviously speak from the standpoint of time. It is very clear in the Bible that before God made the world, or before He made anything in connection with men and women, He first of all brought into being those heavenly intelligences which are called angels.

I know that some authorities take the doctrine of providence before the doctrine of the angels; but I think that that is the wrong order, because we see very clearly in the Bible that angels were in existence even before the creation of the world. So I would argue that the doctrine of providence must come later, because it has to do with this world, and with men and women in the world.

Let me ask a question at this point: How often have you heard either a sermon or an address on the biblical doctrine of the angels? [p 104] How often have you considered this doctrine or meditated upon it? I ask those questions in order that I may ask another: Why is it that we tend to neglect certain parts of the biblical revelation? Why is it that even as evangelical people we seem to be content with the minimum of doctrine? Why are we only interested in the doctrine of salvation? It more and more seems to me that we rob ourselves of a wealth of truth because we do not isolate these doctrines and hold them up for our study and contemplation. As I suggested at the very beginning, any kind of Bible study which does not arrive at doctrine is probably going to be useless to us in the end, and I think the result is very often that we may never have considered what the Bible has to tell us about angels.

The term 'angel' means 'messenger'. It is a word that is not only used with regard to angels, and its use to describe angels indicates that they are sent as messengers. It was used by the Son of God Himself. He, as we have seen, was undoubtedly the Angel of the Covenant, to whom several references are made in the Old Testament literature. But now we are concerned with what is meant by 'angels', these bright intelligences, these beings of whom we read in the Scriptures. So let us first of all, therefore, consider certain general points about them.

The first thing we learn about the angels is that they are created beings, and that is why we put them in this particular place in the order of the doctrines. The first chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews draws a distinction between the Son of God and the angels. The angels, while they are spiritual beings, are nevertheless created beings. They have not existed from eternity as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have existed. Indeed, Paul in Colossians 1:16 very definitely teaches that they were created by the Son. He says, 'For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers'—and those, as we shall see, are descriptive terms of angels—'all things were created by him, and for him.' So we start by realising that angels are beings that were created by God before He created the world.

Now another point that has often been discussed in the long history of the Church is the question as to whether or not the angels have bodies. The question arises because they are referred to as spirits, in the same way as people, after their death, are referred to as spirits. For example, in 1 Peter 3:19 there is a reference to 'the spirits in prison'. [p 105] These are people not in the body, and that has sometimes led

some people to think that the angels have no bodies. And yet on the whole I am in agreement with those who say that this is probably false teaching and that angels have bodies. They have spiritual bodies, as we shall eventually have spiritual bodies, and as our Lord's human frame became a spiritual body, a glorified body, after His resurrection. Angels have a body which is appropriate for their spiritual condition, and thus you can account for what are called 'apparitions' or the 'appearances' of angels to different people.

But at the same time we must remind ourselves that the angels can appear in the form of human beings. In Genesis 18, for instance, we are told about the three men who appeared before Abraham, and there are other examples of the same thing. And yet in the story of Samson's father and mother and the angel, there was obviously something unusual about the appearance, because the angel was able to move in a way that an ordinary, physical, earthly frame cannot move (Judg. 13).

Then another question which we are bound to face is: Are the angels sexless? Are they divided into male and female? This is a question that must be of interest to us, the children of men. We cannot speak dogmatically, but in Matthew 22:29–30 we are given evidence with regard to this. You remember our Lord's answer to the Sadducees when they tried to trap him with the case of the woman who had married seven brothers. Our Lord told them that they were ignorant of the Scriptures, and that they did not understand, 'For,' he said, 'in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.' In addition, however, we must notice that the angels are always referred to as 'he', as if they were masculine.

Another thing we know for certain about the angels is that they never die, and my evidence for that is to be found in Luke 20:36 where we are told, again, of those who have passed on to the resurrection, 'Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels ...' And then we are told in Hebrews 2:9 that our Lord 'was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death'. If he had not been made lower than the angels he could not have suffered death, from which we deduce again that the angels do not and cannot die; they are immortal.

Then the last general point about the angels is their status. We have seen already that they are inferior to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is equally clear, on the other hand, that they are superior to **[p 106]** man. We have seen that our Lord was made a 'little lower than the angels', and the same words are used in the eighth psalm with regard to man: 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ...' (vv. 4–6). So as we think of the angels, we realise that they are inferior to the Godhead, inferior to the Son in particular, but in a realm above man, greater than man in many respects.

Next we must consider certain names which we find attached to the angels, certain designations which they are given in the Scriptures. They are referred to, as I have already reminded you, as 'spirits', but we also find them described like this in Ephesians 1:21: 'Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion ...' Now when those terms are used, they are always used of angelic beings, both good and bad. When Paul, in Ephesians 6:12, talks about wrestling 'not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world', he is referring to angelic beings, evil angels.

Another term that is used of the angels is 'holy' angels (Luke 9:26). We also have a description of them in 1 Timothy 5:21 as 'the elect' angels—we shall return to that term 'the elect' later, but some angels are described in that way while others are not. Then they are often described as 'ministering' angels, and we have that crucial statement in the last verse in Hebrews 1, where they are described as 'ministering spirits'—'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?'

Now as we are dealing with this question of the names and designations we must, of course, refer to those beings who are described as 'cherubim' (e.g. Ps. 99:1; Ezek. 10:1–22) or 'seraphim' (Isa. 6:2), and, also, we must consider those that are described in Revelation 4 as the 'living creatures' or 'the beasts'. We cannot now go into all the evidence, but I think we can take it that these terms are synonymous, and all these names probably refer to the same beings. We speak with comparative ignorance; we are told very

little about them. But we are told that they have the appearance of different animals, though generally the face of a man. They seem to be composite beings, at any rate in their representation.

What, then, are they? Well, there is no doubt that they belong to this generic category of angels, but they are very special beings. They [p 107] seem to stand for and to typify redeemed and glorified mankind. They seem to be symbolic of the highest properties of created life, and there can be little doubt but that their main function is to minister to us. And it is a most glorious thought that human nature, eventually, when salvation is completed, is to be so exalted that we shall dwell in the presence of the Godhead itself! If you keep your eye on every reference to the cherubim and the seraphim and these beasts or living creatures, you will find that they always dwell right in the presence of the Godhead; and the biblical teaching is that that is the future for which you and I are destined. They are symbolic of our ultimate salvation and glorification, and of our eternal existence in the immediate presence of the glorious God.

Now I believe, therefore, that there is a very real significance in the statement which we are given in the third chapter of Genesis. We are told that when the man and his wife had been turned out of the Garden, cherubim were placed there at the east end of the Garden of Eden—cherubim and a flaming sword. I think that there is profound significance in that; the flaming sword is to prevent man from entering back again into Paradise. He can never go back on his own. There is only one way back, and it is the way that has been opened by the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes; but we should thank God that in addition to the flaming sword there were the cherubim, as if to say, at one and the same time, 'You shall not come back; you shall come back. You shall not come back on your own, but you will come back—it is by another way, but you will return.' The presence of the cherubim indicates to me that those who have been thrown out shall also be brought back again. Let us leave it at that. It is a great and abstruse subject and we are told very little. But we are told that much, and it is our business to lay hold of it, to rejoice in it, and to praise God for it.

The next question which we must take up about the angels is their number. How many angels are there? The answer in the Scriptures is that there are very many, they are countless in number. Our Lord said, when His disciples would have defended Him, that, if He chose, He could command twelve legions of angels to defend Him (Matt. 26:53). You remember, too, that we are told that the shepherds at His birth heard 'a multitude of the heavenly host', suggesting an innumerable company (Luke 2:13), and, indeed, in the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation we are told that such is the case, that there are thousands upon thousands, a great, mighty host, a myriad of those angelic beings (Rev. 5:11).[p 108]

And that, of course, leads us in turn to the next question which is: Are there orders among the angels? Are they all identical? Are they equal in power and in authority, or have they orders and ranks? It seems quite clear that there is a division both in status and in work. For instance, we read in the Scriptures of one who is described as the 'archangel', the chiefest of all, the supreme. The word 'archangel' only appears twice, but it is important to notice it. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 we read, 'For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.' And the other reference is in the epistle of Jude, the ninth verse: 'Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.' I think, taking these verses together, that we must come to the conclusion that the archangel, therefore, is the one who is also referred to as 'Michael'.

Two angels are given specific names: the first, as we have just seen, is Michael the archangel, who is also referred to in Daniel 10. Michael seems to have had a special relationship to the children of Israel. He was the one who fought for them against the Prince of Persia (Dan. 10:13); they seem to have been allotted to him as his special care. He is their protector, and his special work is to guard them. Then the other angel who is mentioned by name is Gabriel, and we are told of him that he stands in the presence of God, waiting, as it were, to be given a message. And he was given messages. It was he, you remember, who was sent to tell Mary of all that was to happen to her, and of how she was to become the mother of the Son of God (Luke 1:26); and we are told that it was he also who gave the message to Zacharias (Luke 1:19). Thus we see that he had a special function with regard to the coming of our Lord into this world.

There is obviously, therefore, some kind of order, some kind of divisions among the angels. Indeed, we notice that in all God's work that feature is a characteristic, and you have it even among the evil angels, 'principalities ... powers ... rulers of the darkness of this world ... spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12). There is a kind of gradation, and undoubtedly there is the same gradation among the other angels. And that brings us to the whole question of their power. The Bible is explicit about this—they are very great in power. We are told of the mighty angels, that they 'excel in strength' (Ps. 103:20). Their power is undoubtedly greater than human power; they are not only superior in dignity and in status, [p 109] they are also undoubtedly superior in power.

But from our standpoint, perhaps the most important point of all is that the angels are clearly divided into two groups. The very term 'elect' angels, which I have quoted from the first epistle to Timothy, suggests that there are angels that are not elect, that are lost. In other words, we are reminded that there are good angels and bad angels. We read in Matthew 25:41 about 'the devil and his angels'; they are the evil angels, those who, as we have seen, are referred to as 'evil spirits', and we have looked at the designation applied to them in Ephesians 6.

First, however, we must deal with the good angels, and what we are told about them is that they dwell in heaven. We are to be 'like the angels of God in heaven', our Lord says (Matt. 22:30), and we shall refer frequently to the statement in Matthew 18:10 which reads, '... their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.' It is clear, therefore, that the dwelling-place, the place of existence of these good angels, is in heaven round about the throne of God. Then the great question is: What is the business or purpose of these good angels? What do they do? And it is very interesting and most enlightening and encouraging to consider this wonderful doctrine.

Let me remind you of certain general things which we are told about their occupation. We are told, first, that they spend their time in adoring God and the Lamb. Read again the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation, and you will find that they are singing His praise, worshipping Him and adoring Him. That is the thing that comes first; that is what they delight in; that is what, as it were, they live for. And let us remember again that verse from Matthew 18, that in heaven they 'always behold the face' of the Father. Now there is no doubt but that the meaning of this term 'beholding the face' is that they are watching, as it were, for some indication of His will and of His pleasure. They are servants, and they are waiting. They are looking at Him; they are not lazy; they do not need to be roused. They are always looking for the slightest indication of the will of God. 'They do always behold the face of my Father.' We must start with that. As we come to consider what they do, let us remember that they are anxious to do this great work, like dogs on the leash, as it were, waiting to be let loose in order to do it.

Then there is something else that the angels are very busy about. I never read this next point without having a still more glorious understanding of my salvation. We are told that they spend a good deal of [p 110] their time in looking into this question of our salvation. Let me give you my authority. Peter, in talking about our salvation says, 'which things the angels desire to look into' (1 Pet. 1:12). It is something so marvellous, and so wonderful, that these created angelic spirits, who have always spent their eternity in the presence of God, are, as it were, looking on at this thing which is most astonishing to them, and which surpasses everything else.

Couple with that statement the one in Ephesians 3:10 where Paul actually tells us that it is through the Church that God is going to show to these angelic beings, these principalities and powers, the wonders of His Christ. I have said that the angels are superior to man—yes; but did you know that were it not for you and me, for those who are redeemed, they would know nothing about the grace of God? It is only where the grace of God is concerned that the angels are looking into it. They are astonished at it. 'What is this?' they ask. 'This is the most wonderful thing of all!' They spend their time in looking into it, studying and inquiring into this marvellous salvation.

Then the next thing we are told about them is this—let us bear it in mind always—they not only behold the face of God, they are not only looking into salvation, but they are looking at us. In 1 Corinthians 11:10 Paul uses these words: 'For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.' You remember that Paul is considering the question of women praying without their heads being

covered. Apparently some of the women in the church at Corinth were taking part in prayer with their heads uncovered, and the apostle tells them that that is quite wrong. A woman should have her head covered to show that she is under the authority of the man; and in addition to that, Paul says, she should be covered because of the presence of the angels. In other words, the Scripture teaches that when Christians meet together, and when they gather together in prayer, then the angels of God are present, and the women are to be covered when they take part in public prayer because of the presence of the angels. It is a tremendous and remarkable thing. Let us bear it in-mind.

Finally, and this is the point that I am the most anxious to emphasise, the Bible teaches us that God uses the angels as the instruments of His will. Let me give you some of the ways in which He has done, and still does, this. First of all, we are told that the law was given to the Children of Israel through the medium of the angels. We read in Hebrews 2:2, 'If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and [p 111] every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape ...?' That was a reference to the giving of the law, and there are similar verses in Galatians 3:19 and Acts 7:53.

Another function of the angels is to reveal God's purposes. It was through angels that God revealed to Abraham His purpose with regard to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18), and He revealed His will to Jacob more than once in the same way. Gideon also was told God's purpose for him through an angel, and in the New Testament Zacharias was told about the birth of his son, who became known as John the Baptist, through an angel that appeared to him when he was in the Temple. We have already considered the function of the angel Gabriel, and of Michael; and let me remind you also that it was an angel who told Joseph that he need not worry about the condition of his espoused wife Mary. It was an angel, also, who told him to flee to Egypt, and an angel who told him to come out of Egypt.

But again I would say that the most comforting, and the most wonderful aspect of this teaching is what we are told in the Scriptures of the way in which God uses the angels to bless and to care for His own people: 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth [called forth] to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' (Heb. 1:14). What, after all, is the greatest function of the angels? It is to minister to you and to me—to minister to the heirs of salvation.

What, then, do they do? Well, it seems to me from this biblical teaching that I am entitled to say that the angels are used by God with respect to us and to our salvation. From the very beginning right up to the end they help to prepare us. For example, in the account of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10, we are told that as Cornelius was praying one day an angel suddenly appeared to him and began to give him a 'preview', as it were, of his own salvation, and to tell him what he should do in order that his salvation might be realised. I think we are entitled to deduce from that that the angels may play a much bigger part in preparing us for our salvation than we have ever realised. You know those odd things that occur—you happen to meet somebody; you had not intended going to a place of worship, but you happened to meet somebody ... and so on.

But not only that. We find that the angels protect us. Psalm 91:10–11 says, 'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' Do you remember how Daniel was cast into [p 112] that den with the lions, yet came out quite unscathed? This was his explanation: Do not be surprised, he said to the king, 'My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths' (Dan. 6:22).

But the angels not only protect us, they also give us guidance. In Acts 8:26 we are told that the angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Arise, and go toward the south ...' and these directions, given by the angel, led to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch.

And then I understand from Acts 27:23–4 that angels are sometimes used by God to cheer us and to give us comfort and consolation. The apostle Paul told his companions on that ship, which was already in a shipwrecked condition, 'For there stood by me this night'—notice—'an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve' (Acts 27:23). The angel had a message for Paul. He had been sent by God to cheer the apostle. And there is very little doubt also but that it was the angels who enabled that poor, frightened servant of Elisha to realise that though the enemy was coming with great might to attack them, they were

also surrounded by an unseen host that would destroy the enemy. Read the story for yourselves in 2 Kings 6.

But angels are also used by God to give us deliverance. In Acts 12 we read of Peter being arrested and thrown into prison; but what happened to him? ‘And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals ...’ And then the angel went and opened doors and gates and Peter simply followed him. He was delivered from prison by an angel. All that is marvellous and wonderful, is it not? That is what angels do for us while we are in this life.

But there is something more which I trust will give great comfort and consolation to many people who may perhaps have been thinking with fear and dread of the end of their life in this world—afraid of the physical aspect of death. But we need not be, for we read in Luke 16:22–3, ‘And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.’ The angels prepare us at the beginning, they watch over us and protect us and guard us and deliver us and do all these things—yes. And when we come to die they will be there to receive our spirit and to take us to Paradise. That is the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Never again, Christian [p 113] people, imagine that when you come to die you will be going into some awful loneliness as a disembodied spirit to an unknown world. Not at all. The angels of God will be there to receive you, and to conduct you, and to take you to be with the Lord in Paradise. What a wonderful thing!

Shame on us Christian people that we neglect the doctrine of the angels, that we do not read our Scriptures thoroughly and wholly. We are not told that angels take care of unbelievers when they die, for we read that the rich man ‘died and was buried’. We are not told that any angels came to receive him. Furthermore, I must point out here that it does not seem to me to be the case that the Bible teaches a doctrine of what has sometimes been called a ‘guardian angel’ for every one of us. I think that that is not a true deduction. All we know is that the angels are looking after us for God in this way, but there is no specific teaching that to every single person there is a specific guardian angel; that is quite immaterial. What is important is that the angels do for us all the things that we have been considering.

The good angels have still two more functions. First, we are told that they execute God’s judgments on God’s enemies. What a great chapter Acts 12 is! It was an angel that delivered Peter, as we have seen, but in verse 23 of that same chapter we read, ‘And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory’—that is a reference to King Herod who, arrayed in royal apparel, had delivered a great oration to the people. And they praised him and said, ‘It is the voice of a god, and not of a man,’ and he let them say it, and, ‘Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him ... he was eaten of worms, and he gave up the ghost.’

And that brings us to their final work, which is this: the good angels, we are told, function at the final judgment. Do you remember our Lord’s explanation of the Parable of the Tares? ‘As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.’ The angels are going to do that. Or again in verse 49: ‘So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.’ And then again in Matthew 24:30–1: ‘And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his [p 114] angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.’ They will gather the elect together, to meet Him and to begin their glory with Him.

Paul says something similar in 2 Thessalonians 1:6–8: ‘Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God ...’ And that is the end of it all. There they are before the creation of the world and of man,

and theirs shall be that last action, as it were, in severing the evil from the good, destroying the evil, collecting together the elect, and bringing them to Him who has died for them, and purchased them and whose they are and whom they serve.

I think you will agree with me that we neglect the biblical teaching about the angels to our own loss. Had you realised that all this was true? True for you and true for me! Do not attempt to seek into something that is a mystery, but believe the biblical teaching. That is God's Word, and that is what it teaches about the angels, and about their relationship to us. They are ministering spirits of God, appointed and sent to minister to us, the heirs of heaven. Whether you and I realise it or not, the angels are doing this for us. It may be that we shall go through this life without seeing an angel in any form, but whether we see them or not, we can be absolutely certain that this is the work which they are doing for us. They are caring for us, they are watching over us, they are protecting us, and sheltering us. They often deliver us, and they are used by God to help us in this way.

Let us take hold of the biblical teaching. Let us not rob ourselves as we do. Let us look into this great Word and receive it as it is, and we shall find things that will amaze us, and fill us with a still greater sense of wonder as we come to know our marvellous God and His wondrous love towards us.

11

The Devil and the Fallen Angels

We must continue with the doctrine of the angels, because, unfortunately, all that which we have considered together about the holy angels does not exhaust what the Bible tells us about these spiritual powers that dwell in the heavenlies. In addition to those beings who help us and care for us, there are others who are our greatest enemies. They are opposed to us and set against us, and obviously, therefore, we must consider the teaching of the Bible concerning them. There are many reasons for doing that. It is quite impossible to understand human history without considering what the Bible has to tell us about these fallen or evil angels. We cannot hope to understand man as he is today, we cannot hope to understand the world, apart from this. And it increasingly seems to me that the essence of the error which most people seem to make, even in the history of this twentieth century to which we belong, is that they fail to consider the biblical doctrine of the devil and his angels.

But it is also a most practical doctrine from the standpoint of the individual Christian's personal experience. I find more and more in my pastoral experience, as I am privileged to interview people, and to help them in their personal fight of faith, and in their personal problems, that the essence of the trouble so frequently is that such people have not realised the powers that are set against them. So often I have to deal with people who have been sent to a psychologist, a psychoanalyst, or somebody like that, and whose problem very frequently is simply that they have without realising it been besieged and attacked by the devil. And the essence of the treatment, and of the cure, is to enlighten them with respect to this; to make them see that what they have attributed to themselves and their personal sin and [p 116] failure (perhaps even mental disease), is really to be attributed only to this mighty antagonist who is described in the Bible as the devil. So that, strange though it may sound, to understand the biblical doctrine of the devil and his angels can be a most comforting and releasing doctrine.

So then let us look at it as it is unfolded to us in the Scriptures and we start at once with the one who is described as the devil. Here is one to whom reference is made in the Bible from the very beginning to the end, from Genesis to Revelation. Constantly, running right through, there are references to the devil and his captives. At this point again, as we have done earlier, we need to ask why it is that those of us who are evangelical Christians so infrequently study this doctrine and fail to give it its due place and attention in our Christian life. I maintain seriously that it is our failure at this point that surely must account for many of the pitfalls into which we fall so readily, not only in our personal experiences, but in our evangelism, and in many other respects. For if the devil can but keep us asleep, he will fill us with a false zeal, causing us to confuse the flesh and the spirit, and thus when we appear to be most zealous we can unwittingly be most under the influence of the enemy.

So, what has the Bible to tell us about the devil? First of all, let us consider some of the names that are applied to him in the Scriptures. He is referred to as 'Satan', and the word Satan means 'adversary'. He is also referred to as the 'devil', and that means 'slanderer', one who slanders us. He is also described as 'Beelzebub', which means that he is the prince of the devils. He is described as 'Apollyon', and as the 'angel of the bottomless pit'. He is called the 'prince of this world' and the 'god of this world'. He is described as the 'prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' (Eph. 2:20). He is referred to as the 'dragon', as a lion, as 'Lucifer, that old serpent', and, perhaps one of the most significant names of all, as the 'evil one'.

Now you will often find in the New Testament that whereas in the *Authorised Version* the word 'evil' is used, it is probably true to say that it should be the 'evil one'. Sometimes you will find 'wicked' when it should be 'wicked one'. There are those who say that when we pray, 'deliver us from evil' (Matt. 6:13), it should be 'deliver us from the evil one'. And when John, in the last chapter of his epistle, says that the 'whole world lieth in wickedness' he is undoubtedly saying that the whole world lies in the 'evil one' (1 John 5:19). And in the same [p 117] way in John 17 when our Lord prays his high priestly prayer, 'I pray

not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil,' it should be translated 'from the evil one' (John 17:15). It is a most important term—the evil one.

The second thing that the Bible tells us about the devil is that he is a person. This is most important at the present time, because it has been the fashion for at least a century not to believe in the devil as a person. This is true not only of those who are unbelievers but also of many who call themselves Christians. They say they believe in the power of evil, or an evil influence, or a kind of lack in us, but they have a feeling that to believe in a personal devil is to be very much behind the times. But that is thoroughly unbiblical, because the Bible, as I shall show you, teaches us that the devil is a person. For myself, there is one proof that is more than sufficient in and of itself, and that is the accounts we have in the Gospels of the temptations of our Lord. Now obviously our Lord's temptations came from somewhere, and when people say that temptation to evil is something which arises solely from within, and from a certain lack of power or positive qualities in us, they have no explanation to offer of the temptations of our Lord. (See Chapter 24 on the person of Christ.) It was a person who tempted our Lord, and our Lord addressed him as such; it was the devil who spoke to Him, and He spoke to the devil (Luke 4:1–13)—not an influence but a person. Furthermore, we find the same thing shown quite clearly in the book of Job in the first chapter, where the devil appears quite clearly as a person and addresses God. And God addresses him.

The biblical teaching is in no doubt at all about this. Our Lord, turning to certain Jews one day said to them, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do' (John 8:44). How often you find the phrase, 'the wicked one'—'then cometh the wicked one' (Matt. 13:19)—and that phrase, let me emphasise again, is very significant. Indeed, all these names that are applied to the devil assert in different ways that he is a person. Now I must not stay with this, but you notice that there is always a kind of parallelism in false doctrine. In dealing with the doctrine of God we had to point out that God is personal, but that people have been trying to describe God as some Force or some Energy. They have said that He is some great mind behind the universe and have denied the personality. The same error, you see, has been committed with regard to the evil one.

And what applies to the devil also applies to those who follow him, [p 118] those who are described as 'devils' or 'demons' or 'fallen angels'. You remember, for instance, the conversation between our Lord and the legion of devils that were in the poor man of Gadara. They spoke to our Lord and made a request. They not only said, 'My name is Legion,' but asked that they might be allowed to enter into the swine—again revealing that they have definite personalities. So we must realise that apart from the sin that is in us, and the evil of our nature as the result of the Fall, we are confronted by a person outside us who is tracking us down, a person who has a kingdom, of which he is the head, and which is highly organised, and his one great concern is to destroy the work of God. We have referred to the great statement in Ephesians 6:12—'against principalities, and against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world'—that is the kingdom, the organised kingdom of Satan, the evil one.

Then, of course, at the very beginning of the human story, in the first chapters of Genesis, we are given positive evidence that the devil is a person, because he came and tempted Eve and led to the Fall. Indeed, if you want one other proof I would suggest that the very term the '*Holy Spirit*' who is a person, suggests the opposite—'evil spirit', the evil one, who is also a person and who tries to counterfeit all that God does. That is something, then, which we must never forget. It is of vital importance to realise that there is this person set over against the kingdom of God and His Christ, and all that belongs to it.

Next we must come to a very important and difficult question: What is the origin of the devil? The Bible asserts the fact of the devil, and of his personality. Where has he come from? Now we are not told much about this in the Bible, which is generally concerned simply to state things about the devil and his activities. The devil's origin seems to be assumed in Genesis, but I think there can be very little doubt but that in Ezekiel 28:11–19 we are given an account of the devil. Now it is clear that in the whole chapter two persons are being dealt with. The first is the king of Tyre. But certain of the descriptions in verses 11–19 obviously are not descriptive of any human being; they arise above that to another.

That is typical of Scripture. We see it in the prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophecy is often put in that kind of dual form; it refers partly to some king or to some prince, but in

addition there is a further suggestion about the Messiah. There are many examples of that in the prophecies of Isaiah, and in other prophecies—an immediate reference, but then in it and above it a [p 119] remote reference—and here in Ezekiel, it seems to me, we have exactly the same thing. These verses, then, clearly refer to Satan and his origin, and there are certain things in them which we must emphasise.

The first thing we are told about Satan is that he was created: ‘... the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created’ (v. 13); ‘Thou was perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee’ (v. 15). The devil has not existed from all eternity; he is not an eternal being; he is a created being. There was a time in the history of the Church when that needed to be emphasised very powerfully, because there were those who taught that evil was eternal, that Satan was eternal, and that there were two gods, the good and the evil god. But that is an unscriptural idea. The devil is not eternal—he was made by God. Not only that. We are told that he had great power and ability. You get that in verse 12: ‘Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.’ That was the devil as he was made by God. He seemed to sum up perfection.

He is also described, you notice, as the ‘anointed cherub that covereth ...’ (v. 14). Now this is a very significant statement—‘the anointed cherub’. You remember that in dealing with the angels in an introductory manner in the last chapter, we pointed out that the cherubim are undoubtedly the highest form of being, and that their special function is to worship God, and to present to Him the worship of the entire universe. You see that in the four beasts in Revelation 4. They are the representations of man worshipping God, and, therefore, of the whole universe worshipping God—the ‘living creatures’. Well now, here we seem to have an indication that the devil was originally made by God as the anointed cherub, the chief of all cherubs. The suggestion is (and it is only a suggestion) that when God created this being he meant him, as it were, to represent the whole universe in its praise, worship and adoration. He was the anointed cherub—this cherub that ‘covereth’. Does it not remind us of the Ark of the Covenant, shielded by the wings of the cherubim, still with the idea of worship and of adoration? There is much in Scripture that leads one to the conclusion that the devil was the brightest of all the angelic beings, given this position of superiority in which he was the head of the whole created universe in representing worship and adoration unto God.

You see also that we are told that he was ‘in Eden the garden of [p 120] God’ (Ezek. 28:13). But that is not a reference to his being in the Garden of Eden when he tempted Eve and Adam, and they fell, because the description given here of this Eden, the garden of God, does not tally at all with the description in Genesis. Here is an Eden which is characterised not so much by fruit as by precious stones, and in verse 13 a list is given of these stones. Now many saintly men reading this passage have meditated upon it and perhaps have speculated a little, and they have suggested an explanation that cannot be proved. But I mention it to you for what it is worth, and it seems to me that there is much to be said for it. It is suggested that the devil and his angels were present at the original creation of the world and it was when the devil and his angels fell, that a calamity took place which reduced this first world into a condition in which it had no form and was void, and necessitated the creation which is described in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. We will come back to that later on, I just mention in passing that Eden, the garden of God, to which reference is made here, may well be a reference to that first original creation of God.

And then we are told here in verse 15 that the devil was perfect in all his ways, but that, alas, he did not keep that first estate: ‘Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.’ Then in verse 17 we read, ‘Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.’ This bright, angelic, glorious being was perfect in beauty, but he became lifted up and consumed with pride. Instead of leading the worship and adoration of God, he desired to be worshipped himself, and to be equal with God, and thus he raised himself against God, sinned against God, and was cast down and cast out by God. That seems to be the teaching of Ezekiel 28, and in Isaiah 14 you find something similar. Verses 12–15 of Isaiah read: ‘How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the

heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.' That undoubtedly is a reference to the same thing.

Now, you notice, the Bible does not tell us how all this became possible. It does not explain to us how all these thoughts ever entered [p 121] into the heart of Satan, the devil. It simply tells us that they did. The Bible gives us no explanation as to the ultimate origin of evil, and I suggest to you, therefore, that if you waste a second of your time in trying to speculate about that you are guilty of a lack of faith, because faith means to be content with the revelation given. It is beyond us. We cannot understand it. Theologians have speculated and have said that because the devil was perfect he must have been perfectly free, and perfect freedom in itself contains within itself the possibility of choosing against God. All right. Still, it does not seem to me to explain the ultimate origin of evil; all we do know is that the devil was created, as we have seen, then that evil entered his heart, and he rebelled against God, and was cast down.

What do we know further about him? Well, we are told a good deal in the Bible about his power, and what we learn about it is not surprising in view of what we have been told about his origin. Peter tells us that the devil is like a 'roaring lion' (1 Pet. 5:8). He is described as 'leviathan' (Isa. 27:1), and the 'dragon' in several places in Revelation. I wonder whether you have ever noticed, when you have gone through your Bible, that there is the suggestion that the power of Satan is even greater than the power of the archangel? In Jude 9 we read, 'Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.' Even Michael the archangel speaks to the devil in that way—he does not 'bring against him a railing accusation'; he does not treat him with contempt, as if he were a nonentity. Even Michael says, 'The Lord rebuke thee.' You will find the same suggestion in 2 Peter 2:10–11.

There is no doubt at all about the power of the devil being greater than human power. Our Lord Himself described Satan as the 'strong man armed' who 'keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace' (Luke 11:21). And you will recall that the devil is as powerful as this (I must come back to it, but I just mention it to make this section complete at this point): that he is able to influence our bodies. You remember what he did to job? And Peter tells us that our Lord 'went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil' (Acts 10:38). Then you remember what Paul tells us about himself and the 'messenger of Satan' that was sent to buffet him (2 Cor. 12:7). Yes, the devil can affect and influence our bodies.

What is his status? He is described as 'the god of this world' (2 Cor. 4:4). He is the 'prince of the power of the air' (Eph. 2:2). He is the evil [p 122] one, the concentration of evil; all evil, as it were, is centred in him; he is the head and all evil seems to emanate out of him. Indeed, we are told in the Scriptures that he is the one who controls the power of death (Heb. 2:14). And in Matthew 25:41 we read that our Lord refers to the 'devil and his angels', again showing that he is powerful.

Now I emphasise all that for this reason: if there is one lesson we should learn above all others from this consideration, it is that we should never speak loosely or flippantly about the devil. I am often appalled as I hear good Christian people referring jocularly to the devil. The Bible never refers to him in that light and flippant manner; it emphasises his power, his status. Nevertheless, let me hasten to say, his power is limited, he is not all-mighty. In the first chapter of Job we are told that God, as it were, gave the devil permission to do certain things to job, but he put a very definite limit upon them, and the devil could not go beyond that.

There is a mystery at this point; ultimately the devil acts within the power of God, and yet the Bible teaches quite clearly that for some inscrutable reason that we cannot understand, God seems to accord to the devil a certain status and position. He allows him to do certain things; these very names and distinctions are applied to him. God in His eternal wisdom has allowed the devil to maintain a certain amount of power until the end, and yet that power is ultimately under the control of God. It is His permissive will that allows it, and the devil, as in the case of job, was only allowed to go so far and no further (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Where does the devil exist? Where is his place? Where does he work? Well, we read in many places that he dwells in 'the heavenlies'. He is the prince of the power of the air, and yet we read of him 'going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down it' (Job 1:7). This again is an important point, and to me a

very comforting one. The devil, because he is a created being, and because he is finite, is limited and can therefore only be in one place at a time. Yes, but he is a deceiver, and because he has so many emissaries and because he is represented by his agents everywhere, he deceives us into thinking that he is everywhere at the same time. But he is not. He is not omnipresent.

What is the character of the devil? The things that characterise him supremely are his pride, pride above everything else; then malignity; then subtlety; then deceitfulness. Another term applied to him by our Lord Himself is ‘murderer’: ‘He was a murderer from the beginning, [p 123] and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it’ (John 8:44). That is his character—a deceiver, a liar, a whisperer, a murderer; one who hates God and is full of subtlety and pride.

Then the Bible speaks about the ‘works of the devil’. John tells us that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), so what are his activities? Well, these are shown in his attacks upon the Son of God: his one great objective always is to destroy the work of God and to set himself up as God. So the first activity of the devil recorded in the Bible is the fall of man (Gen. 3). But if some of you have doubts (which you should not have) about the historicity of Genesis 3, then you will find your answer in 2 Corinthians 11:3 where Paul says, ‘as the serpent beguiled Eve’. And what he did there, of course, was to produce in Adam and Eve antagonism to God: ‘Hath God said?’ (Gen. 3:1). The suggestion was that God was unfair, that God was keeping them down. Everything opposed to God—that is his activity.

And then because Adam and Eve listened to him, and fell, the devil became the one who controlled the power of death. I have already reminded you of that statement in Hebrews 2:14. It is a difficult verse to understand, because ultimately the power of death is in the hands of God, but it seems to me to mean this: the moment man listened to the devil he put himself under the power and under the dominion of the devil, and thereby the sentence of death was pronounced upon him. And the devil, as it were, claims this sentence of death, because one who breaks the law automatically belongs to the devil and is in the territory of the devil, which is the territory and the dominion of death. And it is only in that sense that the devil has the power of death.

Then we are told, of course, that he controls all unbelievers, all who are not Christians, in their lives and in the whole of their activities. Our Lord says that they are the children of the devil, (John 8:44), and John says that ‘we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness [the evil one]’ (1 John 5:19). Then Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:4, describes the devil as ‘the god of this world’, while in Ephesians 2:2 he describes him as ‘the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience’. We have seen, too, that our Lord describes him as ‘the strong man armed’ who keeps constant control of those who are unbelievers.[p 124]

How does he do this? Well, the first thing he does is blind them to the truth. ‘If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,’ says Paul, ‘in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not ...’ (2 Cor. 4:3–4). And that is the trouble with every man and woman in the world today who is not a Christian. They are lost, not because they are scientists or philosophers, not because they have gigantic brains, or have read more than other people who call themselves Christians, but because the devil, the god of this world, has blinded their minds to the truth, and does not allow them to see that he is hiding it from them. That is the only explanation of why there is a single person in the world who does not believe in God or in His Christ. Then the second thing the devil does is to order and control the lives of these people: ‘the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience’. He is the father of lust and desire and evil in every form in the life of the ungodly.

If, then, that is what he does to unbelievers, what are his activities with respect to believers? The Bible describes him as our ‘adversary’—one who is always opposed to us in every way. He is also our accuser; he is essentially the accuser of the brethren. He accuses us to God, and he accuses us to ourselves. What does he do in particular? First, he resists our works and our activities. In Zechariah 3:1 you will find, ‘And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.’ Daniel 10:13 tells us that the prince of the kingdom of Persia resisted the archangel Michael. Paul writes about the ‘messenger of Satan sent to buffet him’—to prevent his preaching, and

doing his work as he would like to do it. Then in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul says, 'Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.'

Satan also discourages us. He is always waiting to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8), to try us and to deceive us. 'Satan hath desired to have you,' said our Lord to Peter, 'that he may sift you as wheat' (Luke 22:31). He tempts us with his wiles, his snares, his fiery darts, his deceits and his suggestions; he excites our passions; he affects our minds. He is responsible for most of our moodiness, our depressions, our sense of hopelessness and our sense of despair. Indeed, you can be certain of this—every time you are turned in upon yourself, and find yourself looking at your weakness, your failure, your disability, or anything else in yourself, when you are looking at yourself like that, it is always the devil. I do not hesitate to say that the devil turns men and women **[p 125]** in upon themselves, knowing that when they are looking at themselves they are not looking at God, and so he produces all these moods and depressions within us. He even affects our bodies, as I have already reminded you (Job 2:7; 2 Cor. 12:7). He can produce sickness and illness; he has the power to do so and he uses it. Later on in the series I hope to come back to these things; I just tabulate them for you at this point.

How does the devil do all this work? He does a great deal of it directly himself, but he also does it through his angels. We have seen already that the Lord refers to 'the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41), and in 2 Peter 2:4 we read, 'For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ...' There were certain angels that sinned as well as the devil, and God has cast them down.

In other words, those whom the Bible refers to as demons or as devils, or as unclean spirits, are undoubtedly fallen angels, these angels that sinned against God with the devil, the angels that followed him, that 'kept not their first estate' (Jude 6). These are the devil's angels, his emissaries, his agents, the instruments that he uses to do his work. These are the principalities and powers and 'rulers of the darkness of this world', the 'spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12). All these are fallen angels. They must be—what else can they be? The devil cannot create; he cannot produce such followers; he cannot produce his own angels, because he is only a created being himself. No. The demons or the devils are those who followed this 'anointed cherub' and have been cast out by God.

That, then, is in its essence the biblical doctrine of the devil and of the fallen angels, and we are confronted by this adversary. But we cannot finish without emphasising this: we must never forget that the devil's power is limited; it is under God. Christ in His life, His death and His resurrection, has already vanquished the devil. And we, as Christian people, should be enabled by the Lord to resist, and we can, for James tells us, 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' It is not that we refer to him disparagingly, nor that we bring against him a railing accusation or regard him as a joke. No! But in the power of the risen Lord we can resist, knowing that we can defeat him, we can withstand him. We are told in Revelation that the saints 'overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony' (Rev. 12:11).

How important it is to remember both sides. We must never be **[p 126]** light or flippant; we must never be foolhardy. There is always the adversary. Yes, but we need not spend our lives in a craven fear of him, mighty as he is. 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world' (1 John 4:4). So, as we see the truth about the devil, let us realise more than ever the truth about our God, and about His Christ.

12

The Creation of the World

We come now to the doctrine of creation proper—that is, as we usually consider it. We have, actually, been dealing with it in the doctrine of angels, where we saw that God created the heavens as well as the earth; and now we are looking at the creation of the earth and all that is in it.

As we approach this doctrine, there are certain general points that need to be made. First, we are not given a fully detailed account or philosophy of creation and yet we claim that the account which we are given is wholly accurate. The Bible claims that it is from God. We read in Hebrews 11:3, ‘Through faith we understand that the worlds were formed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.’ God gave an account of the creation to Moses or someone else; so it is not man’s ideas or theories. The biblical account does not, however, claim to explain everything.

Second, we must be clear about what creation means. It has been defined as, ‘That free act of God whereby He ... in the beginning brought forth the whole visible and invisible universe without the use of pre-existing materials, and thus gave it an existence distinct from His own and yet always dependent on Him’ (Berkhof). Now we hold to that as against other theories that have been put forward. There are those who believe that matter itself is eternal; while others believe in the spontaneous generation of matter and its spontaneous development. Other views are that God simply worked into form matter which already existed or that matter is just an emanation of the divine substance. *Pantheism* teaches that matter is but a form of God—that it *is* God. On the other hand, those who believe in *dualism* say that God and matter are eternal; while some teach that the world was [p 128] produced by an antagonistic spirit, another god or demiurge.

But the biblical doctrine is clear: God made everything out of nothing. The world has a distinct existence but it is always dependent upon God. ‘By him,’ says Paul, ‘all things consist’ (Col. 1:17).

The third general observation is that the Bible does not give a reason for creation. It did not happen as the result of a need in God; there was no necessity for it. Neither was it because of His love. It was a free act according to His will and glory and, ultimately, we do not know the reason why.

Fourth, the question is often raised: Are there two accounts of the creation, one in Genesis 1 and one in Genesis 2:4 and following? The answer is, No! Genesis 2:4 does not pretend to be an account of creation. It is the beginning of the account of man’s history and it starts with the typical formula for that—‘These are the generations ...’ (compare Gen. 5:1).

Those, then, are the general observations and we now turn to consider what it is that the Bible teaches. First, it tells us that *creation was the work of the triune God*. In general it is attributed to the Father, but Scripture makes it clear that it is also the work of the Son. We read in John 1:3, ‘All things were made by him,’ and in 1 Corinthians 8:6, ‘But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him’. Paul also says, in his letter to the Colossians, ‘For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created by him and for him’ (Col. 1:16).

Creation is also the work of the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:2 says, ‘And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ And we read in Isaiah 40:13, ‘Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?’ So it is the perfect work of the Three-in-One—out of the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Or, as it has been expressed: the being is in the Father, the idea is in the Son and life is in the Spirit.

Second, we must see what the Bible teaches us about *the time of creation*. In the Bible’s great opening words, we read, ‘In the beginning God ...’ We are told in many places that there is no time with God and that the world and time started together. Now all this means that there was a beginning, but when we

come to the questions: What was before? or, Why did it happen when it did?, our only answer can be that we do not know.[p 129]

Third, there is the interesting matter of the *words that are used in the Bible with regard to creation*. First is *bara'* which means calling into being without the aid of pre-existing material. This word is used only three times in Genesis 1, and only of God's activity in the Old Testament. *Bara'* is never used in connection with existing material and always describes divine activity. See Genesis 1:1, 21, 27. Second is *'asah* which means to prepare out of existing material, a word which is used to describe the work of most of the days of creation: Genesis 1:7, 16, 25, 26 and 31. And the third word is *yatsar* which means to fashion out of pre-existing material. This is used in Genesis 2:7. However, these terms are obviously interchangeable.

Our fourth subject for consideration is *what exactly happened at creation?* Here at once we come to the problem of the relationship between the first two verses of Genesis 1. What is their interpretation? There have been two main answers. One is that these verses describe the two steps of one process; while the other says that there was a gap between the two verses. In the second view, verse 1 tells of the original creation of heaven and earth with perhaps Satan and angels dwelling in it. Then came a calamity and a destruction as a result of the fall of the angels and verse 2 tells of the work of reconstitution and reconstruction.

There are, it seems to me, two points in favour of the second interpretation. First, the words 'without form, and void' are suggestive of waste and destruction. That is the meaning in Isaiah 24:1, 'Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down.' And Jeremiah 4:23 reads: 'I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void.' The second interpretation would also explain the whole problem of the geological strata. But Christians are divided on all this and we cannot prove it either way.

Second, still under our heading of what exactly happened, we must look, of course, at the details in the biblical account of the days of creation. On the first day, light was created; the light and darkness were separated and so day and night were constituted. Light would seem to mean luminous ether, or electricity—the sun is the light-bearer.

On the second day there was also a separation. The firmament was established by dividing the waters above and the waters below. The word 'above' refers to the clouds, while the 'firmament' means an expanse.

On the third day, there was a separation of sea and dry land, and the vegetable kingdom of plants and trees came into being. These are [p 130] three types: grass; herbs, vegetables and grains; and fruit trees—all 'after his kind'. There are two points to be observed here. The first is that *God* did this and the second is that 'after his kind' in verse 12 means that the species are separate and do not evolve out of each other.

The fourth day saw the creation of the sun, moon and stars as light-bearers. Their function is to divide day and night; to act as signs of the change of weather, of future important events, and coming judgment; to affect the change of seasons and the succession of days and years; and to serve as lights.

The fifth day saw the creation of birds and fishes. Notice again, in verse 21, the words 'after their kind'. Once more, this is an indication of different species.

On the sixth day, first, the animals were created. Notice also the use of the words, 'God made' and again, 'after his kind', and 'after their kind' in verse 25. Then, second, in verse 26 we read of the creation of man and this is special.

There is a parallel to be seen between the work of the first three and the last three days:

Day 1

The creation of light

Day 4

The creation of light-bearers

Day 2

The creation of the expanse and the separation of the waters

Day 5

The creation of the birds of the air and fish of the sea

Day 3

The separation of water and dry land and the preparation of the earth as a habitation for man and beast

Day 6

The creation of the beasts of the field, cattle and creeping things and man.

And finally we are told that on the seventh day God rested and contemplated His work: He looked at creation as an artist does, and was satisfied with it.

The next matter for us to deal with is the exact meaning of the word *day*. There are two main views. The first is that it means a twenty-four hour day and the second is that it means an extended period of time.

There is considerable disagreement on this subject among people who are equally good Christians, and the correct meaning cannot [p 131] finally be proved either way. In favour of the second view is the fact that in the Bible, the word translated in Genesis 1 as 'day' does not always mean the twenty-four hour day. In verses 5, 16, and 18 of Genesis 1 it refers to the daylight hours, while in verses 5, 8 and 13 it means light and darkness, and in Genesis 2:4 it means the six days of creation.

Then in other passages in the Bible the same word means an indefinite period of time, as in 'the day of trouble' (Jer. 51:2), or 'the day of the Lord' (Isa. 13:6; Joel 3:14), and, of course, in 2 Peter 3:8 we read, 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day'. This last reference, however, is not relevant to our discussion, as Peter's purpose is to show the differences between eternity and time.

On the other hand, in favour of the twenty-four hour day is, first of all, the fact that this is the primary meaning of the Hebrew word. Second, there is the importance of the phrase 'evening and morning' throughout Genesis 1. How is this repetition to be explained? The question at once arises: If you take a day to mean an extended period, then how do you explain this evening and morning? If you take the point of view which says that in the creation of the world God had taken millions of years to do something that is described here as having been done in a day, and then there followed an evening in which there was darkness and nothing apparently happening and then another extended period and so on, then how do you account for these extended evenings as well as mornings? What was happening during these millions of years of evenings? Furthermore, you have to answer the seemingly impossible question: How could life—vegetable and animal life—exist at all during this extended period of millions of years of darkness and absence of light? Not only that, it seems perfectly clear that the last three days in the account in this first chapter of Genesis were determined by the sun and therefore were twentyfour-hour days. From the moment that the sun comes into being and determines the difference between day and night, surely all must agree that now at any rate we are dealing with twenty-four hours. So if the other theory is right, then we are asked to believe that the first three days mean an extended period, but the last three days mean only twenty-four hours, and obviously there is nothing in the account itself to suggest that the word has a different meaning. I cannot prove that there is no difference, but it surely is a very strange thing that you should have this sudden change in meaning when the description is [p 132] identical in both the first and the last three days.

But it seems to me that the most important argument of all is what we are told about God resting on the seventh day and beholding with satisfaction the work that He had done. Notice, too, the importance that is attached to that in the Scripture and particularly, of course, in the question of our observing and keeping the seventh day. In Exodus 20 we read, 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it' (vv. 8, 11). And that is repeated several times in the Scripture.

Now at that point, of course, there can be no discussion at all. The reference is to a day of twenty-four hours. The Sabbath which they were told to observe was not to be an extended period, it was to be a day of twenty-four hours and the reason given is that after God had made the world in six days, He rested upon the seventh. It does not say that He rested for an extended period of millions of years.

Well there, it seems to me, is the evidence with regard to both these theories. I think I have been making it plain that as far as I myself am concerned (it is only an opinion, I cannot prove it to you) I cannot see how we are entitled to interpret this term 'day' in any other sense than by saying that it means twenty-four hours. The difficulties of the other suppositions make it, to me at any rate, quite impossible.

But I would remind you again that great and learned and devout Christians have held and do hold the other view. Thank God that our salvation is not determined by our view on this particular question. So I trust we will all look at the evidence, bearing that all-important truth in mind. I think it is right and important that we should look at these things but to be dogmatic or to insist that one bit of evidence can certainly prove our case, is to make ourselves ludicrous.

So, let us go on to another question. 'What about all this,' says someone, 'and modern science?' Now as I said at the beginning of this series of discourses, they are not meant to be lectures in apologetics and I want to emphasise that again. Indeed, were I to consult my own feelings I would not do what I am proposing to do now. But, after all, I know full well, having been a student myself and a student of science and biology, that many Christian people do get into trouble about these matters. So I regard it as a part of the function of a Christian minister to try to help. I know that as he does it he is exposing himself to attack from both sides, but that really is immaterial. It is our [p 133] business to help one another as far as we can. Let me make it quite plain that I am not asserting that I am able to prove much, but, at any rate, I think I can disagree with some common and popular assumptions.

So then, what about all this and modern science? Now certain things can be said without any fear of contradiction and here is the first: *this problem, the dispute between science and the Bible, is one which is greatly exaggerated.* The trouble, generally, is due to the fact that, on the one hand, what poses as science is not science but merely opinion and supposition and, on the other hand, what is regarded as biblical is very often not the biblical teaching. So if you have a false conception of the Bible and science, then obviously you will very easily manufacture a great dispute between the two. The trouble is due very largely to the fact that people will persist in quoting errors as facts and suppositions as truth. But I would always assert that I am not aware of any real contradiction between the teaching of the Bible and true, established scientific facts. Now that is the most important thing of all.

It is most astounding to observe the way in which the Bible makes statements which come into the realm of science. It has often been pointed out that if you compare the book of Genesis with some of the accounts in Egyptian and Babylonian literature of the origin of life and of the world and of man, the contrast is simply incredible. There you have myths and superstitions, exaggerations and gross statements which patently are impossible and ridiculous. There is nothing like that in the Scripture. If you put the Bible over against literature which is more or less of the same date, the difference is truly remarkable. And that, I think, is an important bit of evidence.

Now I have already reminded you in passing—but it is important to repeat it again—that even in the time of the book of Job it was known that the earth is a globe. The Bible never says that the earth is flat. In Job 26:7 you read this: 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.' Now if the book of Job is (as is probably the case) about the oldest book in the world, stemming from remote antiquity, we must ask the question: How was a thing like that known? Who would ever have thought it out or imagined it? It is clearly something that was revealed by God Himself. It is up to date. It is modern science, if you like. It is a description of the earth as a globe.

Then another thing which has been pointed out quite often is that the very order of creation which is given in the first chapter of Genesis [p 134] is identical with the order that the modern scientist gives us—I mean the modern scientist who is not a Christian and who rejects the Bible.

And then there is another very striking point, namely, that it has been discovered in this present century that there are only four blood groups, that the whole of mankind can be divided into these four groups, and that all of them can be derived from just two persons. Then you remember that the apostle Paul told the people at Athens that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men ...' (Acts 17:26). Finally, you get a contrast between the greater light and the lesser light in the book of Genesis. In other words, they realised that there was a difference between the sun and the moon, which is a very striking fact.

'But then' says someone, 'what about the statements of geologists who tell us that one layer was put down and then another layer on top of it and so you have the various strata? This has caused a great deal of trouble; many Christian people have been very perplexed about it and many theories have been put forward in an attempt to reconcile the Bible with this supposed evidence from geology.

Some have put forward the theory that Genesis does not claim to be a scientific treatise, but is just allegory or poetry, that the Bible does not pretend to be scientifically accurate but is a typical, poetical, allegorical way of describing creation. To this the answer is, of course, that there is not a trace of poetry in these early chapters of Genesis. The form is not poetical at all. It claims to be history. It claims to be giving facts, and the history that follows immediately and directly out of it is certainly true history and not allegory.

Then others say, 'Well, of course this is a myth' and a myth, they tell us, is something which embodies religious truth. It is a statement which is not of necessity true in and of itself, it is historical in a sense and yet not historical. A myth does not give information about what actually happened, but reveals a religious meaning and truth. But the moment you say that Genesis 1 is a myth, you are in difficulties about the Person and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, because in His teaching about divorce, He referred to the creation of man and woman. He based His whole argument upon the fact that this is literal history. This leads us on to lay down another proposition. It is that you must be always careful in case, in attempting to solve one difficulty, you are not creating a more serious one. We shall come back to that later.

Then another way of trying to answer the geological question is to introduce that old conception that a day means a long period, the [p 135] argument with which we have already dealt. Now here, it again seems to me, you come back to two possibilities: one is that restitution theory, to which I have already referred, which states that there is a gap between verses 1 and 2. That seems to me to be an explanation which would be adequate. I am not saying it is the correct one, but it does seem to answer most of the difficulties. But if you do not accept that, you must remember that, after all, the geologists are not all agreed and that it is still possible that they are mistaken. I cannot prove that, but we must always bear it in mind as a possibility. The fall of man may itself have produced such a cataclysm upon the earth that it would account for most of the problem. We know that God cursed the ground because of the sin of man. What was the limit of that cursing? What exactly took place then, and what took place at the flood? The answer is, of course, we just do not know, but it is possible that there, somehow, something happened which adequately accounts for these different layers of which the geologists speak. But, ultimately, there are certain matters about which we have to say that we do not know; it is the only honest and safe position to take up.

But we can say that science is very much more humble today than it was at the beginning of the century. There have been great changes and admissions in scientific attitudes and standpoints. The position, for instance, with regard to astronomy today is very different from what it was earlier and that is something that is admitted by all competent investigators in this field. So it seems to me that there is one rule here: let us always be careful to differentiate between theories and facts, suppositions and proofs. When people say, 'Science has done so and so,' make certain that they are giving you a fact and not merely putting forward the theory of a particular scientist.

But at the same time, let those of us who are Christians be very careful to face facts when they are put before us. We must never be guilty of obscurantism. We must never refuse a fact because it makes things difficult for us, we must never try to invent facts, and we must not put forward theories which are patently not true. For instance, there was a man who once attempted to defend the Genesis account by saying that he believed that when God created the world He actually created these geological strata, and even created

the fossils in them. But that seems to me to be making the whole position of the Bible ridiculous and futile. We must never just bury our heads in the sand and say, "Well, I shall go on saying this whatever else may be said!" We must be open-minded and ready to face real evidence, sifting it and examining [p 136] it but always remembering that scientists are human beings, and that, like ourselves, they are sinful human beings. So when you are asked to believe that because a man is a scientist, he is a pure intellectual, has no prejudices at all and is consumed by a passion for truth to the exclusion of everything else, well, remember that that just is not true. Scientists, like the rest of us, are full of error and of failure. Indeed, they are some of the most opinionated people in the world today, dogmatism is certainly not confined to pulpits! You get it in scientific laboratories, on the radio and in books.

Now this brings me to suggest a word or two about the vexed question of evolution. I say once more that if I were to consult my own inclinations and feelings I would not be doing this. For the past thirtyseven years or so I have had to read, for various reasons, this argument about evolution, and I am more than tired of it. And yet, of course, I know that it is a live and burning issue with so many. I know that many young people in schools and colleges and other places are being taught things as if evolution has been proved beyond any doubt at all. So I feel that for those reasons, if for no other, I must just again make one or two comments, though from the standpoint of biblical doctrine there is no necessity for me to do so.

Now when you come to this question of evolution, you must start with a definition. Evolution as it is commonly and popularly understood means this: life is something that generates itself; it is a force and a power in and of itself and it produces one type out of a previous type; we start with something utterly simple and undifferentiated and from that something more involved and complex evolves and that in turn evolves into something still more complex and on and on you go up and up the scale from one point to another.

There are many groups of people who believe in evolution, and the commonest and the largest group of all comprises atheists who exclude God altogether—the so-called *atheistic evolution*. But there is also a theory sometimes called *deistic evolution*. Proponents of this view say, 'Yes, we believe in God and we believe that God created matter at the beginning, but having created matter He did no more about it. He put the power into matter and matter has done the rest itself. God, as it were, wound up the watch and having done so He put it down and it has gone on by itself. All the great changes leading up to man, they say, have happened, as it were, automatically out of this power.

And there is a third group who hold the view which is called *theistic evolution*. Now these are the people who are Christian—they are [p 137] believers in God, and at the same time they believe in evolution. You will find them among both Roman Catholics and Protestants—including evangelical Protestant Christians. They say that the development of these different types and species has gone on, but God has been guiding it and has intervened frequently in the process. So they are different from the deists—they are theists and they emphasise the activity of God.

Now I do not want to stay with this, I would simply like to make these comments. The first thing we always have to remember is that evolution is only a theory. Nobody can prove it. Indeed, there are many different theories (which do not agree with one another). If you want to know one of the best attacks that is available upon Darwin's particular theory I would recommend you to read (and it may astound you that I should quote such a name and such a man) Bernard Shaw's introduction to his drama *Man and Superman* for a devastating criticism of Darwin's particular brand of evolution. Shaw believed, you see, in another type of evolution.

I have often said this when I have been involved in discussions, and I pass it on to any who may be troubled by people who talk rather glibly about evolution: the next time anyone comes to you and begins to dangle this word 'evolution' just stop and put this question: 'Which particular brand or theory of evolution do you believe?' And I think you will find that in nine cases out of ten you will be introducing them for the first time to the knowledge that there is more than one theory. So there are many theories and an interesting argument is going on among their advocates; but nothing is proven. Furthermore, none of the theories really explains the origin of everything. Scientists talk about a great planet that began to cool—but where did the planet come from? They talk about this primitive slime, this protoplasm, but

where did that come from? Where did the gases come from that have cooled? And so on. There is no explanation of ultimate origin. They admit that quite frankly. And yet it is rather important. Not only that, they have completely failed to explain why any changes should take place at all. Why should that undifferentiated slime or protoplasm become more complicated and involved; what made it do it? They do not know. There is a complete failure to explain the changes, still less to explain why the changes should always be upward.

Geologists talk a great deal *about* the evidence provided by fossils and so on. However, it is a fact that the geological records show that there is a fixity of types. A type is always the same in the geological [p 138] record. Another thing the records show is that every new type appeared suddenly. There was no gradual evolvement of a new type; you suddenly find a new type quite complete. And the third point about the geological record is the scarcity of evidence for the so-called missing link. If one type does gradually and almost imperceptibly turn into another, then you would expect to find some evidence in these deposits of some of these intervening stages and they simply cannot be found. The missing link is a potent argument.

Again, if you are interested in my personal opinion, I shall put it like this: quite apart from my believing the Bible to be the inspired and authoritative word of God, on scientific grounds alone I have never been able to accept the theory of evolution. The difficulties I am left with, if I accept the theory of evolution, are altogether greater than the few residual difficulties I am left with when I accept the biblical record. But lest you may think that this is simply my own opinion, let me read you one or two statements from some authorities in these matters for you to see how I substantiate my statement. There was a biologist called Delage, who believed in evolution, and this is what he said: 'One is or is not a conformist (that is to say, a believer in evolution) not so much from motives deduced from natural history as from motives based on personal philosophic opinion.' Here is a man who believes in evolution and he says what really determines a man's view is not so much his scientific knowledge as his scientific opinion. He goes on to say; 'If one takes his stand upon the exclusive ground of fact, it must be acknowledged that the formation of one species from another species has not been demonstrated at all.' And that was a man who believed in evolution and was a great biologist.

Another scientist has said, 'Darwinism is more a religion than a science' It is, he says, not so much a question of scientific fact as of a person's ultimate outlook. In this way, he says, the idea of evolution has become a sacred conviction of thousands, a conviction that no longer has anything to do with unbiased scientific research. This point of view was echoed by Professor D. M. F. Watson who once said in a broadcast, 'Evolution itself is accepted by zoologists, not because it has been observed to occur, or can be proved by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible.' You see, he did not have the facts to prove his theory, but because he could not believe in this idea of a God who creates, then he believed in evolution.

I could go on quoting to you. Others—Sir Arthur Keith, for [p 139] instance—admit that evolution is 'a basic dogma of rationalism'. Then let me give you just one other statement. A Fellow of the Royal Society (and to be a Fellow of the Royal Society is the greatest distinction a scientist can have in this country or in any other) once remarked that it is 'professional suicide' for a biologist to attack evolution. In other words, it is a dogma involving feeling and heat, and a man who ventures, even in spite of these facts, to say that he does not believe in it is a man who is more or less committing 'professional suicide'. But there are certain great names in the realm of science who have never accepted it. Sir Ambrose Fleming, Sir William Shelton, and many others whom I could mention to you. But let me just give you two final quotations: the only statement, writes one biologist, that science can make is to make her feel that she knows nothing about the origin of man. We have reached, says another, 'a stage of very general scepticism'.

And, therefore, we must realise that all that is being taught and constantly asserted is nothing but a theory, without proof. It is a form of dogmatism, an anti-God religion. That does not apply, of course, to the theistic evolutionist, but, speaking generally, it describes the others.

This, therefore, makes it doubly distressing that all too often the media refuse to allow the anti-evolution view to be stated. This, of course, just confirms the prejudice that is involved. In spite of these

admissions by various scientists, the prejudice is such that the other side is not even allowed to speak for itself. Thus it seems very clear that we are facing, not a problem of science, but a problem of a spirit and an attitude that is antagonistic to God, and whose concern, as some of these scientists have been ready to admit, is to prove that the earth could not have started as the Bible says.

Here, therefore, we leave this consideration of the relationship of the biblical account of creation to the popular and prevailing scientific opinion. I have not had time to deal with the theistic evolutionists, but I cannot understand people who are ready to accept the theory of evolution in the absence of proof to allow themselves to be placed in difficulty. Let us never compromise the truth of God to fit any scientific theory. The time will soon come when that scientific theory, if it contradicts the Bible, will be replaced by another. So we must never allow our position to be determined for us by the passing theories or current of so-called scientific opinion. Let us hold to the truth as it is revealed and ever, I repeat, with an open mind listen to facts that are placed before us. But let us shake ourselves entirely free from this pseudo-scientific dogmatism that so often masquerades in the guise of a truly scientific spirit.

13 Providence

In our consideration of these biblical doctrines we come now to a consideration of the biblical doctrine of providence. I think it is right that we should consider this doctrine before we deal with man in particular, because it follows on, in logical sequence, from the doctrine of creation. Now perhaps the best way of describing what we mean by providence is to define it in terms of its relationship to creation. We can put it like this: creation, as we saw, means calling into existence something which did not exist before. So if that is creation, then providence means the continuation, or the causing to continue, of that which has been called into existence. Creation brings things into existence, providence keeps them, or guarantees their continuation in existence, in fulfilment of God's purposes. The doctrine of providence does not just mean, therefore, that God has a foreknowledge of what is going to happen, but is a description of His continuing activity, of what He does in the world, and what He has continued to do since He made the world at the very beginning.

Now there can be no doubt at all but that this doctrine at the present time is a very important one for us to consider. Every biblical doctrine, of course, is important, and we must not take any single one for granted, but if you look at the long history of the Church, you will find that in different times and in different centuries some doctrines assume a particular importance. The great doctrine in the early centuries of the Church was, of necessity, the doctrine of the person of Christ. It had to be. That was the doctrine that was most attacked, so the Church placed its maximum emphasis upon it. At the time of the Reformation it was the doctrine of justification by faith only, and so on, at different times. It behoves us to lay very special emphasis upon [p 141] particular doctrines, and I am prepared to assert that perhaps in this twentieth century of ours the most important doctrine in many ways is the doctrine of providence.

Now I hope that no one will think that I am arguing that the doctrine of providence is more important than the doctrine of the incarnation or the atonement; that is not my point. I am simply saying that there are certain reasons why we must pay particular attention to this doctrine. Let me give you my reasons. The first is the state of the world at this present time, especially the state of the world during the whole of this century up to now. This doctrine of providence is the stumbling-block to a large number of people who are outside Christ and outside the Church. They say, 'I cannot believe your doctrine, I cannot believe your gospel. You say that God is a God of love, well, look at the world; look at the things that have happened in the world; look at these two world wars! How can you reconcile something like that with a God of love, a God who you say is all-powerful, so powerful that there is nothing He cannot do if He so chooses? How can you explain all this?' So you see, the very historical situation in this century concentrates attention immediately upon this great doctrine of providence.

Then another thing that has focused attention on the doctrine of providence is what we call 'special providences'. Now special providences are special interventions of God on behalf of individuals or groups of people. For instance, at Dunkirk during the War a kind of mist came down to protect the soldiers while at the same time the sea was unusually calm and smooth, and many people in this country were ready to say that that was a providential act of God. They said that God had intervened in order to save our troops by making it possible for them to be brought back into this country. There are also those who would say the same thing about the wartime defence of Malta. Then, of course, it has been customary and traditional in this country to say that the same thing happened at the time of the Spanish Armada: that what really accounted for the destruction of that fleet was the change in the direction of the wind.

Furthermore, there are people who claim special providences in their own personal lives. 'It is most amazing,' they say. 'Do you know, this is what has happened to me ...'—and they describe to you how certain things seem to have been arranged particularly in order to suit their special circumstances! And then, when you tell them that they cannot say things like that, they resent the whole doctrine of providence.

[p 142] Another reason why it is important to be clear about this doctrine in this century is that most of the thinking of men and women today seems to be determined by what is called a 'scientific outlook'. It is undoubtedly the fact that large numbers of people do not even begin to consider the great message of Christianity because, they say, 'Your whole message includes the idea of miracles and these interventions of God. For those who take a scientific outlook, as I do, towards the whole of life, such things are a sheer impossibility, and if your gospel contains the supernatural, I just cannot begin to consider it'.

And the last reason I would adduce is this: you cannot begin to talk about prayer, answered prayer, without at the same time introducing the doctrine of providence. So we must consider this doctrine because many other matters presuppose it.

What, then, does the Bible tell us about the doctrine of providence? Again, we are looking at a very difficult subject. The particular doctrines of salvation that we shall be considering are very simple in comparison with a doctrine like this. It is one of those inscrutable doctrines and there is a hymn which reminds us of that. 'God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform,' says William Cowper, and, 'Blind unbelief is sure to err.' And not only blind unbelief, but lack of faith, but a desire to understand that which is impossible, are certain to lead us into trouble if not into error. Therefore let us approach the doctrine of providence with reverence and humility, going as far as Scripture takes us, but not going beyond that.

Now the Bible teaches everywhere, very clearly, as I shall show you, that God is in control of all things. Psalm 104 is enough, in and of itself, to establish that doctrine. There is no limit to what He does. Psalm 103:19 also says, 'The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.' Everywhere. And the Bible teaches us that first of all, as over against deism, to which I have referred, that doctrine which regards the universe as a kind of watch made by the watchmaker, wound up by him, and then put down to run itself out. But the doctrine of providence contradicts that, and I rather like the comparison which was once used to show the difference. The doctrine of providence tells us that the universe, and everything within it, is like a great ship which is being piloted from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, second to second, by God Himself. Furthermore, of course, it is over against pantheism also, which says that God is everything, and in everything, and that therefore you cannot differentiate between the universe and God Himself. The doctrine [p 143] of providence contradicts both these views.

How, then, do we find this doctrine in the Bible? Well, first of all we find it in a number of very direct statements in the Scriptures. I shall give you a list of them later on. Then another very powerful argument for the doctrine of providence is based upon the fact of prophecy. It would not be possible for a man inspired by God to predict what is going to take place, perhaps in several hundreds of years, unless God controlled everything. Prophecy is not merely foreknowledge, it is a guarantee—that the prophesied events are going to happen because God is in control.

Then another great argument, as we have seen, is derived from answers to prayer. If we did not believe that God controlled everything, there would be no point in praying—we would not pray for sunshine, we would not pray for rain; we would not pray for health and for the control of disease. Prayer, in a sense, would be ridiculous if we did not believe in the doctrine of providence. And that is why deists do not believe in prayer. Pantheists do not pray; there is no purpose in it. But those who believe in the doctrine of providence obviously pray because the very idea of that doctrine immediately leads to prayer.

And our last general argument is the argument from miracles. Were it not that the doctrine of providence is true, if it were not the case that God has His hand upon everything, and is controlling everything, then miracles simply could not take place at all.

So then, what exactly do we mean by providence? I cannot think of a better definition or description than this: 'Providence is that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator upholds all his creatures, is operative in all that transpires in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.' We shall consider the biblical proof for that statement later on. Now there are three elements in this idea of providence, and we must differentiate between them in thought as well as in practice, though, of course, the three tend to work together. You can look at the three aspects of providence from different angles. The first is the aspect or the element of *preservation*—that continuous work of God by which He maintains the

things which He has created, together with the properties and powers with which He has endowed them.' Now this is most important. The Bible teaches that God preserves everything that He has made. It is a continuous work. Some have tried to say that this doctrine of preservation simply means that God does not destroy the work He once made, [p 144] but that is not preservation. It means more than that; it means that He keeps everything in being.

Others, too, have misunderstood this doctrine. Incidentally, the great Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest theologians that the Christian Church has ever known, that great American who lived two hundred years ago—if ever you find anything written by him buy it and devour it!—Jonathan Edwards himself almost fell into error about this. It is an error which says that preservation means a continuous process of creation, so that God is continually creating, anew and afresh, everything that exists, and everything is kept going by being created in this way from moment to moment. But that is not really preservation, as I understand it, and as it has been traditionally understood. So we will put it like this: everything that has been created by God has a real and permanent existence of its own, apart from the being of God, but that must never be taken to mean that it is self-existent, which belongs to God alone. If things were self-existent they would not need God in order to keep going. That is the difference. God has created a thing, and He keeps it alive. He upholds all things, and they continue to exist as the result of a positive and continued exercise of His divine power.

Notice how Psalm 104 puts it in verses 28–30: 'That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.' Now God does not create these animals of the earth constantly. What He does is to keep life, to preserve what He has already created. Paul, of course, puts this exactly in Acts 17:28: 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' He means the same thing in Colossians 1:17: 'And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.' They are preserved, they are kept going by Him. It is stated still more strikingly in Hebrews 1:3: 'upholding all things by the word of his power'. He has not only made them, He upholds them. There is nothing in the universe that would continue to go forward if God were not upholding it. So we must never think, therefore, of the universe as something which God created and then allowed to work itself out; that is deism.

Second, there is the governmental aspect of providence. This means the continued activity of God whereby He rules all things to a definite end and object, and does so in order to secure the accomplishment of His own divine purpose. 'The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice' ([p 145] Ps. 97:1). He is the King of the universe. He is the Lord of lords. Everything is under His control: 'his kingdom ruleth over all' (Ps. 103:19). 'The nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance' (Isa. 40:15). That is the idea of government. Or take the mighty statement in Daniel 4:34–5:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

The governmental aspect of the doctrine of the providence of God is of vital importance and runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end. 'His purposes shall ripen fast, unfolding every hour,' says William Cowper. There is an end to this creation, a purpose, an object. Everything is leading up to God's determined purpose for it.

The third aspect of providence that I must emphasise is what has generally been called the aspect of *concurrence*. It means 'the co-operation of God and His divine power with all the subordinate powers according to the pre-established laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do'. If you like, it means the whole idea of the relationship of second causes to God's ordering of all things. The Bible teaching is that God works in and through the second causes which He has made. We are all clear, I take it, about secondary causes. We find, do we not, that everything that happens has a cause; certain things lead to certain other things. You see that right through the whole of nature. One thing produces another. Now those are the second causes, and the biblical doctrine of providence teaches the

existence of second causes. But it is very, very clear in its emphasis that the second causes do not operate automatically or independently. God works through them. They have their own operations, but God is over all these operations.

Now it is important to emphasise this point, because so many people today speak of the powers of nature as if they were something independent. But they are not. There are powers and laws in nature, but not apart from God. God is in direct relationship to them, and uses them and orders them and manipulates them; so we hold the two [p 146] ideas at one and the same time—the reality of secondary causes, but their dependence upon God and His control of them.

This is a mystery, of course. This is the difficult aspect of this doctrine—how can these things be true at one and the same time? But the Scriptures teach it. You will find it in Psalm 104:20, 21 and 30. Amos 3:6 says, ‘Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?’ Matthew 5:45 tells us, ‘... for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust’. In other words, these things do not happen automatically as the result of the secondary causes or laws of nature. God is behind them. He is working in them and through them. He is not divorced from them.

So there, briefly, are the three aspects of providence. You can think of them like this: the idea of preservation makes us think of the being of everything that is. The idea of government tells us that this being is guided, and the doctrine of concurrence tells us about how the activity is guided. Being, guidance, and activity.

Then the next question we come to is this: In what way is providence exercised? Or, to put it another way: What are the objects of providence? Now here it is customary to divide providence into *general* and *special*. We have just seen that throughout the Bible we are taught that the whole of the universe is being controlled by God. This is general providence. He not only made it, He keeps it going, and He is controlling it.

Then you come to special providence, which can be thought of in three ways. First of all it is God’s care for each separate part of the universe in its relationship to the whole. There are abundant Scriptures to prove that. Psalm 104 is nothing but a great elaboration of that point. God not only controls the whole universe, He controls the brooks and the streams and the trees and plants as well—not only general but also particular.

Special providence also means that God has a special care for all rational creatures: animals and human beings. Throughout the Bible we are told that God controls the existence of all people, evil as well as good. That is why He causes His sun to rise and the rain to fall upon all types of people. God is thus related even to sinners, even to men and women who deny Him and do not believe in Him. Scripture teaches that they are not outside a relationship with God.

But, of course, above all, special providence means God’s special care for His own people, and what He does for them.

[p 147] So let us come now to the scriptural statements and the scriptural principles. First, the Bible tells us that God’s providence is exercised over the universe at large. Psalm 103:19, which we have already quoted, says ‘his kingdom ruleth over all’. We find it also in Ephesians 1:11: ‘the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will’. God is controlling all things everywhere—the heavens and the earth, and under the earth. He has a purpose behind it all.

Second, God’s providence is exercised over the physical world; I refer you to the whole of Psalm 104, and also, again, to Matthew 5:45.

Third is God’s controlling providence over the brute creation, over the animals. We see that again in Psalm 104 and also in Matthew 6:26, where we read about the birds that ‘they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them’, while in Matthew 10:29 we are told about the sparrows: ‘and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father’.

Fourth, we are told that His providence is exercised over the affairs of nations; you will find that in Job 12:24, 'He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way.' Or again in Acts 17:26 we read, 'And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.'

Fifth, we are told that God providentially governs a man's birth and his lot in this world. We read in 1 Samuel 16:1, 'And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.' And Paul says about himself in Galatians 1:15-16, 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen ...'

In the sixth place, we find that God's providence determines the outward successes and failures in human life: 'For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another' (Ps. 75:6-7).

The seventh is this: that God governs things which appear to be accidental, or apparently insignificant. My favourite text to prove that is the first verse of Esther 6, where we are told that the king 'could not sleep'. 'Dear me,' says someone, 'surely that has got nothing to do [p 148] with God's providence!' But read the book of Esther, and you will find that it is a crucial point. It is made quite clear that the king could not sleep that night because God kept him awake. So Mordecai was saved, and Esther and her people were saved, through the instrumentality of God causing this insomnia—something apparently trivial and seemingly accidental.

In the eighth place, God's providence protects the righteous. Read Psalm 4:8: 'I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety,' says the psalmist. Why? The Lord had protected him. Indeed, that is shown beautifully in both Psalms 4 and 5.

And God supplies, in the ninth place, through providence, the needs of His people: 'But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus,' says Paul in Philippians 4:19.

And tenth and last, you will find that every single answer to prayer which is in the Scriptures is just a statement that God providentially orders things in this way for His people.

Now that brings me to what is called 'extraordinary providences', or, in other words, miracles, for miracles come under this heading of providence. A miracle is an extraordinary providence. 'What is the difference between ordinary and extraordinary providence?' asks someone. I would answer that question like this: in ordinary providence God works through second causes, in accordance with the laws which He has placed in nature. But in extraordinary providences, or miracles, God works immediately, directly, and without the secondary causes. A miracle is God working, not contrary to nature, but in a supernatural manner.

People often get into trouble about this question of miracles because they start by thinking that a miracle is something contrary to nature. But that is quite wrong, and it is wrong because their idea of nature is wrong; they have forgotten that God works in nature. It is simply that God has two different ways of working. Generally He achieves His purposes through the secondary causes; but sometimes He does it directly, and that is a miracle. God is working, as we have been seeing at length, in everything, always and everywhere; so that when you have a miracle, it is still God working, but working in a different way; and to deny the possibility of miracles is to say that God is confined, or bound, by His own laws.

Some people, of course, insist that miracles are impossible because they break the laws of nature. If such people believe in God at all, they [p 149] mean that God is now bound by the laws which He Himself has placed in nature, and can do nothing about it. They reduce God to a position subservient to His own law. But this denies the doctrine of God all along the line. There is also a tendency, among certain people, to believe in miracles only when they think they can explain them!

Let me illustrate that by a story. I remember once, a man, a deacon, coming to talk to me about his minister; he had been rather troubled about the call of this minister to his church, because he was not quite certain about the soundness and the orthodoxy of this man. But he came to me with great glee and delight one day and said, 'You know, our minister now believes in miracles.'

'What has convinced him?' I asked. 'What is your evidence?'

'Well,' he said, 'he was preaching on Sunday night and he told us that some recent discoveries made in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah have revealed that there were certain substances there which might very well account for what is described in the Old Testament.' So his minister now believed in miracles! But in fact he still did not believe in miracles, for if you can explain a thing scientifically it is no longer a miracle. By definition, a miracle is something that you cannot explain.

Someone else once said that an astrologer had discovered that just about the time—the person talking to me was really quite excited about this, and he was an evangelical—that the children of Israel were crossing the Red Sea, the sun and the moon were so positioned that it was more than likely that a sort of gale had arisen that drove back a part of the Red Sea. So it was possible that the children of Israel had passed over on dry land after all. And this man fondly thought that he was a believer in miracles now! No, no! You will notice, perhaps, that there is a tendency to do this at the present time. It just means that such people are not happy in their belief in miracles, and that they really do not accept the biblical doctrine. A miracle by definition is supernatural. It cannot be explained in terms of the ordinary operation of the laws of nature or of secondary causes. It is God's direct and immediate action.

I think that the real trouble with regard to a belief in miracles is due to the fact that people always will approach them from the standpoint of science or of nature, instead of from the standpoint of God who is all-mighty and who governs and controls everything. The danger in this century is to deify nature, to regard it as some absolute power with which even God cannot interfere. It is an utterly false notion. [p 150] Once we have the right idea of God's providence, I think most of our difficulties with regard to miracles should be removed.

Now we must mention one or two difficulties which people sometimes have with regard to this doctrine of providence. They say that they are ready to believe in providence in general, but they cannot quite understand the idea of a special providence, and they say they have two reasons for this. The first is that God is surely too great and too all-mighty to be troubled and worried by the details of our petty little problems. The second is that the laws of nature make such an interference impossible. But the Bible teaches us that God *is* concerned with the details of our lives. He answers the prayers of His people, in detail, in very small matters, and He encourages us to take all things to Him. Paul says, 'Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God' (Phil. 4:6). As for that second objection, the biblical teaching denies it utterly. Scripture teaches this special providence of God positively, and miracles, of course, prove it to the very hilt.

But, after all, the great problem is this: if God does govern and control everything, then what is His relationship to sin? All I can do, in answer, is to lay down a number of propositions that are clearly taught in the Scriptures. The first is that sinful acts are under divine control, and occur only by God's permission and according to His ultimate purpose. If you want proof of that you will find it in the case of Joseph and his brethren. 'It was not you that sent me hither,' said Joseph, 'but God' (Gen. 45:8). God permitted their sinful act and controlled it. You will find the same teaching about the death of our Lord as it is expounded by Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The second is that God restrains and controls sin. In Psalm 76:10 we read, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.'

The third is that God overrules sin for good. Genesis 50:20 puts it like this: 'But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.' God overruled the sin, and He did exactly the same in the case of the death of our Lord.

My last proposition is that God never causes sin, nor approves of it; He only permits, directs, restrains, limits and overrules it. People alone are responsible for their sin. The first chapter of James gives that particular teaching clearly.

[p 151] Let us finish with two general points. The first is to me one of the most comforting of all. I cannot but believe, having read the Bible, that ultimately the whole of providence is for the sake of God's people. If you want a proof of that it is in Romans 8:28: 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' It seems perfectly clear to me that, ultimately, God is thus concerned with everything for the sake of His own people, and everything else is being manipulated for our benefit and for our good. It is a wonderful thought, and I commend it to you. As you read your Scriptures keep your eye on that—providence really is concerned about salvation, and everything is kept going in the world for the sake of God's people. Were it not for His people, everything would be destroyed. All others—all sinners—are clearly going to be destroyed. They are preserved and kept going because of God's people and because of God's salvation.

My other point is this: be careful—it is a warning! Always be careful in your application of any particular event. Let me explain: whenever anything good happens to us or to our country we are all very ready, are we not, to say that it was undoubtedly an act of God—the providence of God. I have explained what the doctrine of providence teaches, but I would warn you that it is dangerous to particularise about any particular thing. Take the famous case of Dunkirk. I am not going to express an opinion as to what happened at Dunkirk; I do have an opinion but I shall not give it. All I would do is show you that if you do claim it was an act of God, you must do so in the light of the following. In 1934 German Christians—and very fine Christians among them—issued this statement: 'We are full of thanks to God that He as Lord of history has given us Adolf Hitler, our leader and our saviour from our difficult lot. We acknowledge that we, with body and soul, are bound and dedicated to the German State and to its Führer. This bondage and duty contains for us as Evangelical Christians its deepest and most holy significance in its obedience to the command of God.' That surely makes us think, does it not? Here is another declaration of theirs in 1933: 'This turn of history,' they said, referring to Hitler's coming into power, 'we say God has given him to us, to God be the glory. As bound to God's word we recognise in the great events of our day a new commission of God to His Church.'

Now those people were absolutely sincere; they were absolutely genuine. They were evangelical Christians, and they believed that! So I think you will agree that we must be a little cautious when we come **[p 152]** to make particular claims. Or again, someone in Moscow once said of Stalin, 'He is the divinely appointed leader of our armed and cultural forces, leading us to victory.' It is a very simple thing to persuade yourself that God has an unusual and a special interest in your country. Let us be very careful lest we bring God and His cause into disrepute by unwise and injudicious claims. Sometimes during the Second World War we had the National Days of Prayer, but terrible things happened almost the next day. Do remember that. My point, then, is this: the doctrine is plain and clear, but let us be judicious and cautious, and have a great concern for the glory and the name of God when we claim any particular event as an instance of His special providence either with regard to us or our country.

14

The Creation of Man

We are studying these biblical doctrines in their chronological and theological order, and so we come now, of necessity, to a consideration of the biblical doctrine of man. We started by considering what the Bible tells us about the being of God, and we confessed that we have no knowledge of Him apart from what we have in the Bible. So we had to start with the doctrine of Scripture and Scripture's own doctrine about itself, and then we looked at what it tells us about God, and about what God has done; and that took us to the doctrine of creation. That in turn led us to consider how God maintains what He created. That was the doctrine of providence which we were considering together in the last chapter.

Now, having done that, we must concentrate in particular upon man, because that is the special concern of the Scriptures. They have been given to us in order that we might arrive at a knowledge of the truth concerning ourselves and our relationship to God. We must, therefore, start with a hurried glance at what the Scripture tells us about the origin of men and women, and it describes that in terms of His creation. A number of things strike us at once with regard to this biblical account and we referred to two or three of them, in passing, when we dealt with the doctrine of creation, indicating that we would have to return to them more particularly when we came specifically to deal with the doctrine of man.

It is clear, as you read the account in the first chapter of Genesis—and it is equally true of the second—that the Scriptures' own account of the creation of man gives the obvious impression that something special was taking place, something distinct, something which must be emphasised. There is a kind of pause here, and in most Bibles it is [p 154] put as a separate paragraph. All of this is designed to remind us of the uniqueness of what was now going to be done. But in addition to that general emphasis, certain things are put before us in particular. For instance, we are told that before the creation of man, God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness' (Gen. 1:26).

It is quite clear—and it seems to me to be the only adequate explanation—that the three Persons of the blessed Trinity held counsel together before man was created. It is quite inadequate to suggest that this phrase, 'Let us,' is simply a kind of plural of majesty such as that used by royal personages who say 'We' instead of 'I'. That is something that is not done in Scripture. God generally refers to Himself in the singular; but here we have this plural. Neither can it be argued, surely, that this was a kind of conference or consultation which God had with the angels; there is no suggestion of that anywhere in the Scriptures.

No, it has generally been agreed from the very beginning that this is undoubtedly a reference to a conference between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Now that is something unique; we have not had that with regard to the creation of anything else. Having made these other things, there was a kind of pause, and the three blessed Persons held counsel together and said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'

So then, the second thing that we are told is that man was made in the image of God. You remember that in other cases we keep on reading the phrase 'after their kind', but there is no such phrase here. Man was not created after any kind, and is not told to reproduce after any kind. There is this peculiar something about him, that he was made and created in God's image and after His likeness.

Then we are told something else in Genesis 2:7: 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' In other words, in the case of man, there is a distinction of the elements which compose him; there is a distinction between the body and the spirit, the material and the immaterial parts. Again, it is something unique, something that we have not met before. God took of the dust of the ground and out of that He made man's body. But He did not take hold of anything in order to put the soul in man; He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. So the important thing to observe here is the distinction of the elements that compose man and his being.

And the other thing, of course, that is emphasised is the exalted [p 155] position that was at once given to him; he was made lord over the whole of creation, over all nature, over all creatures, and all the beasts. We shall have to return to that later, I simply note it here in order to emphasise the uniqueness of man in all this process of creation.

Now once more I am afraid we must turn aside for a little, as I indicated we should, to the vexed question of evolution. There are many, as you know, who believe that man has just evolved out of the animal. Whether they say that man has evolved out of some ape-like creature, or whether they say that the apes and man have both come from a common stock, it does not matter. The theory in general is, as we have seen, that he originally evolved out of some animal, thus denying this doctrine of the special creation of man.

But I must show you, without going back again to the argument of evolution, that this theory with regard to man is something that very definitely and specifically contradicts the biblical teaching. There is, I repeat, this pause in the Bible, and I regard it as being very significant. If man had evolved out of the animals, then there would not be this pause between the creation of the animals and the account of the creation of man; the account would have gone on directly from one to the other. But the Bible pauses, and it says that God did a unique thing; there was a conference between the three Persons of the Trinity. Why say that, if it was just a continuation of the previous process? It seems to me to be quite unnecessary.

Then, as I have just reminded you, the Scriptures tell us, and they emphasise it, that God made man out of the dust of the earth, so the question I would ask is this: If man has evolved out of some previous creatures, why not say so? Why say specifically that He has been made out of the dust of the earth? Surely if the theory of evolution were true, then this statement about man being made in that way is misleading, and so we could charge the Scriptures with misleading us, and apparently deliberately misleading us, which is, of course, quite unthinkable.

Now it is no use trying to argue that people at that time did not know about the doctrine of evolution, because if you believe at all in divine inspiration, then that argument will not hold up for a second. But there are other points which we must notice in this connection, and the first is man's essential difference from all animals. At once we are told certain things about man which mark him out as being essentially different from every type of animal. He has self-consciousness; [p 156] he has moral freedom; he clearly is capable of abstract thought; and he is capable of religion and worship. There is not a suspicion of those things with regard to any of the animals, but from the start the Bible emphasises—and we can substantiate and corroborate what it teaches—that these are peculiar qualitative differences between man and all types of animals, even the highest type.

Then another point, which is extremely important from the standpoint of doctrine, is this. The theory of evolution tells us that man has not only evolved, but that it is always an upward process, from the primitive and the simple to the more highly organised and involved, moving steadily in the direction of perfection. It tells us that man started way down, scarcely to be differentiated from the animal, and then he grows further and further away from the animal, until eventually he is perfect.

But the Bible, of course, tells us the exact opposite; the Bible tells us that man started, as it were, on top and then fell from that. It teaches this doctrine of the fall, and, as I shall have to show many times, the doctrine of the fall is a vital part of the biblical doctrine of salvation. That is why it is so important that we should be clear about these things and see why we cannot accept this idea of the evolution of man. The whole biblical case for salvation rests upon the fact that man, who was made perfect, fell and became imperfect—which is the exact opposite of the doctrine of evolution. So we really must fight at this point. The doctrine of the evolution of man from the animals, and the denial of his special creation by God, involves us at once in a denial of the doctrine of the Fall, and therefore puts us in serious trouble with regard to the doctrine of salvation.

'Yes, but wait a minute,' says someone, 'what about the person who is a theistic evolutionist?'

Well, all we say is that first and foremost on purely scientific grounds he has to establish that human beings have evolved in the way that the theory tells us. You remember what theistic evolution means—it

is a theory that says that man's body has evolved out of the animal but that the soul was put in specially by God. But there is no evidence or proof for that; indeed, the evidence, as we saw, is against it. But in addition to that, the doctrine of theistic evolution does not solve our problem at all; it still leaves us with the great problem of the fall; we still have to explain that. So theistic evolution, which attempts to reconcile what goes by the name of science, but is merely the theory of evolution, with the scriptural teaching, is [p 157] unnecessary because it finally does not help us.

The next thing the Bible tells us, and tells us categorically, is that the human race is one. It teaches very clearly the doctrine of the unity of the entire human race. It tells us that the whole of mankind has come from two people, Adam and Eve. The Bible does not in any way equivocate about this, it just states it. Nobody will deny that that is stated in Genesis, but it is not only stated there, and I want to emphasise this very particularly because some people suggest that it is only to be found in those early chapters of Genesis. It is something which is also stated elsewhere in the Scriptures. Take, for instance, Deuteronomy 32:8: 'When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.' Again, the whole incident in connection with the Tower of Babel, in Genesis 11:1-9, obviously teaches the same truth—that here was this unit which then became divided and separated. And then the apostle Paul said the same thing to the people of Athens: 'And hath made of one blood all nations of men ...' (Acts 17:26).

But why are we so concerned about this and why are we emphasising it so much? Again, we have to do so because other central, crucial doctrines depend upon this very idea. I remember once being in a conference with a number of scientific Christians who were tending to be dominated by their scientific brethren, and their one concern was simply to get out of their difficulties with regard to the first three chapters of Genesis. But it was a very simple thing to show them, and indeed to convince them, that their problem was not only with the first three chapters of Genesis; they also had to face Romans 5. The whole argument in that chapter is that the human race is one, that it has all come out of Adam, so that when Adam fell the whole race fell with him. So, you see, we cannot afford to play fast and loose with these theories.

Now I emphasise it in this way because I think that there is nothing so dangerous to faith, or so fatal, as to be afraid of supposed science. If you start accommodating at one point you will be denying another doctrine at some other point. The whole doctrine of Romans 5 is based upon the unity of the entire human race in Adam, and the unity of all Christians in Christ. Read it for yourselves and you will work out that parallel: 'Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life' (Rom. 5:18); [p 158] and you find exactly the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:21-2. So we must insist upon this doctrine.

And, of course, in a very interesting way it is increasingly being found that what the Bible has always taught and asserted can now be corroborated by evidence outside the Bible. Let me put some of it to you for your consideration. Scientists, even today, have to admit that the human race is but one species; there are obviously different families but there is only one species. And they simply cannot account for this; they are in difficulties about it. Take, for instance, the people who were found in North America and South America when Columbus and others got there. According to the scientific theory, it was very difficult to explain their likeness to us, since the animals they supposedly evolved from were unlike the animals from which people in Asia were supposed to be descended.

Then there is the fascinating evidence which historical research and knowledge provide of the history of the migrations of people. You have probably read about this many times—how the various tribes moved away from central Asia, some travelling north, and some westwards to the Mediterranean area. And with that let us put the fact, which is quite established and undoubted among anthropologists, that however widely separate and different races may be, most of them have certain common traditions, the tradition of a flood, for instance, and the tradition of a fall. Now the evidence of the history of the migrations of people, plus these common traditions, point conclusively to the fact that there seems to have been a common ancestry for all the families of mankind somewhere in central Asia. This is not my theory, nor simply that of Christian people. It is the theory of anthropologists, who study man and try to find out

the truth about him. All of this goes to corroborate and substantiate the biblical teaching about the unity of the entire race.

Then there is the evidence provided from the study of languages—philology. This evidence is most important. Did you know that most of the so-called Indo-Germanic languages can be traced to a common primitive tongue? The nearest approach to it that is extant today is ancient Sanskrit, but they all, including English, can be traced back in that way. Not only that. There is very good evidence, it seems, for saying (I am simply passing on to you now the results of what the experts have found) that ancient Egyptian may very well be the connecting link between these Indo-European languages and the Semitic languages. In other words, philologists have been able to trace all [p 159] these languages back to a common source. It is a most fascinating theme. Those of you who know different languages have probably often noticed how practically the same word in French and in Latin, in English, and in the Celtic language, is used for the same thing, and you have got to explain what the common origin is for these words. And it all points back, you see, to the original unity of the race.

Then there is a very powerful argument from what is called the ‘psychology of man’, which means that wherever you find a man, you always find a creature of the same type, of the same kind; he has the same instincts, the same desires. One may be absolutely illiterate and another very sophisticated, but it is amazing to note how similar they are in what they want and in what they like and what they do. So then, it is very important for us, particularly in the light of the biblical teaching about our unity in Adam and our unity in Christ, to hold on to the teaching of the unity of the race.

We consider next the constitutional nature of man, and the great question here is whether ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are one or two. There are two main theories: first, *dichotomy*—man as body and soul; second, *trichotomy*, that man has a body which is material, a soul, which is the principle of animal life, and a spirit which is the God-related, rational and immortal element.

The arguments for dichotomy are, first: the terms for ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are used interchangeably in Scripture.

Second, the words ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ are both applied to animals. In the book of Ecclesiastes we read, ‘Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?’ (Eccles. 3:21). The apostle John wrote, ‘And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea’ (Rev. 16:3).

Third, in the book of Revelation the disembodied dead are referred to as ‘souls’, not ‘spirits’. Revelation 6:9 talks of ‘the souls of them that were slain’ which were under the altar, and, in the famous passage about the millennium in Revelation 20:4, we read of ‘the souls of them that were beheaded’ reigning with Christ.

Fourth, you find also that the very highest exercises of religion and of worship are ascribed to the soul rather than to the spirit: ‘What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ (Mark 8:36). ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength’ (Mark 12:30). The part that is engaged in worship and in [p 160] relationship to God is not referred to as spirit but as soul. Then you remember how Mary in her song says, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord ...’ (Luke 1:46). In Hebrews 6:19 you have, ‘Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.’ In James 1:21 we read about ‘the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls’, not spirits; and in the same way you will find that death is sometimes described in the Scriptures as giving up the ‘soul’, and sometimes as giving up the ‘spirit’, or the ‘ghost’.

Fifth, the immaterial element of the dead is sometimes described as soul and sometimes as spirit. Take, for instance, those two passages in Revelation to which I have referred; they describe the immaterial element as ‘the soul’; but in Hebrews 12:23 we read about ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’.

So there is difficulty about this. Man is described in Matthew 10:28 as body and soul, but in other places as body and spirit (Eccles. 12:7; 1 Cor. 5:3–5). In other words, it does seem clear from the Scripture

that the two terms are frequently interchangeable, and the conclusion we draw from that is that man seems to be two elements only: body, and soul (or spirit).

‘Yes,’ says someone, ‘but what about 1 Thessalonians 5:23?’ ‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ And then in Hebrews 4:12 we read, ‘For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.’ ‘Now, then,’ continues the questioner, ‘there it is specifically, twice over—body, soul and spirit; soul and spirit separated and regarded as distinct.’

Well, the reply of those who believe in the dichotomy or the bipartite idea is that two passages like that must obviously be taken in the light of the whole of Scripture, and if the whole gives the impression that there is essentially no difference between the two, then these verses must be explained in a way which does not divide them. So they go on to say that neither of these verses really proves that the two things are distinct substances or essences, any more than Mark 12:30 shows that there is a difference between mind and soul, as, for instance, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’ [p 161] Now people are agreed that the mind and the heart—the thinking and the affections—are a part of the soul, but our Lord Jesus Christ seems to differentiate between them. So it is suggested that the separation of the soul and spirit may have a similar purpose. Thus what is emphasised in the 1 Thessalonians 5 passage is the wholeness of the sanctification: the entire person is to be sanctified and preserved blameless. And in Hebrews 4:12 the emphasis is upon the thoroughness with which we are searched: the Word of God differentiates even between the ‘thoughts and intents’, it goes right down to the very depths.

What, then, do we say about all this? I am afraid that once more I have to say that I cannot decide which of the two groups I belong to. Neither theory can really be proved, but we can say that the Scripture does draw a *distinction* between spirit and soul, even if it does not say that there is a *difference* between them. There may be a distinction without a difference. Let me put it like this: certainly the Scriptures teach us that the spirit is that part of the spiritual or immaterial element in each of us which is related to God, and is capable of receiving the operation of the Spirit of God through His word. Spirit is that which puts us into relationship with God and enables the Spirit of God to act upon us. If there is only one immaterial element, then a part of that immaterial element is called spirit, and it is that which, as it were, links us to God, whereas the soul is the part of the immaterial element which animates the body, which renders us capable of thinking and willing and feeling. It is also the seat of the affections. It is that part of us which links us to the body and enables us, through the body, to communicate with other people.

You may not be satisfied with that explanation, but it is an attempt at a compromise. In other words, you must agree that there is a distinction between spirit and soul, but whether you must press your distinction to the extent of saying that they are two essentially different things is something about which I personally am not convinced. So we might say that man *has* spirit but *is* a soul. You will find that the term ‘soul’ is often used instead of the personal pronoun, and often about the whole personality. You will find that the number of people who went to Canaan, was such and such a number of ‘souls’ (Gen. 12:5), or that the number of ‘souls’ who went down to Egypt was sixty-six (Gen. 46:26), and so on. So I am afraid we cannot arrive at any finality, but, at any rate, it is good for us to notice that the material and the immaterial element together make up the person, and that the immaterial element has this distinction of spirit and of soul.

[p 162] Having said that, let us consider briefly the relationship between body and soul. Again, we have to say that we do not know exactly what this is; we do know, however, that they are organically and vitally related. We know that they act on each other and that they affect each other. The Scriptures teach us these things quite plainly, though they do not tell us what the relationship is in detail. But certain things are clear. I remember once listening to the famous Sir Arthur Keith delivering a lecture, and he said, amid much glee and great applause, that he had dissected many human bodies, but still he had never discovered an organ which he could describe as the soul. To which the reply is, of course, that we start by saying that

the soul is immaterial, that it is not something you expect to find when you have dissected a body. But it is there and it animates the body.

Furthermore, we know that though the soul normally uses the body as the instrument by which it expresses itself and does what it wants to do, it can exist apart from the body, and when the body is buried in the grave the soul goes on and still exists, and can exert itself without the body. So that while it uses the body, it is not a part of it; it is not solely dependent upon it. There is a vital organic relationship between them, but exactly what it is is left for us as a great mystery.

One final question: What is the origin of the soul in each individual? Every person born into this world has a soul, but where does it come from? How are our souls a part of us? Once more, the answer is that we do not know. 'But, if you do not know,' asks someone, 'why are you concerned about it?' The answer to that is that we shall soon be dealing with the doctrine of original sin, and you cannot deal with that without considering something of the origin of the soul. The question we shall be up against is this: How does the sin of Adam affect me? What is my exact relationship to him? We believe that every soul born into the world is born in a fallen condition. How did it fall? When? If we really take these doctrines seriously we cannot avoid these questions. And another reason for considering this question is that we shall be looking at the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and we shall teach that He had a human soul. Where did He get it from? Did He get it from Mary? You see, the question is bound to arise.

Now at this point I shall just give some headings. There are those who believe in the pre-existence of the soul—that we have all existed before and come back into this world. There is no biblical evidence for that view whatsoever, but many people have read Wordsworth, his great *Ode* in particular, and they think:

[p 163]

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home.

Plato taught it, and there is often an admixture of Platonism and philosophy in religion without people realising it.

Then there is another idea, called *traducianism*. This means that the soul, with the body, is propagated by human generation; that the soul of the newborn infant has been derived from its progenitors, from its parents, that as its body is given to it in that way so is its soul. What is there in favour of this theory? Well, here are some of the things that are generally said: first, God breathed into man once only, we are never told that it was repeated, and that from thereon man is told to replenish the earth, and so on.

Second, we are not told that Eve's soul was a special creation or that God breathed into the body that He made out of the side of Adam. We are also told that God ceased from the work of creation after he had created Adam and Eve. There are also some very interesting biblical statements about the descendants being in the 'loins' of their fathers. We are told in Hebrews 7:9–10, for example, that when Abraham was paying the tithes to Melchisedec, Levi being in the 'loins of Abraham' was himself paying the tithes to Melchisedec. That is called the doctrine of seminal identity, and a very fascinating doctrine it is to think out. Then we are told that there are analogies—that you get this kind of thing in the vegetable and animal world—and it is said that it is the only way in which you can truly explain family traits in physical appearance, in characteristics, and in mental faculties.

There are certain objections to this theory. First, the soul seems to be regarded as something material, does it not? It seems to be something that can be divided up into different parts, and you raise the questions: Does the soul come from the father or the mother, or both? And in what state did it exist in the father or mother if it were preexistent there? And, second, there is grave difficulty, again, about the person of our Lord if he derived His soul from man.

Then the other theory with regard to the origin of the soul is what is called *creationism*, which teaches that each individual soul is the immediate creation of God and that we do not get our souls from our parents. Our body comes from our parents, but at some point or other—nobody knows when—whether it is in the earliest beginning of the human foetus or later, when the child becomes viable, or when **[p 164]** it

is born, the soul is put into it. To me there is a very grave objection to this theory. It is this: if the soul is an immediate creation of God, where does its tendency towards sin and evil come from? It means that God must be the author of moral evil.

Or if you say that the body alone comes from the parents and that what accounts for original sin is that God puts this pure soul into a sinful body which is sure to cause the soul to sin, then you make God the indirect author of moral evil and of sin. If God creates each soul separately, where does original sin come in? How do you account for it? You see, the traducian idea is not in difficulties about that; it says that we were all, as it were, in the loins of Adam when he sinned, and we have therefore all inherited our fallen nature directly from him. Creationism, while it is right in its views of the nature of the soul, leaves us in grave difficulties about original sin, and almost seems to teach that God has somehow produced something that is evil, which is unthinkable.

I therefore sum it up like this: when we face a question like that, it is vitally important that we should approach it with humility, with reverence and godly fear. We must be careful not to go beyond what the Scripture tells us—and I believe that at that point we have reached something which we cannot understand or explain. But we can say certain things quite definitely: God does not create anything which is evil—that is certain. God cannot create a sinful soul. We are equally clear from the Scriptures that human depravity is inherited—‘I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me,’ says the psalmist (Ps. 51:5). And we are equally certain that the humanity or the human nature of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was not guilty of sin and was not sinful in any way.

Now I trust I have made my attitude towards this clear. This last matter, and the previous one, are obviously not essential to our salvation. But if we are desirous, as I am sure we all are and as we all ought to be, of understanding, to the fullest possible extent, the doctrines that are clearly and plainly taught in the Scriptures, then we have to raise certain questions, even though we may not be able to give final answers. So I would say in conclusion that we should not spend too much of our time with these problems. Let us not fall into the error of so many philosophers, of wasting a lifetime over them, because we will end where we began. Let us above all be careful of becoming ‘party men’ with regard to these things. When we cannot arrive at finality, let us never belong to any party—if indeed we should ever [p 165] belong to a party about anything. But about these matters, certainly, as I said, let us be humble, and let us be content to go only as far as Scripture takes us; but also let us always be anxious to go as far as Scripture does take us.

What a mystery is man! What a mystery is his being! Here we are in these bodies, and yet we have this immaterial part. We are made by God and we are made for God, and though we may not understand exactly how it all happens, thank God that about the things that are essential to salvation there is absolute clarity. But we thank God who has so endowed us with faculties that we can raise questions, and see their significance, even if we cannot always answer them.

15

The Divine Image in Man

Having looked at man's creation, his constitution and some of the problems arising therefrom, we come now to consider the great question of what is meant by man being created in the image and likeness of God. Our first reason for considering this is Scripture itself—let me give you a number of verses which deal with it.

First are the verses in Genesis 1:26–7: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.'

Next are two verses in Genesis 5—verses 1 and 3: 'This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him ... And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and he begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth.'

Then there is Genesis 9:6 where we read, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.' This is a most important text. The context deals with the question of murder, and ultimately the scriptural teaching about murder is that it destroys the image of God. Whenever, therefore, you consider the question of capital punishment, you should bear that in mind, as it is a most potent argument with regard to it.

Then another important reference is found in James 3:9: 'There with [James is referring here to the tongue—'a little member'] bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.' It is the same idea once more. Two [p 167] other references are clearly very important: Ephesians 4:24, 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness'; and the parallel statement in Colossians 3:10: 'And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.'

Now you may wonder why I gave the quotation from James before giving the ones from Ephesians and Colossians. My reason for doing so is that the last two verses have references to 'the new man'; while the previous quotations all refer to man as he is apart from regeneration, and I shall explain later the significance of drawing that distinction. However, in the light of those scriptural quotations—and there are others which I shall refer to—it is, of course, our duty to face this whole question as to what the Bible means by our being made 'in the image and likeness of God'. We have no right to read the Scriptures without attempting to discover what they are saying. The fact that a subject is difficult is not an excuse for not trying.

But in addition to that, there is another reason that I would commend to you, which compels us to consider this matter, and that is a doctrinal reason. I mean by that that there are other doctrines which of necessity raise this doctrine of the image of God in each man and woman. For instance, the whole doctrine of man himself forces us to consider this doctrine. The great questions today are: What is man? What is the matter with him? What has gone wrong with him? How do you explain life as it is in the world today? That is called *anthropology*, the knowledge and study of man. It is a rapidly developing study, and is obviously most important. So clearly—and this is especially true of those of us who accept the biblical revelation and are Christians—we cannot begin to explain the world and what we are doing in it, unless we are clear about our origin, and our essential nature and being.

Then in addition to that, of course, the doctrine concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ compels us to look at this question of the image of God in man. We assert that He was truly man, but what does that mean? What do we believe about His manhood? What do we assert concerning His human nature? Obviously, therefore, without having some sort of idea of this, we cannot hope to be clear about our *Christology*, our understanding or our knowledge of Christ Himself.

Furthermore, of course, the whole doctrine of salvation raises this problem acutely: What exactly happens in the rebirth? What is the [p 168] difference between an unregenerate and a regenerate person? What is the difference between the regenerate person and Adam? Those are questions which are bound to arise. If we are at all anxious to know what it is that Christ has done for us, and the position in which He has placed us; if we are interested in any sense in what is called 'biblical psychology', then this question of the divine image faces us even as we begin to approach the subject.

Finally, there is one other reason for considering this doctrine, which I would describe as a general reason. The whole biblical revelation, in which God reveals Himself to man in order to reconcile man and to restore him to Himself, obviously proceeds upon the fact that man was so constituted originally as to be capable of becoming the subject of such revelation and redemption. If we believe, as we do, that God has granted us a revelation as to how we can know Him again, and be reconciled to Him, and be redeemed from our sins, and prepared for heaven and for glory, if we believe that this is possible, then we are at once suggesting that there is something in us which renders us capable of that; there is something there, if you like to use the theological term, some 'point of contact' which revelation can address, and which makes each of us susceptible of redemption, renovation and deliverance.

These, then, are the main reasons for considering this great subject. Of course, it has been considered in the Church from the very beginning. There has been much argument concerning this throughout the centuries, especially at the time of the Protestant Reformation, because the Reformed doctrine of the image of God is very different from that of the Roman Catholics; and if you want to be a real controversialist in that respect, I think it is well to concentrate on that particular point. Over and above their practices, it is their doctrine to which we should object most strongly, and this was, therefore, very much in the forefront at the time of the Protestant Reformation, as it has been ever since.

However, I am not going into the history; I should very much enjoy doing so, but I must not, because it does not strictly come under the heading of biblical theology. But the history of this doctrine is extremely fascinating—how some have said that the 'image' means man's body, and that the 'likeness' means his spirit, and so on. But we must leave that, and confine ourselves rather to a positive exposition of what the Scriptures teach. Once more, I must preface this by saying that the subject is a very high and a very difficult one, and, again, [p 169] there are certain respects at which we cannot arrive at finality. But with this, as with the other doctrines we have considered, it is our duty to go as far as we can, and not to be dogmatic when we are not in a position to be so.

So then, there are certain things which can be said, and here is the first. It is generally agreed that *there is no real difference of meaning between 'image' and 'likeness'*. You notice that the two terms were used in Genesis 1:26—'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' If you go through the scriptural references you will find that the terms are used interchangeably, sometimes 'image', sometimes 'likeness', and mean exactly the same thing. This is obviously for the sake of emphasis, and to bring out the greatness of this subject.

And man's greatness is, perhaps, our supreme reason for considering the doctrine at all. I am never tired of pointing out that to me one of the great tragedies in the modern world is man's failure to realise this. That sounds strange in an age when man is worshipping man; yes, but what he worships is totally unworthy of the biblical conception. The real trouble in the world today is that man does not know who he is and what he is; he does not realise his own greatness. For instance, the theory of evolution is an utter insult to man from the standpoint of the biblical account—man is great and glorious and wonderful in the mind and conception of God.

Now this term 'image' or 'likeness', of course, conveys to us the idea of a mirror and a reflection. Paul uses it in that way in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where he says, 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' Charles Wesley's hymn puts it,

Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place.

We all, says Paul, are able to look upon Him, in Christ, without the veil that covered the face of Moses, the veil that still stands between the Jews and the realisation of this. We with 'unveiled', with 'open' face are able to behold, and as we do so, God's image, as it were, is formed upon us, and is reflected back again; and as we go on looking the image becomes more and more glorious. That is the idea of image, so that fundamentally when we talk about being made in the image of God, we mean that God made us in such a way that we are some kind of a reflection of God. We must not be too mechanical in our notions, [p 170] but we cannot get nearer to it than that; that man as made by God was a kind of reflector of something of the divine glory itself. That is the essential idea.

The next principle that I would emphasise is that *this term is used after the fall, as well as before the fall*. That is a very vital point, as we shall see. Take those scriptural quotations and you will find that the bulk of them come after the fall. So the image of God was not entirely lost when Adam and Eve sinned and fell. There have been schools of thought that have taught that. There have been unworthy and inadequate notions of the image which have suggested that when man sinned everything that belonged to the image of God in him disappeared, and in the rebirth what was entirely lost is given back. But these scriptural quotations demonstrate very clearly that the term 'image' is used after the fall as well as before. In other words, when man fell he lost something, he lost an aspect of the image, but he did not lose the entire image; something essential to the image still remains. And that at once suggests that there are certain elements in this image of God which are to be found in each person.

The next point I make is this one—and here we come to my reason for putting the quotation from the epistle of James before the other two. I have a feeling (and I am not alone in this) that *it is somewhat misleading to define the original image of God in man in terms of what we are told about regenerate man*. The quotations from Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 are descriptions of what we become when we are regenerate, when we are saved, when the life of God has come into us. Now I suggest that while those two quotations may tell us something about the image of God in man, it would be very wrong to determine our idea of the image at the beginning, before the fall, in terms of these quotations.

I say that for this reason: I think I can demonstrate to you from the Scriptures that what happened in regeneration is not merely that we are restored to the condition that Adam was in before he fell, but we are advanced beyond that: 'Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (Rom. 5:20). Yes; as Isaac Watts has put it,

In Him [in Christ] the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.

Salvation, redemption, regeneration do not merely put us back where Adam was; we are in a much higher position. So here again, you see, the doctrine of the image is very important from the standpoint of the [p 171] doctrine of salvation, and we must be very careful that we interpret it correctly. So while we will still use those two quotations, they will not determine our exact definition of what is meant by the divine image.

And my last general principle is that clearly *there is a difference between man as he was made at the beginning by God, and the manhood or the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ*. If you take those verses at the beginning of Hebrews 1, you will find this: Christ is the 'express image of his person'. All the effulgence of the glory is in Him. That cannot be said about man. Man is, as it were, a created copy—Christ is the image. He is indeed the very express, essential image of God Himself. That will be important to remember when we come to deal with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next we must go on to say that it seems clear, therefore, that there are two main elements in this idea of God's image in us. Often these two elements have been described as the *natural image* and the *spiritual image*. The great Jonathan Edwards, for instance, said that 'the natural image consists very much in that by which God in His creation distinguished man from the beasts, namely, in those faculties and principles of nature whereby he is capable of moral agency.' That is the natural part of man. The spiritual and moral part, he said, consisted in that moral excellence with which man at the beginning was endowed by God. You see the difference between the natural and spiritual aspects? Let me put it like this: you can say that

the image consists of a man's intellectual and moral nature, and his original moral perfection. His intellectual and moral nature—that is the natural; his original moral perfection—that is the spiritual.

Here it might be well to quote the teaching of John Calvin as he was able to explain perhaps more clearly than anybody else at that time the essential difference between the Reformed and the Roman Catholic views. He puts it like this: 'The seat of the image in man is the soul, though some rays of it shine even in the body.' And when he comes to define the image, he says that it really means man's original integrity, his unity, his uprightness, his straightness. But he says as well that 'the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals'. You see, they are all really saying the same thing. The divine image in man, they are saying in effect, means everything in man as a natural being that differentiates him from the animal. But there is more than that; in addition to that, man had an original righteousness, and that is the spiritual aspect. **[p 172]**

So having given you some definitions in general, let me now come to consider it in a little more detail, because clearly we can divide it up. What is this image of God in which man was made at the beginning? What is this likeness of God? First of all, it obviously refers to the soul or the spirit—our spiritual nature, our spirituality. Or you can use this term as well, as a concept—our 'invisibility'. We look at one another and in one sense we see one another, but in another sense we do not. We, none of us, see the essential self of anybody, nor of ourselves. You have never really seen yourself. I wonder if you have ever thought of that? Try to think of yourself and what you look like; you cannot really do it. That is because our essential being, our personality, is invisible. When you look at another person you are seeing certain manifestations of that person but you are not really seeing the person.

Now man in that sense—let us say it with reverence—is like God. God is invisible—'No man hath seen God at any time' (John 1:18). You remember how, in dealing with the doctrine of God, one of the points we made was that of His invisibility? And that, in a sense, is true also of us; our soul or spirit is invisible. And at the same point we must refer to our immortality. As originally made and created, Adam and Eve were not subject to death. And again, you remember, that was something which we said was true of God, according to the scriptural teaching.

But then, second, we would put what you may call our psychical powers and faculties; the powers and faculties of the soul. You noticed I said 'psychical' and not 'psychic'. I am not interested in psychic phenomena, but very interested in the psychical. It means everything that pertains to, or belongs to, the soul, and these, it is generally agreed, are a part of the divine image. I mean things like this: that we are rational and moral beings; that we have intellect, we can think; that we have a will and can desire; and the intellect and the will have their powers and their propensities. Our capacity to reason and to think, to analyse and to meditate is a reflection of the same thing, in an eternal degree, in God. And it is unique to human beings, you do not find it anywhere else.

We also have self-consciousness. We are conscious of ourselves. Again, we have to predicate that about God. And our self-consciousness, our self-awareness, our inability to get rid of the self—all that is a part, again, of the divine image. And perhaps well worthy of very special emphasis at this point is our capacity for self-contemplation **[p 173]** and analysis; that surely is something that belongs to human beings. Man can contemplate himself, he can examine himself and analyse himself. This is an astounding faculty, and we must all at times have wished we had not got it. But you cannot be a person without it and it is a part of the curse that the fall has brought upon us that we cannot get rid of ourselves, and we cannot stop contemplating and analysing ourselves. Even in a fallen condition we proclaim to ourselves our own original greatness by this very capacity.

The third feature of the divine image we will put in this form: it is intellectual and moral integrity revealing themselves in (to use the words again of the Ephesians and Colossians passages) knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Man was made intellectually and morally in such a way that there was a kind of integrity about him, nothing false, nothing imperfect, nothing wrong. There was a straightness, an uprightness. There was a truth. His nature was one; it was balanced; it was exactly what it was meant to be: moral and intellectual integrity, expressing themselves in 'righteousness and true holiness' (Eph. 4:24).

Next, fourth, I come to something about which there has not always been agreement, and it is the question of the body. Does the body in any way share in this divine image? And for myself, I am prepared to say that it does. In saying that, I am not referring to the material substance of which the body is made, but rather to the body as a fit organ of the soul, the instrument of the soul, the thing through which the soul and the personality express themselves, and therefore, ultimately, the instrument through which we exercise dominion over the lower creation, and especially over the animals. Now this is, of course, the most difficult aspect of all, and we cannot be sure, as I say, but there are many suggestions in the Scriptures that in a sense we have been made like unto God, even in the matter of the body.

‘But,’ says someone, ‘I thought you taught us that God is Spirit and you have emphasised His invisibility.’

Yes, but you remember that Paul tells us that our Lord, before the incarnation, was in the form of God (Phil. 2:6). Also, speaking to the Jews one day, our Lord told them that they had not heard God’s voice at any time, and then went on to say, ‘nor seen his shape’ (John 5:37). There are suggestions here about the form of God, though He is Spirit, about the kind of shape of God.

Furthermore, we are told in Philippians 3 that we await Christ’s coming from heaven who, says the apostle Paul, ‘shall change our vile [p 174] body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body’ (Phil. 3:21)—this spiritual body. Our Lord is in that spiritual body now, and obviously—because He is in glory, and because we, when our bodies are changed and glorified, shall be in glory—then at that point there will be a likeness. We do not know yet what we shall be, says John, but we know this, that when we see Him, ‘we shall be like him’ (1 John 3:2). And I suggest to you that the likeness will include the body—the glorified body, it is true—but that makes me suggest that the original human body bore something of this. So I would suggest that the image partly expresses itself and manifests itself in our physical being.

Then the fifth and last feature of the divine image and one which I want to emphasise is this: the image of God shows itself also in man’s dominion over the earth. There is no doubt at all but that that is a part of the divine image. It is there that man partly reflects God’s lordship and sovereignty over everything. You notice how there is a suggestion of this in Genesis 1:26: ‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.’ The moment the image is mentioned that function is mentioned, so that surely it is a part of the image of God in man that he does exercise this lordship. Consider also Psalm 8 in the same connection: ‘O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies.’ Then the psalmist goes on, ‘When I consider thy heavens ... what is man [in the light of all this] that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels [and some would tell us that the right reading there is, ‘For thou hast made him a little lower than God’], and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ...’ Having this dominion, this control, this rule over creation, is a part of the glory and honour. What God is to the whole universe He has made man, as it were, to creation.

So having looked at it like that in detail, let me gather it up in this way. The essential elements in the image are those which man cannot lose without ceasing to be man; they are those qualities and powers of the human soul that remain always. But there are other elements, which we may call ‘accidental’ elements, which a man can lose and [p 175] still remain man. In other words, when man sinned and fell he did not lose the whole of the image, he retained the essential elements, but he lost the accidental elements. We must be very clear about this. When man fell, he did not cease to be man. His essential manhood remained, and that retains that part of the divine image in which he was originally created.

Therefore it is important that we should emphasise this. We must never confine our idea of the image of God in man merely to man’s original righteousness and holiness. People have often done that, and it has landed them in grievous trouble with regard to other doctrines. They say, you see, that the divine image in man simply meant his original righteousness and holiness; when he fell, therefore, he lost it all. But that is not so. The natural element in the divine image must be emphasised, because, as Scripture has taught us, it

persists after the fall. It was there in Genesis 5; it is there in Genesis 9, and it is there in the third chapter of James. Man, even in sin, retains those elements and aspects of the divine image; they are an essential part of human nature. If he lost those he would no longer be human.

Very well then, we can say this: the essence of the soul endowed with the faculty of knowing and willing—the general congruity and analogy between the nature of God and the nature of man—and man’s dominion over the creatures, survives even the fall, but man’s moral conformity to God was lost at the fall. The rational, the intellectual, and those general elements survive the fall, but after he sinned, his moral conformity to God was lost, as we shall see as we go on to consider the doctrine of the fall.

So, the question which we must ask at this point is this: What was man’s original state if all those things are true? Now there are two main dangers here. One is the danger of exaggeration and of making Adam into a kind of Colossus. The other is the danger of underestimating grievously what he was, and here evolutionists again come in and describe him as some kind of half savage half beast. Both are wrong. What we must say is this: man as he was originally made was clearly connected with the earth, but he was also connected with God.

Second, God made him His representative in the world.

Third, he was obviously intelligent and able to understand. God brought the animals to him and asked him to name them, and it was Adam who gave the names to all these animals and creatures (Gen. 2:19–20). He could differentiate and distinguish; he knew the right [p 176] type and kind of name to give, and they are names that carry meanings and tell us something about the character of each animal. So he was obviously gifted with a high intelligence. We gather also that he was happy. He worked without toil. He exercised mastery over the world. He obtained his sustenance from the vegetable kingdom without toiling for it. And he was clearly in a state of familiarity with the animals.

What was his relationship to God? It was one of filial dependence, the dependence of a child, a son. He gave God implicit obedience, and, most importantly, his communion, his fellowship, his intercourse with God was entirely without fear. What, also, was his spiritual condition? Here is an important subject. Again, there has been much error with regard to this. We are told that when God made everything, man included, ‘God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31). In Ecclesiastes 7:29 we are told that God made man upright. This is not only a reference to his physical frame, but also to his essential moral and spiritual constitution.

Now that means, it seems to me, that there was never any conflict in man at the beginning between his lower and his higher elements, between his physical and his spiritual elements. The Roman Catholics say there was—that from the beginning the body was always a danger to man, and God had to give man an extra gift to safeguard him against being dragged down by his lower nature. That is the Roman Catholic idea of the image. In other words, a kind of capacity for sin was already there before man fell. But that is something which the Scripture does not teach. There was no conflict at all; there was perfect harmony between body and spirit. The conscience surely proves that. Every time our conscience accuses us it is a proof that man was originally sinless. We have a feeling that we should not have sinned, that it was wrong to sin. Yes, that is a memory, a recollection of man’s original, sinless condition.

Another negative is this: we must not think of Adam as just being in a state of innocence. Some people think of him as if he were just a child—though a man, a child in outlook and mentality—and say that he was morally neutral. He was neither good nor bad, they say; he had not sinned, he was nothing, neutral. But the Bible does not teach us that. The Bible teaches us that man was in a state of positive holiness and true righteousness. That is where the quotations from Ephesians and Colossians are important. Salvation must at any rate bring us back to that, and more.

[p 177] So then, you ask, what is the difference between Adam before he fell and man in regeneration and salvation? I suggest to you that the difference is that these things were present in Adam in germ, in embryonic form. They were not fully developed. They were there, and as they were they were perfect. They were perfect in part but not in degree. In other words, man was perfect as far as he had gone, but there was room for development. There was nothing imperfect in him at all. You can have a perfect acorn,

and a perfect oak tree. It is a different perfection, and yet they are connected to each other. The fact that the acorn is not an oak tree does not mean that it is imperfect. No. It is a perfect acorn, and all the potentialities of the perfect oak tree are there in the perfect acorn. Adam and Eve at the beginning was surely like that. The knowledge, the righteousness, and the true holiness were there in germ and in embryo, in perfect form, but they were not yet fully developed. In other words, man was on trial, he was on probation. He was in a preliminary condition, which could lead either to infinitely greater dignity and glory or could terminate in a fall. We know it actually did terminate in a fall, but it could have gone on growing and developing until it was in full bloom and perfect.

So that is how God made man. He put him in that condition in the Garden, and He made a covenant with him. He told him that if he obeyed His laws, then he would go on growing and developing to that final, complete perfection; on the other hand, if he did that which God had prohibited him to do, if he broke God's commandment, he would fall and lose certain blessings.

Very well; at this point we must leave it—man created in the image of God, with these intellectual, moral, rational faculties, yes. But over and above that, this original righteousness and holiness. There he is, placed in the Garden, lord of creation, reflecting something of God even in his form, in his very body, and with these two great possibilities—if he remains in correspondence with God, an everlasting development in his perfection until it becomes absolute; on the other hand, if he rebels and does not go God's way, the possibility of a fall. Thus God made man in His own image and after His own likeness. Such was man at the beginning, and in spite of the fall, in spite of sin, elements of that remain today. That is the tragedy of the world. That should be the greatest impulse and motive to evangelism. In a sense, our first message to man should be to realise who he is, what God made him, and then what he has done to himself and has made himself.

16

The Fall

You will remember that in our last study we ended by looking at man as he was to be found created in the image and likeness of God, and dwelling in Paradise. We considered the character and nature of his being. We examined, as far as is possible, in the light of scriptural teaching, what this image of God meant. We found that man was in correspondence with God, in fellowship with Him, reflecting something of His glory. Happy, carefree, able to live without toil, eating of the fruits of the Garden, he was in a state of bliss. He had righteousness, an uprightness, a moral being and character corresponding to the God with whom he was thus in fellowship.

But now, obviously, when we look at man today, we see something very different, the whole picture is entirely changed. And the question to which we must address ourselves therefore is: What has produced this change? We look at man's present moral and spiritual, and even physical, condition and, I repeat, we see something entirely different. We are confronted by a new series of phenomena with regard to life and death. We see the corruption of human nature, and the whole character of human life in this world, and so, of course, the first question which the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, must always ask is just that: What is the matter? What went wrong? If we talk about a salvation, why is it needed? You cannot escape this whole doctrine of man and of sin.

Now many explanations have been put forward in an attempt to account for the state of man and of the world as we know it at present. I must not keep you with these, although many of them are worthy of careful examination in order to refute them. I try not to do that more than I am bound to because I am anxious to keep to a positive [p 179] exposition of the biblical teaching. And yet it is necessary that we should just refer to these other theories and ideas in passing, if only for this reason—that there are people who sometimes think that if a preacher does not mention a thing, it means he has never heard of it! I would, therefore, like any 'intellectuals' who may be considering these doctrines with us to know that though we do not spend a great deal of time with these things, it is not because we are not aware of them, but that we find it more profitable to be positive rather than negative.

However, having said that, let me just mention one or two. There is a very old theory which goes back to a time even before the Christian era, which says that there are two equally great principles in life: the principle of good and the principle of evil; the technical term for that is *dualism*. Dualism states that good and evil are of the very essence of life, and even that there is a god who controls the evil as well as a god who controls the good. There have been various ramifications of that; you will find these ideas in some other religions, and that is why it is important that we should know of their existence. But we have already dealt with dualism in previous lectures, and have rejected it because not only is there nothing to suggest that teaching in the Bible, it cannot be substantiated from an examination of people or of life.

Another attempted explanation is the theory which works itself out in the theory of evolution—that man is only an animal, and that what we witness in life and the world, therefore, is nothing but a manifestation of certain animal qualities and characteristics. I need not go into this again because in refuting the theory of evolution we have already answered this particular idea.

Then when you come to theories which are not based upon evolution or upon this principle of good and evil, but are prepared to look at man in and of himself, there are again a great variety of explanations. There are those who would say that what the Bible calls evil and sin is just a kind of resistance that is an essential part of human nature, put there by God in order that we might have something to overcome, and that by overcoming it, we might grow. Now that is the great principle of all exercise, is it not? You lift up weights in order to develop your muscles; the resistance of the weight is the thing that develops them.

Then there are other theories which regard sin merely as the absence of some positive qualities, the absence of knowledge, the absence of understanding. It is said that what the Bible calls sin and [p 180] evil are just negative conditions, and that if only men and women had more knowledge and were better

educated and more cultured and better trained they would get rid of all this. It is put like this, for instance: 'You must not say about a man that he is bad; what you should really say is that he is not good'.

Well, you see the kind of theory that has been put forward. There are very many, but they all, more or less, boil down to the ones that we have already considered. I shall have to return to this later when I come to consider the doctrine of sin a little more directly, but I think I have done enough to show that man and woman, face to face with this problem, as with every problem, always do their utmost to avoid the plain and clear teaching of the scriptures; and therefore they invent and imagine these theories which they cannot substantiate in any way whatsoever.

But over and against all that, we are confronted by the biblical doctrine of the fall of man, the biblical explanation of the present state of man and of the world. And in a very interesting way you will find that this biblical idea has penetrated into various other religions, and even into folklore, in a sense confirming the biblical history about the unity of the human race and the fall of man. Wherever men and women have gone, this story, this idea, of the fall, has somehow or other accompanied them, thereby providing very striking evidence for the truth we are about to consider.

Now the biblical account of man's present condition is found in that great chapter at the beginning of the Bible—the third chapter of Genesis. What is this? Is it history or is it not? Is what we read there the plain, unvarnished, historical fact, or is it not? This is obviously a crucial question, and therefore you have people suggesting that it is not history but allegory, that it is not really true and did not happen like that. They say it is a wonderful story which is designed to give us in a pictorial manner an account of man's gradual change. That is one way in which people have tried to avoid the clear statement which is made here.

Then there are others who say that it is not so much an allegory as a myth. A myth, they say, is a story which expresses religious truth. It is not actual history, but the ideas it contains, they say, are true.

Human ingenuity and imagination has exercised itself very much throughout the centuries. People say that the serpent was not really an animal. It was just a kind of symbol, a symbol that, according to some, is meant to represent covetousness. But no, say others, the [p 181] serpent is a symbol of sexual desire. Others say that it is a symbol of erring and straying reason, and still others that it is a symbol, a figure, to represent Satan himself. In other words, they do not believe in the literal serpent. But even those who accept the serpent have their difficulty—they struggle with the question as to whether the serpent ever spoke or not.

Now I mention all these difficulties, these objections that have been put forward, in order that we may consider them all together. What do we say about these matters? Well, the obvious thing is that this whole chapter is given to us as history; there is no suggestion of allegory. It offers itself to us as plain, unvarnished fact, and if you begin to say that it is not history, or that parts of it are not history, you will find yourself in an utterly contradictory position. For instance, we are told in verses 14 and 15 about the punishment that followed Adam and Eve's sin, and if you do not accept that, then you have to shed a great deal of the Bible because the consequences that followed, and which are described here, have continued ever since, and the entire teaching of the Bible with regard to man is dependent upon that being fact. So if a part of Genesis 3 is fact, why not the whole? And therefore it seems to me that the only possible thing to do is to accept it all as fact.

Personally I am in no difficulty at all about that. The moment you believe in God, the moment you believe in the devil, then you are entitled to expect miracles, you are entitled to expect things that are supernatural. The Bible says that, and it is the ultimate answer to people who are in trouble over miracles. The moment you believe in God as the Bible depicts Him, you really should not be in any trouble about miracles, and it is exactly the same over this question of the serpent speaking. If you believe in the devil as the Bible depicts him, then you should have no difficulty in believing that he has power even to make a serpent speak. So all this difficulty not only contradicts what we have already agreed about, but, it seems to me, is quite unnecessary.

But over and above that, I want to call your attention to certain other Scriptures which clearly teach that what we have in the third chapter of Genesis is literal history. Take, for instance, Job 31:33: 'If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom'—this supports the historicity of Genesis 3. Then take Hosea 6:7. In the *Authorised Version* it reads like this: 'But they like men have transgressed the covenant,' and it is generally agreed, and you [p 182] will find it in both the *Revised* and the *Revised Standard Versions*, that it should read like this: 'But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant.'

But there is a still more important verse in 2 Corinthians 11:3 where the apostle writes, 'I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' You notice what Paul says: 'as the serpent beguiled Eve'—he treats Genesis 3 as historical fact. The apostle claimed to be divinely inspired and what he wrote was therefore without error, yet that is what he said. And you have still another reference in 1 Timothy 2:14 where the apostle deals with the question of women teaching in the Church, and things of that kind. This is what he says, 'And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.'

In other words, it always seems to me to be very pathetic when people, in the interests of some supposed scientific knowledge, feel that they must dismiss the historicity of Genesis 3 and say that it is only a myth, or something like that, or that parts of it are true and parts are not, and then imagine that they have solved their problems! But if you do that, you are creating tremendous problems for yourself. What do you make of these statements in other parts of Scripture? As we have already seen, if you begin to play fast and loose with the scriptural teaching at any one point, you will find that your whole system will be shaken. And therefore, though—again one has to say it—there are certain things one does not understand, yet for myself I have no difficulty whatsoever in accepting this third chapter of Genesis as being literal, actual history.

Very well then, accepting it like that, let us examine Genesis 3 and see what it tells us. The first thing is that evil, sin and temptation came from the outside; they came from Satan, using the serpent. The thing I am anxious to emphasise is that there was nothing in man himself that produced that fall into sin. There was no physical cause. There was nothing sensual in man that brought it about. This temptation came to man entirely from the outside, and he had perfect free will to decide what to do with it. That is a most important point which is of the very essence of the biblical teaching. We must get rid of all the ideas that say that something in the body, in the human frame, in a man's flesh, some form of natural desire, dragged man down.

As we saw, the Roman Catholic doctrine about the image does suggest that very strongly. Its view is that man always had a kind of [p 183] struggle, that the animal, the bodily part of man, always had a tendency to pull him down, and that God gave him the extra gift of original righteousness in order to enable him to keep at bay this other part that was always tending to pull him down. The Bible says nothing of the kind. Man was perfectly balanced; there was nothing within him at all to drag him down. Sin came entirely from the outside, and that is vital to our doctrine, as we shall see, time and time again.

What, then, were the steps to the fall? I am now simply reminding you of what we are told in Genesis 3. The first thing was that the serpent attacked the woman, not the man. You see the significance of that in some of the quotations I have already given you. We shall not go into that now; we shall come to it some other time perhaps. But the Bible emphasises it, not only in this chapter but elsewhere, and this is what happened. The woman began to listen to the slanders of the devil against God; she began to doubt God's word and God's love. Then, you remember, she began to look at the thing which God had prohibited, and, having looked at the fruit, and having seen that it was good to eat, she began to desire it and to lust after it, and that in turn led her to a definite act of disobedience. She deliberately broke God's commandment and did the thing that God had told her and Adam not to do. Then, Adam, on being offered the fruit, took it from her and ate with her. So they were both in the transgression—the woman first, followed by the man.

So the question that arises is: What made them do this? Ultimately, of course, we cannot answer that question. Nobody has been able to answer it. The most we can say is that man's moral constitution, his being made in the image of God, and his possession of free will, at any rate held the possibility of his

disobedience, but beyond that we cannot get, even as we could not arrive at any ultimate explanation of how Satan himself originally fell. You notice that ambition came into it, and ambition taking on a particular form: a desire for a short road to divine knowledge.

Now I am most anxious to emphasise that, because I am never tired of saying that the ultimate trouble with most false doctrines, what the Bible calls evil and sin is just a kind of resistance that of sanctification, is that they are trying to arrive at something by means of a short cut, and you will see that that was the original cause of man's downfall. God had got His programme for Adam and Eve, which was one of development in fellowship with Him, and ultimately they were going to arrive at this [p 184] position; but the devil came along and said, 'You need not go that way, you need not take all that time about it. Just do what I am telling you and you will be there at once'—a short cut. The short cut always appeals to us. We always have a feeling that God's way is too slow and too laborious, and you will find that most cults are based upon this idea of offering you something by an easy and quick method—always much more rapid, simple and direct than the biblical method.

And the second thing, of course, was this—insinuated doubts of God's love. What was the result of this? Well—I am still talking, not of the actual consequences but of the result in their minds—it led to a transgression of God's law, and to a departure from God. Perhaps we can sum it up like this: it was a refusal on the part of Adam and Eve to submit themselves to the will of God, and to have God determine the course of their life; it was their determination to settle this for themselves. The essence of what took place was that they pushed on one side God's plan, God's purpose, and substituted their own idea and their own method. The famous Professor Emil Brunner has quite an interesting analysis, a psychological analysis, if you like, of what took place. He puts it like this: there were three elements—the desire for the fruit, then the whispered doubt about God, which seared and inflamed the desire still more, and then, finally, ambition turned the scale. First there was the original desire, then the serpent played on that by this whispered doubt, but still there was hesitation. Then ambition came in—'You can be like God, you will know everything ... if only ...' And the ambition proved too much. It tilted the balance and they fell.

The one other point to which I would like to call your attention is the extraordinary correspondence between what is described here in Genesis 3, and what John tells us in his first epistle. In chapter 2:15 he says, 'Love not the world'. Then he divides up this love into 'the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life'. In Genesis 3 there is the desire, and then seeing that the fruit was good to look upon—the lust of the eye; then this pride of life, the ambition to be great, to be marvellous and wonderful. The same elements! Indeed, as I have already suggested, they reappear throughout the Bible and are worked out everywhere.

But to all that, I would add two special points, and here they are: sin is only possible, and was only possible to man at the beginning, because he had a free spiritual personality. Sin is not possible for an animal. In the most extraordinary way, man's being made in the [p 185] image of God made sin possible for him, because of his free personality, because of his free will. The very fact that Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of God, in and of itself, exposed them to this possibility. No more than that, but it certainly did that.

Then the second point I would like to put for your consideration is this one: we know, and we have discovered from the Scriptures, that angels have also fallen, but you notice we are never told anywhere in the Bible that the angels, the fallen angels, are going to be redeemed. Salvation is only for man, and you may have asked yourself why. The angels fell as man fell. Why should there not be salvation for angels as well as for man? And I myself am very ready to accept the explanation which has been put forward, which is that in the case of man, the temptation and the fall came, as I have just been reminding you, from the outside. It is not an excuse, and yet it does make a difference. When Satan fell, he fell because of something within; the temptation did not come to Satan outside himself. What it was we do not know, but there is at any rate that difference. And is it possible, I wonder, that God in His infinite grace and kindness, has drawn that distinction? Because man was subjected to subtlety, to beguiling, to the malign angelic power of this fallen angel, is it possible that God had mercy and compassion and pity, and provided a way of salvation, which He did not provide in the case of the angels? I leave it for your consideration.

Let us come now to a practical point: What were the results of this disobedience, this transgression of God's law and commandment? They are described here very clearly. The first thing we are told is that Adam and Eve became conscious of their flesh (Gen. 3:7). This is an extraordinary thing. Man, as he was made originally by God, was quite unselfconscious about his body (Gen. 2:25). The man and the woman were naked, and that was no trouble to them at all. But the moment they sinned, the moment they fell, shame developed and they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves.

The Scripture emphasises that because it clearly has great significance. We must be careful as we note it, because there are two dangers confronting us. There is the danger of making too much of the sex element in sin, and there is the danger of making too little, but the Scripture specifically calls our attention to it. The first thing that happened was that Adam's and Eve's bodies became a problem to them, and have been a problem ever since. One difference between a man and an animal is that an animal is not conscious of its own body in the way [p 186] that man is. It is of the very essence of man's sinful condition that the body which was given to him by God, and which in a sense is a reflection of God's own glory, the form of God, as we have seen, has become a problem. One of his greatest problems is that there is this sense of shame in connection with it.

Then the next thing which is emphasised is their sense of guilt. The moment they ate the fruit, they knew they had done something wrong. They were immediately condemned within themselves and became guilty. The next thing is that they began to develop a fear of God, and instead of running to God when they heard His voice in the cool of the evening, they ran away (Gen. 3:8). Before that, to hear the voice of God had been the highest bliss possible. They had been in perfect correspondence. They had no craven fear of God, they ran to Him. Now they ran away from Him. And their fear of God persisted. Another way of putting that is to say that they lost their fellowship with God, and their sense of fellowship with God—the thing they had glorified in above everything.

The next thing that is emphasised is that they clearly underwent a spiritual death. They were in an entirely new condition, and in that state, we are told, they were driven out of Paradise, out of the Garden, and were not allowed to return there by their own volition. You remember the flaming sword that guarded the way to the tree of life and barred their entry into the Garden (Gen. 3:24)?

But in addition to that, you find that they were in an entirely new relationship to nature. There had been no toiling before but now Adam had to toil, he had to sweat; it was by the sweat of his brow that he had to earn his bread. Difficulties and obstacles would rise in nature; he would have to tame nature and overcome the thorns and the briars and all the other problems (Gen. 3:17–19).

Moreover, we find that Adam and Eve had clearly undergone a perversion in their moral nature; you see that at once in the story of Cain that follows. There was a perversion in Cain's very nature which he inherited from his parents.

And the last consequence that is noted here is that of physical death. Now we just touched upon this on a previous occasion. Let me put it like this: there was no need for man to die. If he had obeyed God, and had continued living his life in correspondence with God, he would never have undergone physical death. It was possible for him, therefore, not to die. But the result of the fall was that now it was not possible for him not to die. It is put like this in Latin: the original [p 187] condition was *posse non mori* now it is *non posse non mori*. Now he must die. It is impossible for him not to unless there is some special intervention. The Scripture puts that in this way: Adam is told that he must return to the dust from which he came (Gen. 3:19); that would not have happened but for this sin. And that is confirmed in Romans 5:12: 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ...' Death came in that way by sin and as the result of sin.

Now those are the things that immediately resulted, but, again, there are certain things that we must be very careful to observe. You notice that although all that happened to Adam and Eve, they did not immediately lose all their intellectual power—indeed, man has never subsequently lost his intellectual power. He retained that. Go on and read the next chapters in Genesis, and you will find how he became musical, built cities, developed a great civilisation. He did not lose his intellectual power, nor immediately die physically. Indeed, there does not seem to have been any immediate physical change.

In other words, the effects of sin were delayed both physically and mentally. There was subsequently a very great decline in man's intellectual, moral and all his other faculties, as we see described in Genesis 6; but it did not happen at once. Sometimes people think that the moment Adam sinned and fell, he fell as far as man can go. But he did not. He fell in the essential way I have described, but there was a decline and a degradation consequent upon it. He did not die physically at once; he died some time later. And the same delayed result is true of his mental and moral qualities.

So then, let me sum up the results in this way: certain legal results happened at once. Man immediately came under condemnation and was punished by God, whereas formerly he had only been blessed. Spiritually, he immediately fell from his original righteousness. There was not a second's delay. The moment he sinned, he lost that uprightness, that correspondence with the moral character of God. And, equally, he was separated from God at once. His fear came in, and the various other things of which I have reminded you. But the physical consequences followed more slowly. In other words, I am emphasising that when man fell, he did not cease to be man; he did not lose any of his essential qualities or attributes. His intellect, his power of self-analysis, his understanding, his will, all these things remained. But he lost his original righteousness and his fellowship with God. He became fearful, he hid himself, he became ashamed, 'self-conscious' in [p 188] a bad sense—he did not know what to do with himself.

Such is man as the result of the fall. What can we say about him? Well, the best description I have ever read or heard was made by an old Puritan, John Howe. He said that man, as the result of the fall, reminded him of some of these great buildings which you see in London, and in various distant countries. Once there was some great palace which has now fallen to ruins, and there is a sign outside which says, 'Centuries ago, such and such a king once dwelt here'. Now, as a result of the fall, it is written over man, 'Here God once dwelt'.

We have been considering one of the most profound and most awful truths that men and women can ever face. That is why all people, and that is why the world, are as they are today. From that great beginning to this—'Here God once dwelt'. What a terrible, what an awful, what a calamitous thing is sin.

17

Adam's Posterity and Original Sin

In the last lecture, we began our consideration of the doctrine of the fall of man. We looked at the modern world and we saw that there is a very great difference between the picture we see there and the picture that we considered earlier when we looked at man as created by God in His own image and likeness and set in the Garden of Eden, in Paradise. And we considered together the account which is given in the third chapter of Genesis of what produced the difference—the fall of man, the first sin. We went on to trace some of the immediate consequences, some of the things that happened at once in the case of Adam and Eve; but we did not quite finish our consideration of these consequences. There were certain other consequences that followed immediately. There was, for instance, the curse that was pronounced upon the serpent. You find that in Genesis 3:14–15:

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

We do not stay with that, but to make our record complete, it is right to notice that that was a direct and immediate consequence of the sin and the fall of man.

Then, you will remember, certain consequences follow in the case of woman. These are described in verse 16: 'Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and [p 190] he shall rule over thee.' That is a most important statement, obviously, and one which is very significant. It is something which has been true ever since then and it is important for us to realise the significance of that fact. Birth was never originally meant to be as it is. It is one of the consequences of the sin and the fall of man.

And the other immediate consequence was that the ground was cursed. You will find that in verses 17 and 18: 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.' And then the passage goes on to say something which we considered earlier: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' Because of man's fall, the very earth was cursed and thorns and briars came into being, increasing man's toil and effort, confronting him with a perpetual problem. The earth is constantly tending to return to a wilderness condition. If you cease to cultivate ground, it very soon reverts in that way. Now all that is a consequence of the fall. The apostle Paul takes up this very important point: 'The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope' (Rom. 8:20). There we are reminded of this vital fact in connection with the whole life of the world. This curse that follows the fall of man has affected creation, and creation is not today as it was at the beginning, nor as it will be again when evil and sin are removed out of the world.

Those, then, were the immediate consequences of the fall. But now we come on to consider another vital aspect of this great doctrine. We have to consider the effect of sin and the fall upon Adam's posterity—not now upon Adam himself, but upon all who have come out of him. The best way, perhaps, of approaching this subject is, again, to put it like this: we are face to face with the fact of the universality of sin. Now this is something that is agreed upon by all. They do not all call it sin; some are not willing to call it that. But in various ways all people, whether they are Christians or not, have to admit that there is something wrong with man everywhere, wherever you find him. It does not matter how primitive he may be, whether he is civilised or uncivilised. Something in man is clearly lacking, there is something which causes misery and unhappiness. The Bible calls that, and so do we, therefore, the universality of sin.

Now this is something which we have to explain. It behoves anybody who is interested in the world and in man to explain this fact, this phenomenon. Earlier, I mentioned in passing that there are those [p 191] who have their explanations. The most popular of all, I suppose, is the one that bases its case upon the theory of evolution, and would say that man is imperfect because he is not yet fully developed. He has

just come out of the backwoods. He has not yet sloughed off all the relics and the vestiges of his bestial past. It is just his immaturity. (We have already considered this view, and given our answer.) Others say the cause is lack of knowledge, yet others, lack of good economic and social conditions, and so on. Many reasons are put forward and we have no time to stay with them and to refute them. We can simply say that they are all inadequate. They are contradictory and all of them are clearly too superficial to explain the problem by which we are confronted.

Now this fact of the universality of sin is asserted throughout the Bible. To illustrate this, let me simply select certain well-known passages more or less at random. Take the great statement in Isaiah 53:6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' All of us. But in many ways, of course, the classic statement of this doctrine is the one in Romans 3. The apostle goes on repeating it: 'There is none righteous, no, not one' (v. 10). '... all the world may become guilty' (v. 19). 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (v. 23). There is no exception—Jew and Gentile, Barbarian and Greek. It does not matter, the whole world, man in his totality lies guilty before God. It is a vital doctrine, essential for a true understanding of the biblical doctrine of salvation. James says exactly the same thing: 'For in many things we offend all' (Jas. 3:2). Again, it is universal. John in his first epistle says it twice over in the first chapter: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us' (1 John 1:8, 10).

There, then, are some typical biblical statements and we sum it up by saying that the Bible asserts that the entire world is guilty of sin. But the Bible goes further and says that sin has not only affected all men and women, but has also affected their entire nature, that every part of their being is involved—body, soul and spirit.

And, of course, the question that arises at once is: How has this come to pass? But before we take that up, it may be a good thing at this point to be clear in our minds as to what exactly we mean by sin. What is the character of sin? What is sin as the term is used and taught in the Scripture itself? Well, let us summarise it in this way: first of all, the Bible teaches clearly that *sin is a special kind of evil*. [p 192]

Now you can have evil which, in a sense, is not sin. Evil can be something general, something physical perhaps—calamities and things like that. That is a manifestation of evil but not of necessity of sin. The difference between them is that sin is moral or ethical evil; not evil in general, but a particular kind of evil.

Now the Bible has quite a number of terms to describe sin. A word that it uses very frequently means 'missing the mark' or deviating from the right way. Another word means an absence of integrity, of being true and whole, a want of rectitude, a departure from the appointed pathway. It is a most important distinction. Yet another word carries the meaning of a revolt, a rebellion, a refusal to subject ourselves to rightful authority. It means a positive transgression of law and a deliberate breaking of a covenant. Now it is very important that we should always realise that sin includes all these various things and others also.

Another biblical word translated as 'sin' means 'guilt', and that is an important consideration. Another term means unfaithfulness and even treason: it is not merely that we are unfaithful but that we are guilty of treason. Another word, which is often used in Scripture to cover this idea of sin, is 'vanity' or emptiness, futility. Peter talks about our 'vain conversation' inherited by tradition from our fathers (1 Pet. 1:18). Paul, in Ephesians 4, writes of doing things in the vanity of our minds (v. 17)—vanity is a very common biblical conception of sin. But then, finally, we are told that sin means a perversion or a distortion of nature—something that has been taken and twisted and perverted. Those, then, are some of the words that are used in the Scriptures to cover this idea of moral and ethical evil.

Now the second thing that the Bible teaches about *sin is that sin has an absolute character*. The Bible always puts up good and evil as entire antitheses. It does not know anything at all in between them. In the Bible, a thing is either black or white, there is never a grey. There is no communion between light and darkness, good and evil, God and Belial. The quality of sin is an absolute quality, it is actually, positively bad. Sin is not merely the absence of good, it is a positive something and it has a clearly defined character. There is no mean between two opposites, said Aristotle, and that can be applied here. There is no gradual shading from evil to good. A thing is either good or it is evil.

The third thing that the Bible stresses is that *sin is always something that is directly related to God and His will and His law*. The Bible [p 193] always defines sin in terms of our relationship to God. That is where the biblical concept of sin must be differentiated so sharply from moral ideas which do not derive from the Bible. God is always involved and what makes sin sin is that it is a wrong relationship to God. It is men and women in a condition in which they do not love God and do not live entirely for God's glory and honour.

The fourth biblical emphasis is that *sin is something that is in the heart of men and women, not something on the surface of their life, but right down in the very depths*. It is out of the heart that 'proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries' and so on (Matt. 15:19). And the heart in the Bible does not merely mean the seat of my affections, it is not merely something on the surface of my life, it is not merely the way in which I manifest my personality, but it is the very centre or root of my personality. Now sin is resident there, says the Bible.

Another way of saying that is, fifthly, that *sin does not consist of actions only but essentially it is a condition*. Now there are those who have defined sin only in terms of actions, and they have forgotten that it is a condition before it manifests itself in acts. In other words, sin can be thought of in terms of layers: first of all we are in a sinful state and condition, and because of that we tend to develop the sinful habits of which we are so constantly guilty. Then, because we are creatures of sinful habits, we indulge in deeds or in particular acts of sin. So it is superficial and quite unbiblical to think of sin only in terms of particular actions.

And, lastly, the Bible always includes in its descriptions and definitions the fact that *sin is guilt and pollution*. Again, the pollution is a state, the condition, but guilt is a part of sin and according to the Scriptures guilt is sinful in and of itself. One of the best comprehensive definitions of sin I have ever encountered is this: sin is lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in state, disposition, or act. That is a summing up of it all. So the great questions are: Why are we all guilty of sin? How have we become guilty of sin? What accounts for the universality of sin? There are, of course, many who think that this can be explained in various ways—a point we have already touched upon. The Bible tells us that it is all due to the sin of Adam, that all this has resulted directly as a consequence of that original sin which we have been considering together. But there are those who do not accept that. They say that we are all born into the world in a kind of neutral condition, but that we immediately see the bad example that is set by others and we imitate it and thereby sin.[p 194]

But that is a denial of the biblical doctrine of original sin. That does not connect sin directly with Adam but says that Adam left a bad example which was followed by others and this process of imitation has continued ever since. But we must not think of sin like that if we want to be biblical. Neither must we think of it merely in terms of some kind of inability or disability. No, the Bible connects sin directly with that first sin of Adam.

Now, if that is so, the question arises as to how that sin of Adam has affected the whole of his posterity. And here there have been two main explanations which we must of necessity consider. The first, which is generally called *the realistic theory*, is that sin is universal because the whole of human nature was in Adam. Entire humanity was resident in him. Therefore, it argues, when Adam sinned and fell, the whole human nature fell with him. But not only that, it all fell in Adam at that one moment.

Now you will remember that when we were trying to look at the character or the nature of the soul, we had to ask whether the soul is something that passes from parents to children in a kind of semiphysical manner or whether each soul is a special creation of God. This realistic theory holds to the view that the soul is something that is inherited from our parents and, you remember, it introduces the argument which we describe as the argument of *seminal identity*. In Hebrews 7:9–10 we are told that Levi, who was yet unborn, paid tithes to Melchisedec in Abraham. Abraham, you remember, paid tithes to Melchisedec. Yes, says the author of Hebrews, and when Abraham paid those tithes, Levi ('who was in the loins of his father') was therefore paying the tithe himself. That is the theory of seminal identity. Now the realistic theory of original sin makes use of that argument. It says that the whole of mankind, all of us, were in the loins of Adam when he sinned and because we were in the loins of Adam, as Levi paid tithes in the loins of

Abraham, so all of us sinned when Adam sinned his original sin at the beginning. That is the biblical basis for this particular view as to how sin has become universal.

Now there are certain difficulties about this theory. One immediate difficulty is that it does, of course, as I pointed out in the previous discussion, tend to materialise the soul. It almost of necessity must regard the soul as something material which somehow or another can pass physically from parents to children. That is the argument that has generally been brought against it and up to a point I admit the [p 195] cogency of that argument, and yet it does not seem to me to be a conclusive objection.

There is another difficulty. If this theory of seminal identity is true and we have all sinned in Adam because the whole of human nature was in him, then why does the Bible teach as clearly as it does that we are only responsible for Adam's first sin? Why are we not responsible for all his sins? Furthermore, why are we not responsible for all the sins of all the children of Adam and of all the people who have come out of Adam ever since and of all our forefathers right down until we were born? The Bible does not say that we are responsible for all those sins. Its teaching is that we are responsible for this one sin of Adam that produced the fall. But according to that theory, in a sense—and I admit that this argument is a powerful one—the Bible really should teach that we are responsible for all the sins of all our ancestors.

And the other difficulty with regard to the theory is that it does present a certain problem about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If human nature is something that is divisible like this and is derived by a physical process from parent to child, does it not follow, almost of necessity, that the human nature that our Lord received was therefore sinful? If we believe in this common unit of human nature in Adam which has been divided up since, it is hard to see how you can avoid that difficulty.

The second theory as to how Adam's sin has affected his posterity tells us that we have all inherited this sin and that sin has become universal because Adam was not only the natural head of the human race, but that God made a covenant with him and appointed him as the representative of the human race. It says that God made man and said in effect, 'Now, you are going to represent the whole of humanity, and I will make a covenant with you. If you do what I tell you I will bless you and you will grow and develop and eventually you will reach full maturity. But on the other hand, if you fail, not only will you fail, but all who come out of you and all whom you represent will fail in the same way.' This is called the *covenant theory*. It says that Adam was a kind of federal representative of the entire human race, that God appointed him as such and that, therefore, anything that Adam did had consequences for all who came out of him. For instance, we send a man to parliament to represent us and when a member of parliament votes he not only votes for himself, he votes for us—his constituents, the people whom he represents. He is our representative in parliament.[p 196]

Or take another illustration. An ambassador represents a whole country and if he should be guilty of some error, the whole country will bear the consequences. If he should blunder and the country go to war, though we did not agree with what he did, we all suffer. He was our representative and he acted for us. Now that is the covenant idea which says that Adam was the federal representative of the entire human race and for that reason his sin was imputed to all of us and we all suffer the consequences.

Now there are certain advantages about this second theory. One is that it does explain very clearly why only the first sin of Adam is imputed to us. There is no need to impute any further sin because it was that one sin that made Adam lose his position. That one sin alone was sufficient. This theory also avoids the difficulty with regard to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ because the Scripture teaches us, as we shall see, that the Lord Jesus Christ was not a human person. He is a divine-human person. There is something unique in Him. He is not one in series with all the rest.

Well, again, if you are interested in my personal opinion, I must admit that I find it very difficult to be entirely on the one side or the other. There is a great deal, as I said before, about the doctrine of seminal identity which appeals to me. We cannot avoid that explicit statement in Hebrews 7:10, and it does seem to me that if it is a fair argument there, it is a fair argument here. At the same time, I admit that there are those great difficulties about that doctrine of seminal identity to which I have already referred and there are aspects about this second idea of Adam as our federal representative which greatly appeal to me. I dislike compromise but I do not quite see why, in a sense, we cannot adopt both views.

At any rate, whichever of the theories is true, or if both are true, the fact is, according to the Bible, that it is from Adam directly and from that first sin of Adam, that universal sin has come. Now the way in which this is generally described is this: it is called the *doctrine of original sin*. Now what do we mean by this? First of all, let us get rid of certain very common misunderstandings of this doctrine and especially misunderstandings of the meaning of this word 'original'. It does not mean, and must never be allowed to mean, that sin belonged to the original constitution of human beings. It specifically did not and we were at great pains earlier to emphasise that. It does not mean that sin is due to something that was originally a defect in man's constitution.[p 197]

What it does mean, first of all, is that sin is derived from the original root of the human race—Adam—that all sin has come out of Adam. Or, to put it negatively, it asserts that sin does not originate from our imitation of the examples of others who have gone before us or whom we see, but that it is something that now inheres in human nature from birth, that we are all born in this condition. It has been derived in that way from the original root and therefore we are born in sin, 'shapen in iniquity' (Ps. 51:5).

And the other thing which we must emphasise about it is that it is something which is the inward root of all the sins that we actually commit and which defile us. It is original in the sense that it comes, as we have seen, right out from the centre of our being and our personality.

But we must go on to point out that there are two parts to original sin. The first is *original guilt*. The second is *original pollution*. According to the Scriptures we have inherited those two things from Adam and from his sin, and I want to emphasise this very carefully because you will find that there are many people who believe in original pollution but who reject the doctrine of original guilt. 'Yes,' they say, 'it's quite true to say that we have inherited this pollution from Adam,' but they say that they regard it as unjust and unrighteous, and impossible to reconcile with the love of God, to say that we are actually guilty of Adam's sin, that we have inherited guilt from him as well as pollution. But this, as I want to show you, is the biblical doctrine. It asserts that we have been born under the penalty of the law and of justice and that we deserve this penalty and punishment, that we are actually guilty of Adam's transgression.

Now people do not like this. They say that we are not guilty until we have done something wrong, that we have been born with this inherited inability or disability, this bias even, towards wrong but that, they say, is not guilt. The moment you have done something, then you are guilty, but not until then. Or some people, going a little further and becoming a little more biblical, say, 'Yes, we are guilty, but what we are guilty of is our polluted natures. We are not guilty of the actual transgression of Adam, but because we've inherited a polluted nature from him we're in a guilty condition, because to be polluted is to be guilty.' Now the Bible, I would assert, does not teach either of these views. It teaches, rather, that we are actually guilty of the sin that was committed by Adam.

Now the great, classic passage on this is Romans 5:12-19:[p 198]

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses [when the law was given], even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

How anybody can dispute or deny that passes my comprehension! It is so clear and the apostle goes on repeating it. Great teacher as he was, he repeats himself and repeats it and repeats it because he knew that men and women in sin are natural philosophers and would not like the doctrine, and would object to it and would try to argue against it.

But let me put the argument to you like this. You notice that in this paragraph the apostle is drawing a parallel and what he is saying is really a further exposition and explanation of what he has been saying in the first ten verses of this great chapter. He is magnifying the grace of God in Christ. He is showing how we owe everything to Christ, everything is given freely by His grace and we are justified by Him and by Him alone. So this is Paul's argument: How are we justified? Well, like this: without doing anything at all we are justified because God imputes to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. His action, not mine at all, is imputed to me, and you notice the way in which Paul brings that out? He says: I've got a perfect illustration here. You know that when Adam committed that one sin, though we had not committed it, it was imputed to us all. In exactly the same way, this action of Christ is imputed to us, though we have done nothing, and we are justified by it.

But, you notice, Paul goes into particulars. He says here, 'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and [p 199] so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' He says, in effect: I can prove this to you. For until the law came, which was given to Moses, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no law.

'Well then,' you may ask, 'if sin isn't imputed how was it that all these people died?'

Here is the answer: 'Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.' In other words, all these people who have died, from Adam to Moses, died, not because of anything that they had done, but because of that sin of Adam's. The law had not yet been given and sin is not imputed where there is no law, but these have died because of the sin of Adam which was imputed to them. It is that one sin that brings death upon them.

Conversely, he says, and gloriously, this great action of the Son of God is imputed to me. I have done nothing. He has done it all. But it is imputed to me because He was my federal representative or because I was in His loins, whichever you like, but you see the parallel. Now what I am anxious to stress, therefore, is that the Bible thus teaches plainly and clearly this doctrine of original guilt and if we are to have a complete conception of the doctrine of original sin we must be careful to emphasise this original guilt quite as much as the original pollution which we have also inherited, and which I hope to go on to consider with you.

But I do commend to you again that great fifth chapter of Romans. It displays the grace of God in Christ in our salvation in a most astounding manner, but the whole argument is really dependent upon our acceptance of the doctrine of original guilt as well as original pollution. Once more, in the light of all this, I would ask you, with me, to consider the greatness of God's grace and love in dealing with us as He does in Christ Jesus.

18

Original Pollution

We resume now our consideration of the biblical doctrine of original sin. It is a great and vast subject, and in the last chapter we were only able to deal with a portion of it. We are considering in general the consequences of Adam's sin, Adam's original sin and transgression, which meant his fall, and in him and through him the fall of the entire human race. Then we considered the consequences in Adam himself, and the consequences which befell him immediately and we went on to a consideration of the effect of this on the progeny of Adam. We saw that this subject of original sin is divided into two main sections, or, to put it another way, there are two main aspects of the matter. The first is original guilt, and we have been considering that. We are all held guilty and responsible for that first sin of Adam; it is imputed to us, to our account.

We come now to consider the second aspect of this doctrine, and that is what is known as *original pollution*, because, you remember, the moment Adam sinned, two things happened at once. One was that he became guilty, and the second was that changes took place in him; he was not the same as he had been. Now the doctrine of original sin says that both of these consequences devolved upon us also, so that we are guilty of original pollution as well as original guilt.

What, then, do we mean by this term original pollution? Well, first and foremost, obviously, it means in us what it meant in Adam—the absence of that original righteousness which Adam had. He was made in the image and likeness of God, and a part of that was that he was righteous with a righteousness corresponding to the righteousness of God Himself. But Adam lost it, so that all of us are born with an absence of original righteousness. Not only that. We are also born [p 201] with the presence within us of a positive evil. There are those two aspects to this matter of pollution.

Now we must examine this a little further. This pollution, from which we all suffer as the result of that first sin, is not merely a disease; it is a sinful and, therefore, a guilty condition. We are guilty because we are polluted. It is something which must be regarded, therefore, partly in a legal manner. Another thing we must be careful to observe about it is that we must not say that it means that there has been a change in the substance of the soul. By 'the substance of the soul', I mean its constitution. As we have seen, we do not know what that constitution is, but we must be very careful not to say that there is any change in the soul. It is, rather, a change along the lines which I shall elaborate.

But let us consider another negative before we do that. We must not consider it, either, as merely a privation of something which we once had. The pollution is not merely negative. It does not just mean the absence of something in the soul. No, it is something which is positive, a positive inherent disposition towards sin. This pollution is something active. It is not merely that we are not what we ought to be; we are positively what we ought not to be. We saw that, of course, in the last chapter when we were considering some of the biblical terms and definitions with regard to sin. Modern psychologists do not like this. They say that what we call sin is merely the absence of certain qualities. You must not say a man is positively bad; what you mean is that he is not good; sin is negative. But the Bible says that sin is positive. It is not the absence of goodness, it is the positive presence of evil and of badness. And that is something which we must emphasise because from the very beginning it is emphasised, constantly, in the Scriptures themselves.

How, then, does this condition, this absence of original righteousness and the presence of positive evil, manifest itself in fallen humanity? How does it manifest itself in all of us? And here again there is a twofold division which is taught and emphasised right through the Bible. The terms generally used are these: first, it shows itself in what is called *total depravity*, and, second, in *total inability*.

So let us look at these separately. What do we mean by total depravity? This, again, is a term that is often attacked. Indeed, alas, there are even Christians who dislike it, almost invariably because they do not know the meaning of the term. They attach a false meaning to it, and then say that they cannot abide this

idea of total [p 202] depravity. If, however, you ask them what they mean by it, they will probably give you one or the other of the following false definitions.

First, we do not mean by total depravity that all men and women are as thoroughly bad and depraved as they can possibly be. Now you generally find that people who dislike the idea of total depravity define it in that way. But no reputable theologian has ever defined total depravity like that. I most certainly do not and neither do the Scriptures.

Second, it does not even mean that men and women in their fallen state have no innate knowledge of God, because they have. They are totally depraved and still have a sense of God within them.

Third, it does not mean that men and women do not have a conscience; therefore, it does not mean that they have no knowledge of good and evil. People in a state of total depravity do have a conscience, and they recognise the difference between good and evil.

But I still have not finished my list of negatives. Total depravity does not mean that men and women are incapable of recognising or admiring virtues, or that they are incapable of disinterested feelings and actions. You notice why I am emphasising these negatives. 'Ah,' says the modern psychologist—and so, unfortunately, do many Christians also—'I cannot abide this doctrine of total depravity, it cannot be right.' They say, 'Look at many people who are not Christians; they have ideas of virtue, they try to do good, they may be idealistic.'

Quite right! It is not a part of the definition of total depravity to deny that. And the last negative is that we do not mean by total depravity that every unregenerate person will indulge in every form of sin.

'So then,' asks someone, 'what does it mean?'

Well, positively, it means that man in his fallen condition has an inherently corrupt nature, and the corruption extends through every part of his being, to every faculty of his soul and body. It also means that there is no (observe the adjective) *spiritual* good in him. Yes, there is plenty of natural good, there is natural morality, he can recognise virtue and so on. But there is no spiritual good whatsoever. That is what it means.

Or, to elaborate a little more: someone in a state of total depravity, every unregenerate person, is at enmity against God and God's holy law. That is always the great characteristic of total depravity. To put it another way, all that person's powers are misused and perverted. Now let me give you the Scriptures to prove this. The first clear [p 203] statement of all this is to be found in Genesis 6:5: 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.' That is a most amazing, comprehensive statement; I commend a very careful study of it. But consider also Psalm 51:5: 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.' There again is an account of this total depravity—'shapen in iniquity', 'conceived in sin'.

Then take Jeremiah 17:9: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' But I suppose in many ways the classic statement of this doctrine of total depravity is in the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans. There it is in all its fulness, with the variation in the use of the terms describing man as the result of sin. I shall not, at this point, go into an exposition of that chapter; I am simply concerned to show you that its definition of total depravity is complete and perfect. But listen also to Romans 8:7: 'Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' Another terrible statement of the same thing.

Paul again, in Ephesians 4:17–18, talks about the Gentiles being '... in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' What an astonishing statement that is! Or listen to Paul writing to Titus: 'For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another' (Titus 3:3). What a terrible description of depravity as the result of sin!

Notice that Scripture, in some of the passages that I have quoted to you now and earlier, Scripture, in order to make this thing perfectly plain and clear, uses a number of terms to describe this pollution, and

we must be familiar with them. I trust that no one is bewildered as to why we are going into all this. The obvious explanation is that no one can have a true or adequate understanding of the scriptural doctrine of salvation, not one of us can appreciate our own salvation truly, unless we realise the nature of the disease, the condition, out of which we are to be saved by the gospel. In other words, we must understand the truth about ourselves in sin. We can never really know the love of God until we realise this. The way to measure the height of God's love is first of all to measure the depth of our own depravity as the result of the fall. [p 204]

So Scripture, in order to bring this right home to us, uses a number of terms and here are some of them. It talks about *the flesh*, about *concupiscence* and the *old man*. It talks about *the law in our members*; about *the body of sin* and *the body of death*. It talks, too, about *the carnal mind*. There are other terms, but those are the chief ones, and I think it is probably correct to say that in general all those terms mean and describe the same thing. The important one—I suppose the most important of all, because it is the one that tends to be most misunderstood—is the term *flesh*. What does the Scripture mean by this?

Now the Scripture uses this term in three main ways; first, it uses flesh to describe the body, the physical body. Second, it sometimes uses the word to stand for the whole person—'That no flesh should glory in his presence' (1 Cor. 1:29). That does not mean no physical body, it means that no person shall glory in his presence. So flesh sometimes means the entire personality. The third meaning may be described as the ethical meaning of flesh, or even the spiritual meaning, and this is the one which I am anxious to deal with now.

But I can imagine someone asking, 'You tell us that the word flesh is used in three different senses, how am I to know which of them is being used at any given point?'

The answer to that is not, I am happy to tell you, that you should have a knowledge of Greek, but that you should know the context. The Greek does not help you a bit; it still uses the same term. The only way we can tell which of the meanings the word carries is through the context, and the context, if we allow it to speak to us, will invariably make this quite clear.

So let us consider the ethical meaning of the term flesh. It is very important to realise that the word does not mean the body when it is used in this ethical way. The trouble with us is this flesh of ours—this is the thing that causes all our trouble, says the Bible. That is the argument of Paul in Romans 7, and when he says that, he is not thinking of the body. This is obviously important because the whole idea of monasticism was based on that false understanding. Men became monks, and they half starved themselves and mutilated their bodies, because they thought that sin resided in their physical frames, and that the thing to do was to keep the physical body down; and if they did that, they thought, all would be well.

But Scripture does not mean the body in this context. I can easily prove that in this way: if you read the lists that are given in various parts of the Bible with regard to the operations of the flesh, you will [p 205] find that some of the things mentioned have nothing whatsoever to do with the physical body. Take, for instance, Paul's famous list in Galatians 5:19–21, where he puts it like this: 'The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.' All those are definitely connected with the flesh, the physical part of our selves. But then Paul goes on, 'idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies ...' Now heresy has nothing at all to do with the physical frame; it is a sin in the realm of the spirit. But these are all catalogued together as 'works of the flesh', which, I think, is enough to prove that flesh when it is thus used in an ethical sense must never be taken to mean the physical frame, the animal part of our being.

Or let me put that positively in this way: flesh in the Scripture is almost invariably opposed to the spirit, and especially to the Holy Spirit within us. So flesh means the working of that nature which we have inherited from Adam, that which is entirely natural, and which is entirely without the influence of the Holy Spirit upon it. That is one definition, but take another. The flesh in this ethical sense is 'the principle, or the seat of the principle, which in fallen human nature resists the divine law and wars against the spirit'. 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh' (Gal. 5:17). Or, if you like a still simpler definition, the flesh has been described as 'human nature in its estrangement from the divine life'. I think that is as good as any.

But perhaps the best way to understand this term ‘the flesh’ is to take that famous statement which our Lord made to Nicodemus, ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (John 3:6). Now when our Lord said, ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh,’ He was not simply thinking of our physical frame. No, He was telling Nicodemus that he, a leader in Israel, was still thinking in a fleshly manner, still thinking ‘after the flesh’, in ways devoid of the Spirit. Flesh, in other words, is the human race as self-evolved and as self-continued; it is the human race without the Spirit of God. There, then, is our main definition of this term that is used so frequently in the Scriptures. And what we are told about our state in a condition of total depravity is that we are in the flesh and acting according to it.

Now one of the main characteristics of our life as the result of that influence is that it is a life which lacks balance, and this is a most important matter. Man consists, as we have seen, of body and soul—or, of body, soul and spirit. (See chapter 15). Now we saw that when [p 206] he was first made by God, man was in a perfectly balanced condition. That part of him which was related to God was there and functioning; that part which included his mind, his understanding, the rational part of him, which enabled him to communicate with others round about him, there it was, working perfectly, and the body was perfect. Yes, but the important thing was that the parts were working together in a state of perfect harmony.

I often feel in the matter of illustrations that I am somewhat crippled, because I am afraid that so many people do not have sufficient agricultural background to their lives to understand what I am saying. But if you have ever seen a dairymaid milking a cow (in the days when they used to milk with hands and not with these machines they now use) you would often find that the dairymaids used to sit on little three-legged stools, and it was always a trouble if one leg was shorter than the others, or if one leg suddenly broke. Now man at the beginning was like that little stool; there was perfect balance, each part fulfilling just its right function and no more.

But what has sin done? It has upset the balance. This condition of being ‘in the flesh’ means that the balance has gone. Formerly the spirit controlled everything, it kept the balance. Man in the right relationship to God functioned perfectly in his spirit, in his soul, in his body; the body was kept in its place. You remember that Adam and Eve were naked and everything was all right. The moment they sinned they became ashamed of their bodies, and they tried to cover themselves. You see, the body had immediately got out of proportion, and that was the beginning of this modern sex mania, this consciousness of sex, this thinking about it, reading about it, suggesting things to it, looking on it from the outside. And man in this fleshly condition, in this state of depravity, has become utterly lopsided.

Paul describes him in Ephesians 2:3 as guilty of being controlled by ‘lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind’—something which people forget. Everybody recognises lusts of the flesh, but according to the apostle Paul, lusts of the mind are as bad as lusts of the flesh. For man was never meant to be controlled by his mind, any more than he was meant to be controlled by his body. He was meant to be controlled by the spirit. But that has been lost as the result of sin and the fall, and man, if you like, has become eccentric, he is not at home, he is lopsided, he has not got his balance. Some people are controlled entirely by their bodies—eating and drinking, and various other things. Yes, but others who are not guilty of that, [p 207] can be equally in a state of lust, and equally in the flesh, because they are controlled by their earthbound minds, by their own thoughts, by the philosophies of men, not by God’s revelation and not by God’s Spirit.

And that is why you will find that the Bible seems to teach everywhere that the ultimate sin is intellectual pride. It was the great trouble with the Greeks. Their pride was the pride of intellect, and they would not listen to the gospel. That is why at times it seems a very much easier thing that a man who is guilty of lusts of the flesh should be saved, rather than a man who is guilty of intellectual pride. It is equally terrible, if not more so, in scriptural definition.

Other characteristics of man in a state of total depravity are these: first, he is controlled by self instead of by God; it follows of necessity. The original sin—temptation—was put in that form, was it not? An appeal was made to human pride: Why should you be subservient to God? Why should you allow God to keep this from you? Why don’t you assert yourself? (Gen. 3:1–6). Eve fell to the temptation, Adam followed, and the result has been this most amazing thing—that man is a victim of himself! You yourself,

and I myself, are our greatest enemies. The curse of life is that we are all self-centred. We live for self instead of for God, and thus we are selfish, we are jealous, and we are envious. As Paul puts it, we are 'hateful, and hating one another' (Titus 3:3). Why? Because we are out for ourselves. Instead of living to God, in worship of Him and to His glory, we have all made ourselves gods. We are revolving round ourselves, and our little planets collide with other planets, and thus there are quarrels, there are clashes and disputes and differences. Man as the result of this depravity has become egocentric and he cannot get away from himself.

And, of course, this leads in turn to the misuse of all our faculties. We are meant to use them to the glory of God, but now we use them for our own glory. They were never meant for that, so they are being abused, and the result of persistent abuse is that wrong habits develop and, eventually, our faculties become defective. The Scripture teaches us that this can happen even to the conscience; the conscience can be 'seared with a hot iron' (1 Tim. 4:2), and it may get into such a state, because of ignorance, that it misleads us. We may think we are right when we are wrong. The conscience needs to be educated. And that is why you will find the conscience of a man in a pagan country speaks differently from the conscience of a man who has been educated in virtue and in morality. **[p 208]**

The final and ultimate depravity is that we are all slaves of Satan. Not only has our own nature become twisted and perverted in the way we have seen, but still more terrible is the fact that we have become the slaves of the devil. Our Lord described us by nature apart from regeneration as children of the devil. He said, 'The lusts of your father ye will do' (John 8:44). We belong to the kingdom of darkness. Or again, our Lord said, 'When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace' (Luke 11:21). Unregenerate mankind is nothing but the goods of the devil. What a terrible state we are in by nature as the result of Adam's original sin and transgression—total depravity!

Then the second effect of original sin and pollution is *total inability*, and this has reference, obviously, to our spiritual powers. The Bible teaches that man is totally incapable and I emphasise both terms. Again, this does not mean that he cannot perform any natural good. Of course he can. It is obvious. It does not mean that he is incapable of civic good and righteousness, because of course he is, and history proves that. Indeed, it does not even mean that he is not capable of an external kind of religion; he is capable of that. A man can be very religious and yet we still say of him that he is totally depraved and totally incapable. How do you show that? Well, he is totally incapable in the sense that all his actions are defective, good though they may be in many ways, because they are not prompted by a love of God, and by a concern for the will and glory of God. So though actions may be morally good in and of themselves, they are useless because their motive is not true.

Let me put this still more specifically. When we say that man is totally incapable we mean that he cannot do any act which fundamentally meets with God's approval, or which meets the demands of God's law. 'There is none righteous, no, not one ... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:10, 23). All the goodness of the world is as 'filthy rags' (Isa. 64:6). All the goodness of the world is as dung, and refuse, and loss; ultimately it has no value because it cannot win God's approval or satisfy His law.

But by total depravity, or total incapability, we also mean that man cannot change his fundamental preference for sin and self. He cannot change his nature. He cannot get rid of the depravity which I have been defining. I go further. He cannot make even an approach to such a change, to getting rid of it. He can do nothing about his fallen **[p 209]** condition, his fundamental total depravity and inability. Even beyond that, I must say this: he has no appreciation at all of spiritual truth. I find that stated in 1 Corinthians 2:14 where Paul says, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' Read that chapter very carefully and you will find that the apostle's entire case is that the natural person, this person who is in the condition of flesh, not only cannot change his nature, but also has no understanding or appreciation of spiritual truth.

Why is this? Well Paul answers his own question in the second chapter of Ephesians where he tells us in the first verse that the natural or carnal person is 'dead in trespasses and sins'. Or take that statement in

Romans 8:7: 'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' This is an absolute statement of total inability. Let me give you some other Scriptures. The new person in Christ is described in John 1:13 as one who is 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God'. I have referred already to our Lord's words, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:6), and in John 6:44 we read, 'No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.' Read again Romans 7, where Paul tells us what the natural man cannot do—he is quite incapable.

So there, then, we see these two great consequences of original sin—original guilt and original pollution; and the pollution manifests itself in these two terrible and terrifying ways—total depravity and total inability. And you notice that the essence of the definition of both the depravity and the inability is that they concentrate on describing man's spiritual state. It does not mean, let me emphasise this again, that every man is as bad as he can be. It does not mean that he is not capable of any sort of good at all. Why, even animals are capable of that; you see them sometimes doing kindnesses to one another, and showing consideration for one another. Of course! But the point is that there is no spiritual value in these things; they are of no value in the sight of God. Man can do nothing at all about his own salvation, he cannot change his nature. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' (Jer. 13:23).

There, then, according to the Bible, we see man as he is as the result of Adam's sin and the fall. He is guilty, he is condemned by the law [p 210] of God, he is polluted, he is depraved, he is under the dominion of self and sin and of Satan, and he is utterly and absolutely helpless. He has no appreciation of spiritual truth, because of his depravity and because he is blinded by the god of this world who will not allow him to have that appreciation, even if he wanted it. 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 says, 'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them.'

So there is man, and again I would remind you of that great statement as we look at him—'God once dwelt here'! What a calamity that sin of Adam was! What a terrible, devastating thing! What awful consequences have devolved upon man! What can be done about such a creature? Is there any hope for him? Is there anything we can say to ourselves as we look at man as he is as the result of sin and the fall? We have not flinched. We have not tried to protect or to shield ourselves. We have allowed the Scriptures to speak to us, and we have seen this horrible picture, this awful photograph of ourselves as we are born into this world. Is there no hope?

Well, thank God, we all know the answer—there is! Into that awful condition there came a cross, and the thing, I think, that will fascinate us and charm us throughout eternity is this: that the promise came through the very God against whom man rebelled. And still more amazing and remarkable is that it came almost immediately after man had rebelled, for the promise was given to Adam and Eve even before they were thrust out of Paradise; the promise was given to them even in the very Garden where in their utter folly they had listened to the devil and, alas, brought all these horrible consequences upon themselves. Even then, without any delay, this amazing God whom we worship and adore, in His everlasting and eternal love gave the promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). There was going to be a deliverance, a Saviour, a salvation; and God's universe, man supremely, would not only be restored to what it had been before, but to even something beyond, for—

In Him the tribes of Adam boast

More blessings than their father lost.

Isaac Watts

And so we shall go on to consider that ultimate, crucial act which made all that possible, in which the Son of God gave Himself and [p 211] 'bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness' (1 Pet. 2:24).

19

Redemption: The Eternal Plan of God

‘According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will’ (Eph. 1:4–5).

Before we continue with our study of biblical doctrines it would be good, perhaps, for us to remind ourselves of the exact point at which we have arrived. We started with the general proposition that we find it difficult to understand both the world and ourselves. We have within us a sense of God, and yet that in itself is not enough to bring us to a knowledge of Him, and we came to the conclusion that if we really are to know anything truly about God or ourselves or our world, we must of necessity come to the Bible, this book which we say is the Word of God, inspired by Him, and infallible. And therefore we submit ourselves to it, realising that there are many things that we cannot understand, but that we have come with minds made receptive by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon us.

The first thing we find as we do this is that God has been graciously pleased to reveal Himself, and we have considered that revelation. Then we went on to think about what God has done, the creation of the heavens and earth and the various orders of beings that He has brought into existence. But we concentrated upon man, and saw that God created man and woman perfect; He made them ‘in our [God’s] image, after our likeness’ (Gen. 1:26). We tried to consider what the Bible tells us about this and there we saw man and woman in Paradise, without sin, perfect, and enjoying a life of communion with God.

Then from that, we looked at men and women as they are today; **[p 213]** we looked at ourselves, as we know ourselves to be, and the great question is: Why are we as we are now, if Adam and Eve were like that? So that led us to a consideration of the doctrine of the fall and that is the point at which we have arrived. We saw that all men and women are as they are because of the fall. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and that led to their fall (Gen. 3); and in working out the doctrine of original sin, as it is called, we saw that men and women, as the result of this, are in a fallen condition. They are guilty before God, their very nature is polluted and perverted, and they are quite helpless—helpless especially in the matter of returning to God and of arriving at a knowledge of God (Rom. 5:12). You remember we summed it up by putting it like this: that you look at a man or woman today and you say, with that Puritan John Howe—‘God once dwelt here.’ Man is a ruin, a ruin of his former self. And there we looked at him, driven out of Paradise, out of the Garden of God, and eating his bread by the sweat of his brow; and we saw all that is so true of him now, and of human nature as the result of sin.

But we were glad to end on a note of hope. We found that in the third chapter of Genesis, in which we are given the account of the fall, of its immediate consequences and of some of the remote consequences also, there is, after all, a hope: before God thrust Adam and Eve out of the Garden He gave them a promise. It looked at that moment as if everything was irretrievably lost. Adam and Eve, having listened to the devil in the form of the serpent, had made themselves the slaves of the devil, under his power, unable to resist him and helpless in his hands. It looked as if man’s future was altogether lost and hopeless, but, even there, God flashed into the gloom and darkness a ray of light. He addressed the serpent and pronounced a curse upon him, telling him that there would be warfare between him and ‘the seed of the woman’; that he would pierce, as it were, the heel of the woman’s seed, but that his own head would be crushed; and there lay the one gleam of hope.

So now we proceed to consider what exactly is meant by that hope. Having faced the history of men and women from their original perfection to their degradation and pollution, in a state of sin and guilt, we asked: Is there no hope for them? And the answer is: Yes, there is. In other words, we are beginning to consider the biblical doctrine of redemption or of salvation. In many ways it can be said, of course, that this is the central theme of the whole Bible, and yet all that we have considered hitherto has been absolutely essential. It is because so **[p 214]** many frequently fail to consider that mighty background that their conception of the doctrine of salvation is often incomplete, and even fallacious at certain points. It is

only as we truly understand something of the nature and character of God and the condition of men and women in sin, that we can understand this grand doctrine of redemption. Therefore it is but right that we should have spent all that time in considering these great doctrines that lead on to it.

However, here we are now, face to face with this great central doctrine. Obviously it is very comprehensive, and we shall have to divide it up under various headings. But we will not do that now. I am anxious, rather, that we should take a general look at it. Here, again, is a procedure which I advocate very strongly. It is a very wise thing, a very biblical thing, to take a general view like this of the doctrine of redemption before coming to its particular aspects; and as we do so, we shall find that certain things stand out very prominently and gloriously, and we must grasp them and take a firm hold on them.

Let me give you a number of headings. First: *redemption is entirely of God*. What we have in the Bible is the record of God's activity in the redemption of man. Now that, of course, is something that you find, at once, away back there in the third chapter of Genesis. The moment man had fallen and had found himself in this pitiable condition, and when he seemed to be absolutely without hope, the hope was given by God. It was God who spoke. And it was God who gave an outline of what He was proposing to do.

Now this can never be emphasised too strongly. The Bible, after all, is an account of what God has done about the redemption of man. It is *not* an account of man seeking for God. That has been, perhaps, the greatest of the heresies that have characterised so much of the Church and her teaching during the past hundred years. The so-called 'higher critics' were never tired of telling us, influenced as they were by the theory of evolution which they applied to the Scriptures, that the Old Testament was nothing but a record of man searching for God. But it is the exact opposite. It is the record of God's activity, what He has done, and what He is going to do.

We can put that very clearly like this. We saw that when God had made man in His own image and likeness, and had placed Him in the Garden, He made a covenant with him, which has generally been called, very rightly, the 'covenant of works'. God said to Adam, in effect: 'If you keep my commandment, if you do what I tell you and refrain from eating of that particular tree, if you refrain from doing [p 215] what I have prohibited, you will go on growing and increasing in your perfection.' And so God made certain promises. Man's future was then contingent upon his own action; it was a covenant of works.

But then, you remember, man failed to keep the covenant; he rebelled against God. And the result was that he landed himself in that condition which we describe as one of total inability. So clearly God could no longer make a covenant of works with man. Man when he was perfect had failed to keep that covenant, so God obviously did not make another. In the light of what we have already seen, it was impossible. But, we thank God, it was not left at that and the biblical doctrine of redemption is an account of what God has done about man.

Or, to put it another way, it is not a question of what man can do to placate God. The Bible does not tell us that. There are some people who seem to think that the message of the Bible is one which tells us what we have to do in order to please this God whom we have offended. That again is quite wrong. The Bible tells us about what God has done in order to reconcile us to Himself. I want to put that very strongly. Not only is God not unwilling to receive us, it is He who goes out of His way to seek us. So if we want to grasp the biblical doctrine of redemption we must once and for ever get rid of that notion which has been instilled into the human mind and heart by the devil, who is God's adversary and our adversary, and who tries to make us believe that God is against us. But the Bible's message is that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ...' (John 3:16).

Indeed, let me go even further and put it in this extreme form: the Bible does not even tell us that the Lord Jesus Christ needs to placate God for us or has done that for us. You still find people who hold that view. They say that there is God in His justice and in His absolute righteousness, and then they depict the Lord Jesus Christ as pleading with God on our behalf, and beseeching Him to forgive us. You will find it in certain hymns and choruses. But it is quite false to the biblical teaching, which can be summed up in what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:19: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.' The biblical case is not that Christ, as it were, has to appeal to God to change His mind. It was God who sent Christ; it was God Himself who took the initiative. So we can never emphasise

too frequently or too strongly this first proposition, which is that redemption and salvation are entirely of God, [p 216] and that the Bible is nothing but a record of what God has done, is doing, and will do about us men and women and our salvation.

The second principle is this: *salvation is all of grace*. It was all done in spite of man's rebellion, in spite of man's arrogance, in spite of his folly and sin. You go back to that account in Genesis 3 and that is what you will find. Adam and Eve foolishly disobeyed and rebelled, and there they were, frightened and alarmed when they heard the voice of God, and they hid themselves; their instinct was to get away from God. But it was God who called after them, who called them to come back.

Now that is the whole case of the Bible: this gracious action on the part of God, who does not turn His back upon us and upon the world because of sin and disobedience and the fall, but who, in spite of the fact that we are so undeserving of His love and His mercy and His compassion, looks upon us with a pitying eye, and speaks to us in terms of grace and of love. You remember that when we were considering the character of God we emphasised this character of grace. Grace means 'undeserved favour', and that is the essence of the biblical message. The hymn writer says,

Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are matchless, godlike, and divine.
Samuel Davies

There is nothing comparable to the grace of God, to the way in which He looks upon us and upon the world, in spite of what we have done, and gives us these promises. We have no claim upon the love of God. We have forfeited it. Salvation is all of grace.

The next point that the Bible makes very clear about this doctrine of redemption is that *it was all planned before the foundation of the world*. Now this is most important. Read what Paul says about it in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. Redemption is not an afterthought. It was not something that God thought of after man fell and because man fell. To say that is to contradict the Scripture. The Bible all along keeps on referring to this as something that was conceived before the world was made. Before man was ever created, this plan of redemption was clearly in the mind of God.

Here again we are confronted by a great mystery. There is a sense in which it is impossible for us to grasp it. We are so bound by time, we are so accustomed to seeing everything in a kind of time sequence! We think chronologically and it is quite inevitable that we should do so. [p 217] But God is outside time. God sees the end from the beginning and all things are always in His presence. It is a staggering thought, and yet here it is, very plainly taught everywhere in the Scriptures: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world ...' (Eph. 1:4). Now you will find that certain people give the impression that God is continually having to modify His plan and His purposes because of things that are done by man, but this is something you can never substantiate from the Scripture. Before anything was made, the plan, the idea of redemption, was already present in the mind of God.

The next thing we go on to is something that we should consider with adoration, praise and worship, and it is this: *the three Persons of the blessed Trinity took part in this plan and purpose of redemption*. There can be no question at all but that the Scriptures teach that before the foundation of the world a council with respect to man took place between the three Persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And there in that eternal council they seem very clearly to have divided up the work of redemption, so that we can describe the Father as the originator, the Son as the executor and the Holy Spirit as the One who applies what the Son has achieved.

But it is also very clear that in particular an agreement, even a covenant, was made between God the eternal Father and God the eternal Son. It is quite clear, according to Scripture, that the Son has been made the 'heir of all things' (Heb. 1:2), which means that everything in this world was given to Him, that it was, as it were, made over to Him. And everything that happens in this world and on this earth belongs, therefore, to His domain. In His high priestly prayer in John 17, our Lord reminds His Father, 'As thou hast given him [Christ] power over all flesh ...' (v. 2). That is the same idea. God the Father hands the world as it

is to the Son, and He gives Him power over all. The eighth psalm not only refers to man, it refers in a very special way to the Son of God Himself:

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

Verses 4–8

But beyond that, we see clearly in the Scriptures that for the purpose [p 218] of redemption God the Father has made the Son the head and the representative of a new humanity. Take, for instance, what we are told in Romans 5, where we are given the contrast—‘As in Adam ... so in Christ.’ The apostle works this out and his teaching is that Adam, as we have seen, was the head and the representative of mankind, but now, for the purposes of redemption, God has appointed a new head and a new representative, and that is His own Son. He could not appoint a man, obviously, because all men had fallen in Adam, and God cannot appoint fallen man as a representative. If man in a state of perfection had failed, how much more so must man in Adam, and in a state of imperfection, fail.

So now you see why the incarnation was an absolute necessity. There was no one on earth with whom God could make His covenant, there was no one whom he could pick out and make a head and representative. So He took His own Son, whom He was going to send into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh, and appointed Him as the head and the representative of this new humanity. You find that in Romans 5 and, equally definitely, in 1 Corinthians 15:22: ‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’ It is the same contrast between Adam and our Lord. And, of course, you find the same teaching in Psalm 2: ‘Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee’ (v. 7), with the other things that follow from that.

The next step in this compact, or covenant, between the Father and the Son was that God the Father gave God the Son this people whom He would raise at the last day. Read, for instance, John 6, and you will find that our Lord constantly refers to that and He says He must not lose anything that God has given Him. It is very clear, again, in John 17, in that high priestly prayer. Our Lord constantly repeats that He is doing all this for the sake of those whom the Father has given Him. ‘Father, the hour is come,’ he says, ‘glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him’ (John 17:1–2). And He goes on repeating the phrase: ‘I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world’ (v. 6). And then He reminds His Father, ‘While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled’ (v. 12). So that is another part of the compact.

Then you have another reference to it in Hebrews 2:13 where the Son says, ‘Behold I and the children which God hath given me.’ So [p 219] clearly there was an arrangement concerning the people who had been given to Him. He is the head of this people, this new humanity, the redeemed.

But further, we see that God not only gave Him the people, He also gave Him a certain work to do with respect to them. Again in John 17 we read, ‘I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do’ (v. 4). So the Father, in eternity, gave the Son a certain work to do and then, having given it, He sent Him to do it. ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son’ (John 3:16). ‘God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law’ (Gal. 4:4), and there are many other similar statements. And, indeed, in a most marvellous way we are actually told that the Father even prepared a body for Him. There is a reference to that in Psalm 40, and you will find it quoted in Hebrews 10:5: ‘... a body hast thou prepared me.’ So that is the essential teaching; it was the Father who sent forth the Son.

The next, the fifth general heading, I would suggest is that *this plan and scheme of redemption is a definite plan*. There is nothing incidental or contingent about it. It is a perfect plan, and it was all perfect before the very foundation of the world. God had mapped it out in eternity, and then had put into operation in this world of time. You cannot read the Bible without noticing in a very particular way the

time element. Everything that has happened up till this moment has happened according to God's plan and programme.

There are some most astonishing examples of this, and it is most fascinating and encouraging to consider some of these instances and to work them out in detail. For instance, God actually told Abraham of the four hundred years which his descendants would spend in the captivity of Egypt (Gen. 15:13–16). Then the time of the flood was known to God. When He first gave His commandment to Noah to start building that ark, when the world began to scoff and say: Where is the promise of this judgment that you are speaking about?; God knew, and, at the prescribed moment, it happened (Gen. 6–7). And the same is true of the time when He chose a man called Abraham and founded a nation in him (Gen. 12:1). We will be considering this again in detail but all these things happened at precisely the time which God had appointed for them. And so as you go along with all the history of the Judges and the Kings and the Prophets, you find that it is all according to this perfect plan and it is all perfectly timed.

And this brings us especially, of course, to that great statement [p 220] which we have already quoted in part: 'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law ...' People have often asked, 'If God gave that promise away back there in Eden, why did He wait so long before He sent His Son?' It is an idle question to ask. But God has His great purpose in it all. It is very easy to suggest many reasons why God did not send His Son until the exact moment when He did send Him. It seems to me to be more and more clear that He did this in order that He might first show men and women their utter helplessness. The law had to be given in order that they might see that they could not keep it. An opportunity had to be given to Greek philosophy to do everything that it could do; an opportunity had to be given to Roman law and Roman ideas of justice and of government. Everything that men and women could think of for redeeming themselves and their world had already been tried and had failed before God sent His Son.

God knew that from the beginning. If we are told that 'he that believeth shall not make haste' (Isa. 28:16), how infinitely more true is that of God, who sees the end from the beginning. So I emphasise that it is a perfect and definite plan, complete and entire. The apostle Paul in Romans 11 does not hesitate to speak about a time when the 'fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved' (vv. 25–6). Now God had known all this from the foundation of the world. The plan was entire and He gave these revelations of it to His servants so that they could write about it and we can read about it. God knows the number of the fulness of the Gentiles; He knows the number of Israel; He knows the number of this new humanity that is in Christ Jesus. The plan of redemption is an entire plan: a perfect, definite plan, down to the smallest detail.

The next thing I want to emphasise about it, the sixth principle, is *the absolute certainty of the consummation of this plan of redemption*. This is one of the most glorious and encouraging things that we can ever consider together. I thank God that that is made very clear even in Genesis 3. When God pronounced His curse there upon the serpent and announced the warfare between the seed of the woman and the serpent, He made it plain that this enemy who had brought man, who was perfect, down to the dust and to shame and degradation, was going to be utterly defeated and destroyed.

And the Bible keeps on reminding us of this. In its last book it gives us a picture of the consummation of it all, when even the devil himself shall be cast into the lake burning with fire and shall be destroyed to [p 221] all eternity. Whatever the appearances may be, however much they may suggest the contrary at different times and in different epochs, God's plan is certain. Nothing can frustrate it, nothing can prevent it from being worked out to the smallest detail. That is, of course, the major theme of the Bible. We are given an account of the end as well as the beginning. The whole thing is there; we can rest assured that no power of man nor of earth nor of hell can ever prevent what God purposed in this eternal council before the foundation of the world.

Then the next heading—and again it is something that is emphasised in Ephesians 1—is that *this purpose of God in redemption applies not only to man but to all things*. It applies to the world itself, and, as we have just seen, it includes what God has purposed even with regard to His enemies. Paul says, 'Having made known unto us the mystery of his will'—it was there in His purpose but it was a hidden mystery and

we would not have known it if He had not been pleased graciously to make it known to us—‘according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself’—it is all of grace, it is all His love. Why?—‘That in the dispensation of the fulness of times’—there it is again—‘he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him’ (Eph. 1:9–10).

Now that is the plan. I am afraid that many of us are often tempted to think of salvation only in terms of ourselves or only in terms of a number of individuals. We must never do that. This great purpose of God includes the heavens and the earth. All things, everywhere, come within His purpose, even to the extent of determining beforehand the final state and destiny of Satan and evil and all that belongs to his territory. There will be a final destruction, and there will be ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (2 Pet. 3:13), which will be the grand result of the work of redemption of the Son of God.

And that brings me to my eighth point, which is that *this great plan of redemption always centres in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Paul tells us that God’s purpose is to ‘gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth’—and he repeats himself—‘even in him’ (Eph. 1:10). I shall have occasion again to go on emphasising and repeating that. I put it here as a principle, because I am afraid that certain people very definitely teach that some form of redemption is possible apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find in certain ‘Notes on the Scriptures’, a teaching which says that a time [p 222] is coming when the dispensation of grace will have finished and a new dispensation of law will come in, and people will be saved by keeping the law and will not be saved if they do not keep it.

Now I do not hesitate to assert that that is a completely erroneous conception, and a contradiction of the Bible. There is no mention of any salvation anywhere in the Bible except in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one gospel; there is only one way of salvation. The saints of the Old Testament are saved in Christ as much as you and I are, and all who will ever live must be saved in Christ or not at all. It is in Him that God is going to reconcile everything, and there is no other way of reconciliation. We cannot emphasise that too often or too strongly.

To put it another way, we call this book the Bible, and we divide it into two portions, the Old Testament and the New Testament. What does this mean? It means that the Old Testament and the New are both concerned about the same person, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is the preparation, the promise, the prophecy of His coming. There, back in Genesis 3, you have it; the whole thing is put so plainly. Who is the seed of the woman that is going to crush and bruise the serpent’s head? It is none other than the Son of God, and He did it upon the cross on Calvary’s hill. The Old Testament from beginning to end points to Him.

Then what is the New Testament but the glorious fulfilment of every type and shadow? He is the substance of all the shadows. He is the great antitype of all the types. He is the fulfilment of everything that God had indicated He was going to be. So there is the Bible—Old Testament, New Testament—but it is all in Christ. The plan, the purpose, the way of redemption are always in Him.

And that brings me to my last heading, which is that *this purpose of God in redemption has been revealed to mankind in various covenants*. Now I do not enter into that now; I hope to go on to consider this question of the covenants in our next study. But God, in His great condescension, in His infinite grace and kindness, has not only determined upon this plan of redemption, He has done something else which in a way is still more extraordinary and marvellous: He has made agreements with men. The almighty and eternal God, the sovereign Lord, turns to men and women who have sinned and rebelled against Him and begins to tell them what He is going to do. And, as we shall see, when He did that with Abraham, He not only told him what He was going to do, He confirmed it with an oath in order that [p 223] man might have a certain and sure hope (Heb. 6:17–20).

So then, we have taken a kind of synoptic view of the biblical doctrine of redemption. We have looked at it in general. We have surveyed the whole landscape, as it were. We have looked at it from beginning to end, and have seen that God in His kindness and love and mercy and compassion, and in His infinite grace, looked upon men and women when they deserved nothing but hell and destruction, and gave them the promise of their wonderful redemption that would finally be consummated in His own eternal Son, our

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore to Him, and to Him alone, must of necessity be all the praise and all the honour and all the glory!

20

The Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament

We continue now with our consideration of the biblical doctrine of redemption or salvation. We have seen that man, having failed to keep God's law and commandment, became the slave of Satan, dead in trespasses and sins, and that had he been left to himself his condition would have been entirely hopeless. But God, in His infinite grace and love and mercy, looked upon man in pity, and informed him of His great plan of salvation. And we have considered the general character of this great plan of redemption. I ended by saying that God revealed it to man in the form of a covenant that He made with man. This is commonly called the covenant of redemption or the covenant of salvation, and that is to be our special theme now—the way in which God has made known His gracious purpose to save man from the guilt and pollution which resulted from listening to the suggestion of Satan.

Now the great word we must consider is this word *covenant*. It is a word that God used when He was speaking to Abraham (Gen. 17). What is a covenant? Well, it can be defined as an agreement or a pact which is entered into by two parties, the two parties generally being more or less of equal standing. People often make covenants today; they make them, for example, with respect to giving gifts towards good causes. There is also the Covenant of the League of Nations or the Covenant of the United Nations. A covenant is generally confirmed by some kind of solemn ceremony—you take an oath, or there is perhaps a religious service. And in the covenant the two sides bind themselves to the fulfilment of certain promises given on the basis of certain conditions.

[p 225] In the Bible you will find covenants made between men—David and Jonathan made a covenant, and it was on the basis of equality. But when you come to God and man, clearly there is of necessity a difference; the idea of covenant undergoes some modifications. This difference appears especially in the *Authorised Version* of the Bible in this way: the word is sometimes translated as 'testament' and not as covenant. So we talk about 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament'; and you will find the word 'testament' in 2 Corinthians 3:6 and also in other places.

Now it is generally agreed that the word which stands for this idea should always be translated as covenant except in one instance, and that one exception is Hebrews 9:16–17, where clearly it must be translated as testament for it refers to a person dying and making a will. But apart from that one instance you will find that the other translations, the *Revised Standard Version*, for example, always translate it as covenant rather than as testament.

I emphasise that for this reason: the translators of the *Authorised Version* had a very definite object in view when they used the word 'testament'. Their purpose was to emphasise the priority of God. When God makes a covenant with man, there are not two partners of equal standing, but God is *giving*, as it were, His covenant to man. So the translators thought that it was more like a testament than a covenant, and chose to use that word. Strictly speaking, they were wrong, but they certainly did emphasise this idea of the priority of God over against the idea of man as an equal. They did it also because they could see very clearly that in Hebrews 9 the word means a testament, and as it can be argued that ultimately all the blessings that come to us under the covenant of grace come as the result of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a sense in which we do inherit everything as the result of His last testament. So there was that much at least to be said for their translation. Furthermore, they were undoubtedly partly influenced by the fact that the Latin word for all this is *testamentum*, and they were dependent partly upon the Latin translations of the Scripture.

However, the thing that we must keep in mind is that the priority of God must be emphasised. The covenant is a gift from God which has been ushered in by the death of Christ, and because it comes from God it is something which is certain, and inviolable, and unbreakable. And yet we must hold on to this idea of a covenant, because God in His wonderful love and grace and condescension chose to reveal His [p 226] purposes in this particular way. He called man to Himself and He chose to make an agreement with man. God need not have done that, but He has done so. In spite of human rebellion, sin and arrogance, God, as it

were, called man in and said, 'I want to make an agreement with you.' In a way, there is nothing that so displays the wonderful love and grace and kindness and condescension of God so much as this teaching in the Bible with regard to His making covenants with men.

Now we have already seen that God originally made a covenant with Adam. You remember that He put him into the Garden and told him that if he did certain things he would have a certain reward. That is called a covenant of works, because Adam's inheritance of this promise was entirely dependent upon his works, upon what he did. But, you remember, Adam broke the covenant; he failed, and landed himself and his posterity in the terrible plight that we have been describing. So, from there on God has made a new covenant, which is called the *covenant of grace*.

Clearly, as we have seen, God could not make another covenant of works with man. If man, in an ideal position and while perfect, could not keep the covenant of works, what would be the object of making another covenant of works with fallen man? So the Bible tells us that God did not do this but that He made the covenant of grace. And yet in this covenant, God has introduced a condition. He has made His promises. He has told us what He is making possible for us. But He does make a demand upon us. He tells us that we are only going to receive and enjoy these promises if we have faith, and we have to accept this condition voluntarily before we will enjoy the blessings. But furthermore, God has also told us in the covenant that He Himself is going to do something which makes it possible for us to derive these benefits, and that is why it is called the *covenant of grace*.

Now let me divide that up a little. God, I say, has made certain promises, so what is the great central promise that He has made in the covenant of grace? Well, it really can be put in this way: He has promised to be a God unto man. That is the great promise—'I will be to you a God.' You see the importance and the significance of this? God had been the God of Adam, but Adam sinned against Him and fell; he became the slave of Satan and broke the connection with God. And the remarkable and astounding thing is that God turned to man and assured him in the covenant of grace that He would find a way, that He had a way, whereby He could still be a God to man. 'I will take [p 227] you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God' (Exod. 6:7).

Make a note of that because as you go through your Scriptures you will find that that is the great promise that is repeated time and time again. You will find it in Jeremiah 31:33; 32:38–40. You will find it in Ezekiel 34:23–5; 36:25–8; 37:26–7. You will find it in 2 Corinthians 6:16–18, in Hebrews 8:10; and, in a marvellous way, in Revelation 21:3 where we read this: 'The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them.' That is the final state. So you see that that is the very essence of God's promise in the covenant of grace—that what had been broken by sin and the fall was going to be restored. And the supreme blessing therefore, the ultimate blessing, the blessing of blessings, is that God is my God, and that I have a right to say 'my God'. And the whole of salvation is included in that.

I must not stay with that now, but how often do we forget that? How often do we tend to define salvation in terms other than that? Yet the greatest thing a human being can ever say since the fall is this: 'God is my God.' And the greatest blessing of all is to know for certain that God is saying to you, 'I am your God'; 'I will be to you a God.' That is what He has promised.

But the covenant also includes certain other things. God has promised certain temporal as well as spiritual blessings. He especially promised those under the old dispensation, and let us never forget that the temporal blessings are meant to be pictures of, and to symbolise, the spiritual blessings.

He has also promised, obviously, a way of justification. God cannot be my God, and I cannot say 'my God' unless I am justified, unless my sin is forgiven, unless my sin is removed, and unless I am adopted and made a child of God. This is all implicit in the promise that God is to be my God. Indeed, it includes the promise of life eternal, the giving of the Spirit, and the full application and working out of redemption in my sanctification and ultimate glorification. The promises in the covenant of grace include all this, and we are called upon to respond by faith, by the desire for all this, and by faithfulness and obedience to God in these new conditions.

So I have tried to give you an omnibus definition of what we mean by the covenant of grace. We can put it like this: the covenant of grace is that arrangement between the triune God and His people, whereby God carries out His eternal purpose and decree of redemption by promising His friendship. The promise is full and free salvation to His people upon the basis of the vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus [p 228] Christ, who is the mediator of the covenant, and His people accept this salvation by faith. It is the promise of God's friendship, of His being our God, of entry into intimate relationship with Him, and knowing Him, and it is all made possible by Jesus Christ.

But the thing I want to consider now is this: this great covenant which God has made with man, this covenant of grace, can be divided up into two dispensations, or, if you prefer it, two administrations. This one great covenant has been administered in two different ways, the way that is described in the Old Testament and the way that is described in the New Testament. You notice what I am saying? There is only *one* covenant of grace and I hope before we finish this study to prove that to you.

What, then, are the ways in which the covenant of grace has been dispensed under the old dispensation? Well, you go first of all to Genesis 3:15. If you are interested in the technical term, it is generally called the *protevangel*. In other words, there is a kind of foreshadowing of the whole gospel in Genesis 3:15. Now to me this is one of the most fascinating and thrilling things anyone can ever encounter. Here is this great book; we divide it up and we call it the Old Testament and the New Testament and we all know what we mean by that. But, you know, if we were to be strictly accurate we would not describe it in that way. The real division of the Bible is this: first, everything you get from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 3:14; then everything from Genesis 3:15 to the very end of the Bible. What you have up until Genesis 3:14 is the account of the creation, and of God's original covenant of works with man, and of how that failed because man broke it. Beginning with Genesis 3:15 you get the announcement of the gospel, the covenant of grace, the way of salvation, and that is the whole theme of the Bible until you come to the last verse of the book of Revelation. That is the real division of the Bible.

But, of course, we talk about the Old Testament and the New Testament because we want to emphasise the two main ways in which this one great covenant of grace has been administered, and here it is beginning in Genesis 3:15—'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.' Now the whole of the gospel is there. It is there in this almost cryptic form, in this very undeveloped form, but it is there.

Let us work it out. What does God tell us in Genesis 3:15? Well, first of all that He was going to put enmity between the serpent, and [p 229] the woman and her seed. Hitherto, you see, there had been no enmity between them; but the serpent had beguiled Eve, so they were very friendly together, and the woman was now under the dominion of the devil. Had God not done something, that would have been the end of the story. But God came in and He said, 'Now I am going to break that friendship; you were meant for friendship with me, not with the devil, so I am going to put enmity between you and the devil, and between the devil and you.' That was the first announcement of salvation; man cannot be saved while he is a friend of the devil and an enemy of God. He must be a friend of God; therefore he must become an enemy of the devil.

The second thing, therefore, that is implied is that God was going to give man power and grace to fight the devil. Man had already been defeated by him, and was his slave. Man must have help and strength, and God promised him that. God promised to be on man's side in this fight against the enemy. He applied the promise also to the 'seed'—'between thy seed and her seed'. That is most important. It was not a temporary promise given there in Eden; it was to continue until it had achieved its ultimate purpose.

You notice also that God said that the quarrel was to go on not only between woman and her seed, and the devil, but also between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. In other words, mankind was here divided into two sections—those who do not belong to Christ belong to the devil, they are the children, the seed of the devil. So humanity can be divided into the seed of God and of Christ, and the seed of the devil, and there is a fight between them—all announced in Genesis 3:15.

Then you notice that we are given the promise there of the certainty of the triumph of God and His way. The serpent was going to be bruised, his head would be bruised, he would be destroyed. Cannot you

see that there is the prefiguring of Calvary? It was there he was put to an open shame, it was there he was defeated—all promised in the protevangel. And ultimately there is this idea which we can see so clearly in the light of subsequent Scripture, that the real seed of the woman is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Genesis 3:16). Now there was the first announcement of this covenant. God did not call it a covenant at that point, but it was a foreshadowing of the covenant that later was made more explicit.

But, second, let us come to the covenant made with Noah. You will find that described in the ninth chapter of the book of Genesis, after [p 230] the flood. God promised here that He would never again destroy the earth and all flesh by means of water, by the return of such a flood. He furthermore guaranteed that there would always be a succession of seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. God promised that that would continue, come what may. He also promised that the forces of nature would be bridled. In other words, the effects and results of sin and the fall were checked, they were held in balance in the covenant made with Noah.

In the same way, the powers of evil were put under a greater restraint, and man was not allowed to be as violent as he had been, and as he would like to be, against other men. Man was protected against the violence both of man himself and of beasts. Read it for yourself in Genesis 9. And it was all confirmed and sealed by the sign of the rainbow in the cloud.

Now the thing I want to emphasise here is this: the covenant made with Noah was not a new covenant of grace. The covenant of grace was adumbrated in Genesis 3:15. This did not interfere with that at all, but simply introduced certain subsidiary promises and ordinances. The covenant with Noah was not a new covenant in the ultimate sense of grace and redemption. It was simply a temporary legislation, it was what is sometimes called *common grace*, as distinct from the special grace which ensures our spiritual salvation.

Then, thirdly, there was the covenant made with Abraham. That is what you find in Genesis 17, and it was here that God first explicitly and clearly stated His purpose of redemption in the exact form of a covenant. What do we find here? Well, we find that here for the first time, in any definite manner, we have the beginning of a kind of church. There was a separation between the people who belonged to God and those who belonged to the world. There had been a kind of family worship before, in houses or tents, and so on, but something new was introduced in the covenant with Abraham. God chose a particular man, a particular family, and made a promise to Abraham and his descendants—and to nobody else. There was this separation; there was the formation of a unique body, a special people of God.

This is most important. Notice also the emphasis placed upon Abraham's faith, upon his response. It was by his faith that he entered into the covenant and began to receive the benefits and the blessings. And notice, too, the spiritual character of the blessings that were promised to him. Over and above the promise concerning the land, etc., there was the great promise of a spiritual seed, that all the [p 231] nations of the world were going to be blessed in him.

Now if you want to work that out, just read the epistle to the Romans, chapters 3, 4 and 5, and the epistle to the Galatians, chapter 3, which I shall quote shortly. You see that in his covenant with Abraham, God was giving Abraham justification. We are told in the epistle to the Romans that Abraham was justified by faith, justified in a spiritual sense—justified from sin, he was forgiven, he was adopted into God's family, and made the father of the faithful, the father of all believers. And then, in addition to that, there were also temporal blessings. We can never place too much emphasis upon the covenant made with Abraham. If you keep your eye on the references to Abraham in the subsequent parts of the Bible, you will find that this covenant is absolutely crucial. It is the great, explicit, original promise which God adumbrated in Genesis 3:15, but here stated explicitly.

Then we must move on, of course, to the covenant at Sinai, the Sinaitic covenant, the covenant made through Moses, which you will find in Exodus 19 and following. Now this is most important. Here the emphasis is placed especially upon the fact that this covenant was a *national* covenant, and from here onwards the church and the nation became one. So to belong to the nation of Israel was to belong to the church, and you could not be put out of the church without being put out of the nation. A man who transgressed the law was put to death. He was not merely punished in a spiritual sense, he was literally put to death, put out of existence, put out of the nation as well.

Then, of course, at Sinai great prominence was laid on the giving of the law. But I do want to make it very plain that the giving of the law did not mean that, in any sense whatsoever, God was re-establishing a covenant of works. I have already shown you the sheer impossibility of that. What is the point, I ask again, of making a covenant of works, of telling a man that he can save himself if he does certain things, when man had failed to do that in Paradise! No! The giving of the law did not mean a return to a covenant of works. The children of Israel made the terrible mistake of thinking it did; that was their error. It did not mean that. It was simply given in order that the life of the nation should be regulated in certain respects, and also for certain other reasons.

In the covenant at Sinai God gave to Moses the ceremonial law and all the typical sacrifices and services in connection with the Temple—the burnt offering, the various other offerings, and the appointment of certain people set apart as priests. And we have also the [p 232] promulgation of the fact that the gospel, the great covenant of grace, was to be preached now in symbols and in types. These are meant to show us the demands of God upon us, and also, at the same time, to remind us of God's great promise of forgiveness and of salvation.

The law as a rule of life you can divide in a threefold manner—the moral law, the civil law and the ceremonial law, that is, the certain great, fixed principles of morality, the special legislation for the life of the nation, and the laws governing the ceremonies and the ritual. Now I want to emphasise that the making of this subsidiary covenant with Moses on behalf of the children of Israel at Sinai in no way whatsoever interfered with the covenant of grace that had already been given to Abraham, and that had previously been hinted at in the Garden of Eden. Now let me explain that, because there are some people who regard this as an entirely new covenant. But it was not; and I prove it in this way: in Romans 4:13 we read, 'For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.' This is most important. Listen again to Galatians 3:17: 'And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.' In other words, Paul's great argument in Romans and Galatians is that the subsidiary covenant made with Moses at Mount Sinai, did not interfere to the slightest extent with the great covenant of promise and of grace that God had made with Abraham.

'But,' says someone, 'what about Galatians 4:21–2 where we read, 'Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.' And Paul goes on to say that this is an allegory, for these are two covenants. Does that not teach that there was a subsidiary covenant? To which the answer is this: it cannot mean that, because if it did, it would mean that in Galatians 4 Paul contradicts his own great argument in Galatians 3 and in Romans 4.

But quite apart from that, the context surely makes it quite clear. Paul's only purpose in Galatians 4 is to differentiate between the natural Israel and the spiritual Israel. It is his way of denouncing the wrong understanding of the Jew, who argued that to belong to Israel in the flesh meant that of necessity you belonged to the true seed of Abraham. But it does not. There was an earthly agreement, and there was a heavenly agreement, and it is the heavenly agreement that [p 233] saves. After all, the promise God made to Abraham, in a sense, included Ishmael and Esau, did it not? All these people were circumcised, yes; but they were not the children of faith, they were not the true children of promise. They belonged to the realm of the flesh. God explained that to Abraham even in Genesis 17.

Very well then; the covenant made through Moses when the law was given, did not in any way interfere with the covenant of grace, but was simply meant to do two things. First, it was meant to increase the consciousness of sin, it was meant primarily to do that. 'Moreover,' says Paul, 'the law entered, that the offence might abound' (Rom. 5:20). He makes the same point in Romans 4:13: 'For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.' And in Galatians 3:17 Paul says, 'And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.' So that is the first great argument—that the law was given

in order to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin, in order to convict the nation, and all nations, of the utter hopelessness of a man dealing with his own sinfulness.

So the second purpose of the law we can put as Galatians 3:24 puts it: 'Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.' You see, the original covenant was the covenant which teaches justification by faith; that was the covenant God made with Abraham and his seed. That is the fundamental thing. What was the point of the law? It was to bring us to that, to act as a kind of teacher, a pedagogue, to act as a coach—it showed us the utter necessity of Christ and our absolute need of him. The law was never given as a means of salvation in itself.

You notice that I am emphasising this with considerable feeling, and I do so because you will find certain Bibles with notes, and certain books on the Bible, which would teach that God told the children of Israel that they could save themselves if they kept the law, that He provided the law in order to give them another way of saving themselves. But as we have seen, that is an utter contradiction of the teaching of Scripture.

We have, then, been dealing with the ways in which the great covenant of grace was administered and revealed to the people under the old dispensation. That leads on, of course, to the new dispensation which is the way that God has revealed and perfected, re-ratified [p 234] and fulfilled the promise, and all that is contained in the covenant in and through His Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So let me try to summarise, therefore, what we have been considering thus far. First of all God made with man—perfect man, man in the image and likeness of God—a covenant of works. Man was to inherit eternal life, with the possibility of communion with God, if he kept the commandment, the law. Man fell—he broke God's law; sin, pollution, and degradation followed.

Now since then God has only made one fundamental covenant with man, it is the covenant of grace; and He revealed that great covenant of grace in the Old Testament in the ways that I have been describing.

So I think we have all probably learnt one thing, and I trust have seen it more clearly than we have ever seen it before. Christian people have often expressed surprise that the early Church decided to incorporate the Old Testament with its new literature, and they say, 'I do not see why, as a Christian, I need to be bothered about the Old Testament.' Well, if anybody still feels like that, I have failed and failed lamentably, because I have tried to show that the same great fundamental message is there in the Old, as in the New. And if we want to know about God's great purpose, we must delight in tracing it from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, right the way through until we come to our Lord. We must see the marvellous plan of God as it unfolds in the old administration of the covenant of grace, and the new administration of the same covenant. The gospel begins, not in Matthew 1:1, but in Genesis 3:15. Let us never forget that, and so let us go to our Old Testament and look for the gospel. You will find it there almost everywhere in a most astounding manner, and it is our business, as well as our privilege, to seek it and to rejoice in it as we find it there.

21

The Covenant of Grace in the New Testament

'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ...' (Heb. 1:1–2).

We have dealt so far with the old dispensation of the covenant of grace, and we have seen, you remember, that it is only one covenant. It has been administered or dispensed in two ways—the old and the new dispensation, or, if you prefer another term which is seldom talked of now, 'economy', but both are aspects of the same covenant of grace. It was made and given in full to Abraham, as it is recorded in Genesis 17, but we saw also that it had been guaranteed, and indeed laid down quite clearly in Genesis 3:15.

Furthermore, in looking at the old dispensation of this covenant we also saw that God made other subsidiary covenants with respect to the nation of Israel, but we must be careful to emphasise that none of those further covenants interfere with, deviate from, or even interrupt the covenant of grace given to Abraham. Apart from that covenant there is no hope at all for any of us.

So we come now to the *new* dispensation of the covenant of grace—the word 'new' simply means a new administration of the same covenant—and let us again remind ourselves of God's purpose in this covenant of grace. Through sin and the fall men and women lost their knowledge of God, they were estranged from Him, and God's purpose of redemption was to bring us back to know Him. And as we look at the working out of the new economy of this covenant, we shall see how all this has been done in and through our Lord and [p 236] Saviour Jesus Christ. It is important, first of all, that we should establish clearly that we are still dealing with the same covenant, so let me give you these proofs.

The first, as we have seen, is that there is but one covenant of grace and it is the same covenant in the Old Testament as it is in the New. We notice that the great promise made in the Old Testament: 'I will be their God'—the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 17:8—is mentioned several times in the New Testament. It is one and the same promise. I hope we are clear about this. The greatest thing, let me repeat, that can happen to anybody is to say, 'My God'; nothing is to be compared with this and it is the New Testament term as well as the Old.

The second proof is that you find the same kind of blessing in the Old Testament and in the New. Take Psalm 51 and see what David prays there: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me' (v. 10), and he wants to have the joy of his salvation restored to him (v. 12). We might spend a good deal of time on this point, but we must not, in order to move on. However, sometimes Christian people speak very wrongly of the kind of spiritual experience that was enjoyed by the Old Testament saints. There is a tendency to say that we have this experience but that they had nothing. You would be very surprised to hear that the psalmist is further on spiritually than you are! The type and kind of blessing is exactly the same in both Testaments. Notice that I am referring to the *type* and the *kind* of blessing; there is a difference, and I am coming to it. But the same blessing is in the Old Testament; it is a spiritual blessing and Psalm 51 alone is proof.

The third proof is that the Bible teaches very clearly that there is only one gospel; the gospel is the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New. Again, I am surprised when a preacher does not see it in the Old Testament, for if a man does not see it there, I doubt if he understands the gospel in the New Testament. Take the gospel that was preached by God in the Garden of Eden and also the promise made to Abraham; that is the essence of the gospel. Look at all the types and shadows, look at the various offerings described in Leviticus and elsewhere. Look even at the very furniture of the tabernacle. All these things preach the gospel; they are the types of the gospel and its message.

It is most important that we should grasp that whenever we read the Bible. Listen to the teaching of the prophets, look at the great [p 237] passages in Isaiah and in Jeremiah, and, indeed, in all the prophetic books. The statements of the gospel are the same in both Testaments. Consider, too, the specific

statements made by Paul in Galatians 3:8 where he speaks of God justifying the heathen through faith. He says, 'And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.' Surely this statement in and of itself is enough to show that there is only one gospel—though there are further statements of this in the same chapter.

My fourth proof is that there are a number of direct statements which tell us that the Old Testament saints are now in the kingdom of God in exactly the same way as we are, and share all the blessings of God with us. Take, for example, Luke 13:28: 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.' Then take another illustration, and a most important one. In Romans 11, in his great teaching about the oneness of the people of God, Paul addresses the Gentiles and says,

For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

Verses 16–18

In other words, the Gentiles are put into the same tree; they have been grafted in. It is not a new tree, it is the old one; some branches are taken away, others are put in. It is the one lump and it is the lump that matters; we belong to the lump. Verse 24 in the same chapter states, 'For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?'

So the argument in Romans 11, obviously, is that the old and the new economy all belong to the same tree, it is the one kingdom, the one covenant of grace, one salvation. Then in Galatians 3:14 we read, 'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' There it is once more, and we find it again in verse 29, 'And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the [p 238] promise.' What a tremendously important chapter the third chapter of Galatians is!

But now go on to Ephesians 2:11–13 where we read,

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

The Gentiles are 'made nigh' to the covenant of grace, as Paul puts it in verse 19: 'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God'—the same terms as those made to Abraham.

It is clear and unmistakable and Paul is not content with saying it once, he must repeat it again, in Ephesians 3:6, where he says, 'That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.' Paul always claimed that that was the special message delivered to him, that the Gentiles are to be fellow heirs with those chosen in the nation of Israel; they are joined together in this receiving of the blessings of the kingdom, for the promise is in Christ by the gospel.

Then look, too, at Hebrews 6:12–13—I have just chosen some of the relevant texts—"That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself ...', and verse 18 states, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' This refers to the promise that God made to Abraham, with an oath that accompanied it, as something that is meant to strengthen our faith in the new dispensation, under the new economy.

In Hebrews 11 you will find that the great argument there about faith is a very extended and wonderful exposition of this selfsame point. The writer winds up his argument in verses 39 and 40 by

saying, 'And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.' His point is that both they and we are all going to be made perfect together. A total [p 239] unity is established between these Old Testament saints that we have been reading about and those under the new dispensation. These are explicit and specific statements that all of us, new and old, have the same benefits of salvation.

My fifth proof is that clearly, according to the Scriptures, there is only one way of obtaining salvation and all those blessings, and that is the way of faith. All the Old Testament saints believed explicitly in God, and they exercised faith. In Habakkuk 2:4 we read, 'The just shall live by his faith.' This is the theme and the message of the Old Testament from beginning to end, and, as in Hebrews 11, it is reiterated in the New Testament. Paul, quoting from Habakkuk, says in Romans 1:17, 'The just shall live by faith'; and this is the theme of all his epistles.

But Paul puts it still more clearly and specifically in Romans 4:23–5, where, referring to Abraham, he says, 'Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.' It is clear that we receive justification by faith, exactly as Abraham received it by faith. So once more under this heading, read again from the end of Hebrews 10 through chapter 11 to the beginning of chapter 12. It is the same truth, elaborated at length.

The sixth and last proof is that there is only one mediator under the two dispensations; the same mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ—'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). Take the promise made to Adam about the seed of the woman. God says that salvation is going to happen in that way, and other Scriptures prove that the seed of the woman is no other than the Lord Jesus. He is the mediator in the Old Testament types, all point to Him, the prophecies all point to him, it is always the Lord Himself.

In John 5:39 our Lord Himself says—to me this is still more wonderful—'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.' That is a perfectly clear and explicit statement, but He repeats it in verse 46: 'For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.' He and He alone is the mediator. Listen to Him again in John 8:56: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.'

But let us go further on to Acts 10:43 where Peter is preaching in [p 240] the house of Cornelius: 'To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.' Or again, Paul writes in Romans 3:25, 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.' He alone was and is the only mediator, and He alone can justify what was done under the old dispensation.

The writer of Hebrews tells us, 'And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance' (Heb. 9:15). You notice the argument: those who were under the first testament can only receive the promise of eternal inheritance through Him who is the mediator of the new testament. So there you have six proofs designed to show that there is only one covenant of grace which is the same in the New Testament and the old.

Now, second, we must look at differences in the two dispensations. There are, for instance, certain things which are characteristic of the Old Testament and not of the New. In the Old Testament everything points forward to Christ: the promise looks forward to Him. Another characteristic of the Old Testament is the types and shadows, the foreshadowing adumbrations and hints, which is the form the promise takes under the first dispensation. All these refer to the specific covenant made with Abraham, and are confined to one nation only, to Israel. It is of Israel that God says in Amos 3:3, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' They were His special people.

So let us put all this positively under three new headings. First, we must emphasise the superiority of the new dispensation of the one covenant over the old dispensation of the same covenant. The old was

mediated through the servants, Abraham and Moses, but the new has been mediated through the Son of God. Hebrews 3:5–6 makes this very clear: ‘And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.’

Second, the truth in the old dispensation was partly revealed and partly hidden in the types and shadows. But in the new dispensation it is clearly revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in what He did, taught and accomplished and in the work of the Holy Spirit. The [p 241] mystery that had been concealed is now being shown in the New Testament language.

Then third, in the new dispensation it is not only clearly revealed, but the revelation has been, of course, increased and made more clear by the incarnation of the Lord Himself and the work of the Spirit. You will see this in Hebrews 1:1–3:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:1–3

The revelation is now complete, full and final, it is all in Him. ‘For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily’, says Paul to the Colossians, and, ‘In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:9, 3).

This leads me to the fourth way in which the new dispensation is superior to the old. Under the old dispensation the revelation was largely carnal and material in form, whereas now it is entirely spiritual. You see this in Hebrews 9 where the writer, speaking of ‘the first covenant’ (v. 1), says,

Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Hebrews 9:10–12

Fifth: the old dispensation, as we have seen, was for one people only. Now it is no longer confined, it is for all nations everywhere; it is for the world.

The sixth superiority is that the old dispensation was clearly preparatory, while the new is final. The whole purpose of Hebrews is to demonstrate the finality of the cross. Nothing can be added, nothing needs to be added, for everything is in Him.

Then, seventh, under this new economy the Holy Spirit has been poured out. He had not been poured out under the old dispensation [p 242] but he came upon specific men to enable them to accomplish given tasks. Undoubtedly God’s people were made children of the kingdom because of the work of the Holy Spirit in them and upon them, but He had not been poured out in the way He was at Pentecost. The result is that the blessing is greater in scope under the New Testament. There is greater knowledge, greater understanding, and therefore greater enjoyment of these blessings. Abraham only saw these things ‘afar off’ (Heb. 11:13), though seeing them afar off, he rejoiced (John 8:56). We do not see afar off. We see in the clear fulness of the day, and therefore our joy is greater.

The difference between the old and the new dispensation is the difference between a child and a mature person. This is extremely important and we can look at it like this: the child is as much the child of the parent at the age of one year as at the age of forty years. The relationship does not change, but as the child grows and develops, knows the father better, and enters into an enjoyment of that relationship with a greater degree of understanding than before. That, it seems to me, is the essential difference between these two dispensations of the one covenant of grace. They are children; we are mature. In a way they could not be this greater thing. As Hebrews 11:40 puts it, ‘God has provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.’ But they enjoy it with us; they could not then, they do now.

Having seen, then, something of the superiority of the new dispensation over the old, let us sum it all up, and emphasise it. There is only one covenant of grace and it all centres around the Lord Jesus Christ. The old points forward to Him; the new reveals Him and holds Him forth to us in person. He alone is the fulfilment of everything that is promised from Genesis 3:15 onwards. It is all in Him. The original covenant with regard to redemption was fully and clearly made with Him.

Sometimes you hear people saying that the Bible is not a book, but a library of books. I think I know what they mean but, you know, this sort of thing is wrong, it should never be said. This is really one book. It was written by different men, at different times and in different places, but there is only one book and one message; it is one book with one theme, about one person. Let us follow our fathers, who always talked about 'The Book'. For that is what it is, not a library of books. It is infinitely greater, that is the glory of it, and these different men were used by the Holy Spirit to write this one book, inspired by the Author.

[p 243] This leads me to the last point I would make. It is that while it is true to say there is only one covenant, it is equally true to say that the covenant was originally made between the Father and the Son. Man, having fallen, was not in a position to make a covenant with God, so God made it with His Son, and you and I come into this covenant. His Son is our representative, our mediator, our surety, our guarantor; what He did, He contracted to do. This is perfectly clear.

But what did He contract to do? First, He contracted to keep, to honour and to fulfil the covenant of works which was first broken by Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Second, He contracted to deal with the results of the fall, of the sin and the pollution of man. Obviously we cannot be reconciled to God until that is done.

Third, He guaranteed the performance on our part of all the duties devolved on us in the covenant. God promised, on the condition that certain obligations are fulfilled; the Son contracted to do this so that this covenant might become possible. He guaranteed to do this on our part.

What, then, does all this involve? I will simply give you three headings:

The Son must become the second man, the second Adam, and that is precisely what He is called in 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47. In verse 45, Paul says, 'The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.' Then in verse 47 we read, 'The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.' So He is the 'last' Adam and the 'second' Adam.

Second, He must assume our place; He must take our nature upon Himself—'made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons' (Gal. 4:4-5); and He must present us faultless in the presence of God (Jude 24).

Lastly: He must undertake all our obligations. Obviously, the covenant cannot be carried through by us, so He must undertake all the things that God demands from us.

Our consideration, therefore, of the covenant of grace shows God's plan, purpose, redemption and salvation. It leads us to Christ and from every direction it points to Him. So in our next study, we shall be happy to start upon our consideration of the biblical doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But let me emphasise and impress upon you the importance of **[p 244]** coming to this doctrine about that blessed person in the way we have done. So often you find people beginning with redemption and salvation, rushing immediately to the person of our Lord, not realising that He is the final statement, the truth of this great covenant of grace that God promised in the Garden of Eden and specifically and explicitly stated to Abraham. Does this not cast a great light upon the Old Testament, and show the importance of studying it as well as the New Testament? Let us read it constantly, looking for this covenant of grace as set forth in types and shadows which show that everything is pointing to Him. And I trust that from the blessings we all hope to enjoy, from the realisation of that great covenant, we will all be helped to know the Old Testament in a deeper way than hitherto.

22

The Lord Jesus Christ

At the end of our last study on the doctrine of the great covenant of grace, we ended by emphasising the fact that the covenant, in both its dispensations, always points to the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So we have come now to our consideration of the biblical doctrine concerning Him. While this is obviously not the startingpoint of biblical doctrine, it is certainly its centre. The truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ is the central and the most stupendous fact in the history of redemption. It stands out as the unique event in all history. This truth concerning Him is the biggest and most astounding event of all.

Not only that. We have seen several times already that all history points to Him and to this event. Everything until this points forward, everything that has happened since points backward; it is indeed the turning point of history. That is recognised if only by our calendar. By dividing up history into B.C. and A.D., we pay tribute to the fact that this is undoubtedly the central and the most important event that has ever taken place. So we are forced, for every reason, to consider this doctrine. The Bible itself makes it very plain and clear that the whole essence of the Christian position is dependent upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that is in many ways what you will call the “differentia’ of Christianity. That is the thing that separates the Christian faith from all other religions. Their founders, while important, are not absolutely essential to them. If Buddha had never existed you could still have Buddhism. If Muhammad had never lived you could still have Islam. In other religions it is the teaching that matters and the person is not essential; other persons might have done it equally [p 246] well, and the teaching would remain unaffected.

But that is not the case with the Christian faith. Christianity, as has often been pointed out, is Christ Himself. He is not only central, He is absolutely vital, and therefore we have to see that we are concerned primarily and always with Him. This is something that I shall have to emphasise, of course, time and time again, but the touchstone of anybody’s profession of the Christian faith is, of necessity, such a person’s relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. What proclaims at once that so many people who call themselves Christian are not Christian is that Christ as a person is not at all essential to them.

I am referring here to people who think that a Christian is just a good man or woman. Obviously, you can be a good man without even mentioning the Lord Jesus Christ; but in Christianity He is vital, and if the truth concerning Him is not the truth, the whole position vanishes. Now that is something that one cannot overemphasise. The Christian faith is entirely concerned about Him, who He is, what He has done, and what He has made available and possible for us. And therefore you see the vital importance of our being quite clear in our minds, and absolutely right about all these things.

So I make no apology for putting it as dogmatically and as bluntly as that. To me, those who apologise for saying such a thing are very doubtful Christians, if, indeed, they are Christians at all. There is an intolerance about the Christian faith, expressed like this by the apostle Paul: ‘But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed’ (Gal. 1:8). And we must say the same thing. The truth is clear, it is well defined, it is perfectly definite, and we must be certain, therefore, with regard to what we believe about Him. It is not enough to say, ‘I believe in Christ.’ What do we believe about Christ? What is the teaching about Him? That is what now concerns us.

Now the New Testament itself exhorts us to do this. Why do you think the four Gospels were ever written? Surely there can be no hesitation about answering that question. They were written, God caused men to write them and guided them, through the Spirit as they did so, in order that the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ might be known exactly. All sorts of false stories were current in the first century. There were apocryphal gospels and in them things were being ascribed to Him, and He was reported to have done and said things, which had never happened. So the Gospels were written in order to define the

truth, in order to exclude certain falsehoods, and these [p 247] other facts plainly and clearly. Luke, in the introduction to his Gospel, says that, and you will find that John, at the end of his Gospel, virtually says the same thing: 'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ...' (John 20:31).

But not only do the Gospels tell us that, there are also several sections in the other parts of the New Testament which specifically make the same point. Take the first epistle of John, for example. Why was that written? Well, undoubtedly, for one major reason, and that was to counteract the false teaching that was current, the teaching that denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, that docetism, that false doctrine. And therefore I make no apology not only for calling your attention to this doctrine, but also for defining certain things clearly, and pointing out certain errors which we must avoid.

Let me also warn you, before we go any further, that we are not only dealing with a great and mysterious subject, but with one which makes demands upon us and upon our thought and our attention. But it is essential, and I am anxious that I should deal with the case of anybody who may be thinking, 'Well I really have not much time to be interested in doctrine like this. I am just a simple believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.' If you take that position you are utterly unscriptural! It was because such simple Christians were ready to believe false teachers, and, indeed, did believe them, that so many of the epistles had to be written, with their stern warnings against the terrible danger to the soul of believing these wrong teachings and false ideas concerning our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is not enough to say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ.' The New Testament asks you questions when you say that. It asks, 'What do you believe about Him? Is He man only? Is He God only? Did He really come in the flesh or did He not? What did He do? What is the meaning of His death?' The New Testament is concerned about definitions, and there is nothing, I suggest, that is further removed from its teaching than to say, 'It is all right; so long as you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ it does not matter very much what you say in detail.' The 'detail', as I am hoping to show you, is all-important and absolutely vital.

Furthermore, not only is all that stated in the New Testament, but if you read the subsequent history of the Christian Church, you will find that in the first three or four centuries heresies kept crowding in, and the Church had to meet together to define or to reject certain ideas. So various discussions and councils were held which were very largely engaged in safeguarding this great central doctrine of the [p 248] person of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we must study the doctrines as we value our souls and our salvation, and, we must have a desire to be clear in our conceptions and to be able to give a reason to others for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15).

So then, what are the general statements made by the Bible concerning this person? What does it tell us about Him, as it focuses attention upon Him and compels us to consider Him? First, it says that He is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament prophecies and promises. The great central statement of that is in 2 Corinthians 1:20: 'For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.' They come to a focus, to a point, in Him.

Now I cannot take you through all these promises and prophecies in detail. Let me simply pick out some which clearly are the most important, in order to establish this point. For instance, as we have seen, He is the fulfilment of the promise that was given in the Garden of Eden where God says that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). There is also the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 17 about the seed. Paul refers to this in Galatians 3:16: 'He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.' Again, we have already considered that, so let us look also at some others that we have not considered.

Take, for instance, the promise given in Genesis 49:10: 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.' That is a tremendous promise, and, a most vital statement, and it was literally fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a fact of history that the sceptre and lawgiver did remain with Judah until A.D. 70, and then, with the destruction of Jerusalem, and the casting out of the Jewish nation among the nations, that has no longer been the case. The sceptre of the lawgiver remained there until He came, and then it departed, in that external sense. And likewise this statement: 'and unto him shall the gathering of the

people be' obviously has been fulfilled, and only fulfilled, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Though born 'of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Rom. 1:3), all nations have come to Him. He is the Saviour of the world.

Then look at the prophecy in Daniel 9:24–6:

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up **[p 249]** the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

Again, this is a most vital prophecy. It is always agreed that 'weeks' here mean weeks of years, and, therefore, we are told that there shall be this seventy weeks of years, meaning altogether four hundred and ninety years. First of all we are told that there will be seven weeks of years, forty-nine years before the city would be rebuilt, and so it happened exactly. Then that there will be sixty-two weeks, which comes to four hundred and thirty-four years, after the rebuilding of the city, and then the Messiah will appear. Work it out and you will find that it coincides with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then we are told that there is to be a period of one week, seven years, and that halfway through this He should be cut off, three and a half years. Now there you see again is another great prophecy, not only pointing to Him but obviously clearly fulfilled in Him.

Then take a number of prophecies with regard to His birth. First of all we are told something with regard to the time of His appearance. The verse I have already quoted from Genesis 49 does that, and so do the verses from Daniel 9; and you will find in the prophet Haggai the prophecy, 'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former' (Hag. 2:9), referring to the fact that He did not appear in the former house but would appear in this latter one. And then there is a very vital statement in Malachi 3:1 where the prophet says, 'Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.' That is very significant, and I shall refer to it again later. Furthermore, you remember that in Micah 5:2 we are given an exact prophecy with regard to the place of His birth—that it is to be in Bethlehem. We are told also that He was to be of the tribe of Judah, and of the house and family of David—read Jeremiah 23:5–6, and you will find such a statement.

Then in Isaiah 7:14 we are told that He is to be born of a virgin. Now I am strongly tempted to stop and deal with this. There is **[p 250]** considerable discussion about it because the *Revised Standard Version* has dropped the word 'virgin' and refers to a 'young woman'. However, we must press on, and I do not think I should pause to go into the evidence with regard to that now. But I can assure you that scholarship is quite clear that it is an unjustifiable change, and it really does mean 'virgin'. The essence of the argument is this: the prophet is promising a sign, and a sign is obviously something unusual. Now it is not an unusual thing that a young married woman should have a child. That would not be a sign. But if a virgin has a child it is unusual and it is a sign. So apart from the meaning of words, the whole context makes it perfectly clear that it must be a virgin. Furthermore, if you believe that the Scriptures are inspired—and we agreed about that earlier—then we have no problem because we are told specifically in Matthew 1:22–3 that that verse in Isaiah was indeed a prophecy that our Lord would be born of a virgin. I shall come back to that fact in a subsequent lecture.

Then again Malachi 3:1 says that He would be preceded by a forerunner, and we know that our Lord was preceded by John the Baptist. So all these prophecies, and others, meet in the Lord Jesus Christ, and what is still more interesting is that not only have they been fulfilled in Him, they never can be fulfilled in anybody else. Now this is most important if you are ever discussing this matter with a Jew, because the fact is that the genealogies of the tribes and the families have been lost. This means that in the future it will be impossible to establish that anyone claiming to be the Messiah is the Messiah. No longer can any genealogy be traced in the way that it has been traced in the case of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But now let us look at a number of prophecies which point out the characteristics of the Messiah when He comes. We are told that He is to be a king and the conqueror of a universal empire. Psalm 2:6, Psalm 45 and Isaiah 9:6–7 all make this point. And yet the extraordinary thing is that He is not only to be a king and a conqueror, He is also to be ‘despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief’ (Isa. 53:3). And it was because they failed to realise those two things that His own countrymen did not recognise Him when He came. They were looking for the king only; they had forgotten these other aspects. But the prophecy combines the two and our Lord does also.

Prophecy also tells us that He is to be ‘a light to lighten the Gentiles’, a most astounding thing to have said to the Jews. But it was said [p 251] many times in the prophecy of Isaiah, in chapters 42:6 and 60:3, and in other places. We are also told in Isaiah 53 that His death is to be vicarious; and when we come to look at the doctrine of the atonement, we shall see that it was vicarious and substitutionary. We are told that He will enter into the city of Jerusalem riding on an ass (Zech. 9:9), and you remember how that was fulfilled. We are told that He is to be sold for thirty pieces of silver, and that with His price a potter’s field will be purchased (Zech. 11:12–13). We are told that lots would be cast for His garments (Ps. 22:18). We are told that He will be given vinegar to drink in his sorrow (Ps. 69:21). We are even told that He will utter certain words on the cross, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Ps. 22:1). Psalm 22:6 says that His hands and feet will be pierced, and Zechariah 12:10 adds, ‘... they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn ...’ And we are told in Isaiah 53:9 that He will make His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death and we know that He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea.

Then there is a whole group of prophecies concerning His work—for instance, His work as a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:18 tells us, ‘I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee’—that was said to Moses. And from there onwards the children of Israel were looking for that prophet, and the Jews often asked whether Christ was the one. We are told that He is also to be a priest. You will find that in Isaiah 53:10 and in Daniel 9:24. And we are told that He is to be a king. Read the great prophecy in Daniel 2:44–5. The stone ‘cut out of the mountain without hands’ that smashes every other kingdom and that conquers and fills the whole world is a prophecy of our Lord who would one day come as a king. And so His work is prophesied—Prophet, Priest and King.

So the first great statement of the Bible concerning Him is that the prophecies point to Him, and that He is their fulfilment. But, second, the Bible also exhorts us to consider Him, because He is the only one by whom we can be reconciled to God, and by whom we can know God. We read in Hebrews 12:24 that He is ‘the mediator of the new covenant’. He said Himself, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me’ (John 14:6). Anyone who says a thing like that must be looked at and considered. If we value our salvation and want to know God we must listen to such a person. Then after His resurrection He said, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and [p 252] that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations ...’ (Luke 24:46–47). Nothing could be clearer than that. And then Peter, when he was on trial, claimed for Him, ‘Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). And there is the statement made by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:5: ‘For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.’ That, then, is the claim that is made for Him everywhere: that it is in Him, and in Him alone, that we know God and are reconciled to God, and in Him alone, therefore, can we be saved.

The third great reason which the Bible gives us for considering Him is that He holds all things in His hands. All power has been given to Him in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18). He has all might and dominion and authority. In Revelation 5 we are told that He is the only one who can control and open the seals. There was no one strong enough to break the seals of the book of history except the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb that once was slain. But He can do so, and He does so. In 1 Corinthians 15:25 we are told that He must reign till God has put all His enemies under His feet; again, in Ephesians 1:22–3 we are told specifically that ‘God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.’ It is a staggering and a stupendous thought that all history is in the hands of this person. Everything that happens in this world is under His

control—everything without exception. He is the Lord of glory and the Lord of history, and He sits at God's right hand in the authority and the glory of God.

And then the final reason which the Bible gives us for considering Him is that He is the one by whom the world is going to be judged, and this is where we are all vitally concerned. He claimed this Himself. In John 5:27 He says, '[The Father] hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.' Paul in preaching to the learned Athenians says, God 'hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead' (Acts 17:31). The Father has committed all judgment unto Him. Read the book of Revelation; you see the same thing again portrayed in its symbols and in the wealth of its imagery. The Lord of history will be the Judge of the whole world.

Those, then, are the general reasons given by the Bible why all people should consider Him. Consider Jesus! Look at this person! So **[p 253]** we accept the invitation. What else does the Bible tell us about Him? Now here we come to the first subdivision of the biblical doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: it is what is commonly called the *doctrine of the incarnation*. Here, obviously, is a wonderful subject. Let me first lay down some of the general principles.

Here we come to the greatest mystery of all time, the mystery in which we are told that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us' (John 1:14).

The apostle Paul states the same truth in 1 Timothy 3:16 in these great words: 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.' Now in the doctrine of the incarnation we are concerned, of course, with the first part of that statement: 'Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh ...' So what does this mean? Let me just give you a definition at this point and then in our next study we shall consider it in greater detail. But let us be clear about the comprehensive statement; it is that the eternal Son of God has taken on Him, or has taken unto Himself, human nature.

Notice what I am saying. I am not saying that when Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem a new personality came into being. That is not true. That is rank heresy. The doctrine of the incarnation says that the eternal second Person in the blessed Trinity entered into time and into the world, took unto Himself human nature, was born as a babe, lived a life as a man, and appeared in 'the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3). Now there I am making the most vital statement of all. I hope to go on to break it up, to show you the importance of making this statement, and safeguarding it against various errors. But the essence of the statement is that the one who was born was not coming into being, was not starting His existence as a person. No! It was this eternal Person, the Son of God, who now assumed this form and entered the life of man in the world.

There are numerous great statements in the Scriptures which put it like that, and which emphasise that. The most notable, of course, which we shall have to consider in greater detail later, is that great passage in Philippians 2:6–8; but there are many prophecies in the Old Testament which put it in the same way. Malachi says, 'But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings' (Mal. 4:2); and we have considered all those other statements which talk about His coming or His appearing. It did not **[p 254]** start at Bethlehem. He came from eternity, from the bosom of the blessed God Himself, and entered into life and into time and into history in that particular form.

We must leave it at that point now. But you notice the progression of ideas, the progression of our thoughts? Something must be done by God before man can be saved. We have the assurance in the covenant that it will be done and the covenant points to this person. He is at the centre of the Bible. It asks us to consider Him for the reasons I have given you. And as we come to look more closely, we shall see what a glorious and astounding truth it is and why it had to happen in the way it did. Then we shall go on to consider the details, which will involve a consideration of the doctrine of the virgin birth. After that, we must consider what we are told about His deity and His humanity, and how these two are reconciled, or exist together, in the one person. And so we shall be plunging right into the midst of this most wonderful and most glorious doctrine concerning the mystery and the marvel of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

23

The Incarnation

We have now begun to consider together the biblical doctrine of the person of Christ. That, as you notice, I put under the general heading of the doctrine of redemption, and I think one must do so. We have looked at the person of our Lord, in dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity, but specifically, when considering the doctrine of redemption, we must, of course, concentrate upon the person and the work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And we have seen that when we do come to consider Him, we are at once confronted by the first particular doctrine with respect to Him, and that is the doctrine of the incarnation. We have made the general statement that the eternal Son of God, the second Person in the blessed Holy Trinity, took unto Himself human nature. We said that this did not mean that a new personality came into being, but that God the eternal Son became incarnate. We saw, too, that it was necessary to take that statement, that general statement, and to break it up, because it is something that has been so frequently misunderstood; and as our salvation and our eternal destiny depend upon our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, what can be more important than that we should be clear and certain in our ideas and in our thoughts concerning Him.

Furthermore, of course, Church history shows very clearly—indeed, before you come to Church history, the New Testament itself shows us—that the devil is concerned about nothing more than to lead people astray with regard to the person and the work of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is why we can take no risks, and we cannot content ourselves with a mere general statement of the doctrine of the incarnation. We must break it up and analyse it; **[p 256]** we must show what it does and what it does not say, lest any of us should inadvertently fall into error.

I propose, therefore, to make the following series of statements. The first is this: the doctrine of the person of our Lord, and the doctrine of the incarnation in particular, show us again the all importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Now we considered that doctrine earlier and as we come to consider it now, we shall see why it was so important for us to have considered it then. The whole Christian position, in a sense, depends upon the doctrine of the blessed Holy Trinity. If we do not believe in that we cannot be Christian; it is impossible. Someone who does not believe in the Trinity cannot be a Christian because he cannot believe in the doctrine of redemption. Therefore as we talk about the person of the Son we see how important it is always to realise that God exists in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The second statement is that the doctrine of the incarnation asserts not that the eternal triune God became flesh, but that the second Person in the triune God became flesh. The Scripture puts it like this: ‘The Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14). Now this is surely something which we must emphasise. We often speak rather loosely, I am afraid, in talking about the incarnation, and many of our hymns tend to do the same thing. But to me it seems always to be wise not to say that God became man. That is a loose statement which we had better not use. We often do say that, but believing as we do in the Persons of the Trinity, what we should say is that the second Person in the Trinity was made flesh and appeared as man. If we merely say, ‘God became man’, then we may be saying something that is quite wrong, and if people believe something wrong as the result of our statement, we cannot really blame them. We must be particular and we must be specific and we should always be careful what we say.

The third statement is that the doctrine of the incarnation does not say that it was merely an appearance or a form that was taken on by the second Person in the Trinity, but that it was indeed a true incarnation; He did come in the flesh. I emphasise that because in the very early years of the Christian Church there were people who went into errors and into heresy about this. The so-called Gnostics said that our Lord had the mere appearance of flesh; He had a phantom body, an appearance of a body. But the doctrine of the incarnation does not say that. It says it was not an appearance, it was real; it was a true incarnation; the *Word was made flesh* and dwelt among us.

[p 257] Point number four is again a negative one. The doctrine of the incarnation does not say that it was merely the divine nature that somehow became united with human nature and so formed a person. It is not that; it was the second Person Himself, the Person, who became flesh. Now there were many in the early ages of the Church, and they have persisted throughout the centuries, who have not understood that. Their view of Jesus Christ is of divine nature and human nature forming a new person. That is not the truth. It was the second, eternal Person in the Trinity who took human nature. You see the significance of that? We have already seen, you remember, that the doctrine of the incarnation does not teach the creation of a new person. It teaches that He took on to Himself flesh and appeared in this world in the likeness of man—not a new person, but this eternal Person.

So the next point, then, is that the doctrine of the incarnation does not teach, neither does it involve the idea, that a change took place in the personality of the Son of God. There was a change in the form in which He appeared, there was a change in the state in which He manifested Himself, but there was no change in His personality, He is the same Person always. In the womb of the virgin Mary, and lying as a helpless babe in the manger, He is still the second Person in the Holy Trinity.

The next definition I put like this: we must never so state the doctrine of the incarnation as to give the impression, therefore, that we say that the Son of God was changed into a man. That is why that phrase about God becoming man is misleading. We have seen that John 1:14 says, 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' and that very phrase 'was made' has often caused people to think that the Son of God was changed into a man. This is partly due to the fact that it is not really the best translation. Instead of saying, 'The Word was made flesh,' what we really mean is that He *became* flesh, or that He *took on* flesh. The idea of 'making' gives the impression of being 'changed into', but that is wrong.

In other words, the way in which the Scripture generally puts it is this: in Romans 8:3 we are told that He came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. That is better. Or take it as it is put in 1 John 4:2: 'Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.' Jesus Christ has not been changed into a man; it is this eternal Person who has come in the flesh. That is the right way to put it.

[p 258] The next principle is that our Lord did not merely take the *appearance* of human nature; it was true human nature. Let me explain. We have accounts in the Old Testament of angels appearing to various people and we are told that they appeared in human form. Now when we say that the angels appeared in that way, we are not talking about an incarnation, but an appearance. The angels did not change their nature, they did not add to it in any way, they just took on that form. Indeed, we saw earlier, you remember, that our Lord Himself appeared in that way; we spoke about the Angel of the Covenant. The Angel of the Covenant in the Old Testament is undoubtedly the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and He appeared more than once to various people in the form of a man. That is what we call a *theophany*. Now theophany is entirely different from incarnation. Theophany means that an angelic or a divine person appears in this form for the time being, but the doctrine of the incarnation asserts that the Lord Jesus Christ has taken on human nature itself—not its appearance but real human nature.

There are many statements which say that; let me give you two. Hebrews 2:14: 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.' He really did take unto Himself human nature. 'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels,' says verse 16 of that same chapter, but He 'took on him the seed of Abraham.' That is what He has taken on. Take also 2 John 7 where we read that 'Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.' There is no doubt at all but that John wrote his three epistles in order to counter the dangerous heresy which had arisen, and which denied that He really had come in the flesh, asserting that it was a mere appearance. Some said that the Messiah entered into this man Jesus at His baptism and left Him on the cross, while others said that the whole thing was a phantom. Now the New Testament—John especially in his epistles—not only denies that, but denounces it as being the most dangerous error, the very lie of the antichrist, and therefore we must be certain that we are clear about these things.

That brings me to the next statement. The doctrine of the incarnation asserts that our Lord took unto Himself a full human nature. It was not merely partial, it was complete. He did not merely take a body to

Himself. There have been people throughout the centuries who have taught that; they say that the Son of God only took on a human body. That is wrong. There are others who say that He took [p 259] on a body and a kind of animal soul, but that the spiritual part of the soul was provided by the eternal Person. That is wrong also. The doctrine of the incarnation teaches that He took on Him complete human nature, body and soul, including spirit, that He was truly man. I shall have to emphasise this again, but it has to be stressed at this point.

And my last point under this general heading is that He took on this complete human nature from the Virgin Mary. That means that we must not say that a new human nature was created for Him. Some people have taught that God created a new human nature for His Son, and that this human nature merely passed, as it were, through Mary. That is wrong. The doctrine states that He derived His human nature from His mother, the Virgin Mary. It was not a new creation. He did not bring His human nature with Him. He received it from her. And therefore, as the Scripture often emphasises, He is truly of the seed of Abraham and of the seed of David. Here it is in Matthew 1:1: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.' Now if a special human nature had been created for Him, He would not have been the son of David nor the son of Abraham. But He was both, because His human nature came from His mother, the Virgin Mary. Again, let me emphasise that what He had was not a human nature that was merely like ours but not really a part of ours, not organically related to us. He actually did receive our nature. Go back again to those verses in Hebrews 2:14–18. He really does belong, therefore, to the human race, He is one with us.

Now I must not stop with this, tempted as I am to do so. I am concerned about it because the doctrine of our redemption ultimately depends upon it. If He had not taken our human nature, He could not have saved us. As Hebrews 2 argues so clearly, because we are partakers of this flesh and blood, he had to partake of the same. It was the only way in which He could save us. So we cannot afford to take any risks about this doctrine. We cannot afford to say, 'It does not matter what your precise statement is.' That is to be utterly unscriptural. We must be precise and clear and certain and definite in all our statements, otherwise, without knowing it, we may make the doctrine of our own redemption quite impossible.

So, having established that, we now return to the mystery of the incarnation, and at once the question arises: How did all this come to pass? How did this extraordinary thing become actual? And that, of [p 260] course, leads us immediately to the doctrine of the virgin birth. I do trust that we are all observing the order in which we are taking these truths. I conceive it to be my main function in these addresses to show you that order as it is worked out in the Scriptures; the details, the facts, you can derive from the Scriptures themselves.

And so by logical inevitability we arrive at the doctrine of the virgin birth. What is this? Well, the Apostles' Creed, the first creed of all, the first great confession, puts it like this: 'He was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.' Now here is, again, one of those great subjects which is full of mystery; it is a doctrine that has been much debated and argued about and misunderstood and frequently denied; and people seem to find great difficulty with it.

Therefore, as we approach it, there is nothing, it seems to me, more important than that we should bear in mind everything we have considered in all our previous lectures. If you have agreed with me in what I have been saying in them, you should have no difficulty about the doctrine of the virgin birth. If you really have agreed about the doctrine of God and the doctrine of the Trinity; if you really have believed what I have said about the doctrine of the Scriptures as being the infallible Word of God inbreathed by the Holy Spirit and not merely human ideas; if you have agreed with all I have said about miracles and the supernatural, and how all this is inevitable when God acts and deals with this world, then, I repeat, there really should be no difficulty about the doctrine of the virgin birth.

And it is, of course, a fact that the people who have difficulty with this doctrine are the very people who have difficulty with the doctrine of Scripture and with the doctrine of miracles. They are in trouble about the doctrine of the incarnation because they set up their puny minds as the ultimate test of all truth, and because when they cannot understand a thing they will not believe it.

But surely we must be in agreement that in all these matters we are outside the realm of natural human reason and understanding. We started at the very beginning with the whole concept and category of revelation. We know nothing apart from that. I do not put forward theories and philosophies; I start on this premise—that what I am announcing is what God has done, what God has revealed. I know nothing apart from what I find in the Bible. I am entirely shut up to it; I am utterly dependent upon it. And therefore it is my business to come to it as a little child. ‘The world by wisdom knew not God’ (1 Cor. 1:21); so, if that was true and is still true, then I must depend [p 261] upon this book, I must accept its authority, I must receive its statements, even though my little mind cannot always understand them. That is the frame of mind and the appropriate attitude to adopt as we come to consider this extraordinary and amazing and yet glorious doctrine of the virgin birth.

What, then, do the Scriptures teach? What are we told? There are two portions of Scripture which are the basis of the doctrine of the virgin birth. I always feel one should start with the statement in Luke 1:26–38, because it gives us the announcement to Mary of the great thing itself. Notice the details in connection with that announcement; notice the facts, and how the angel came. You see, if you have not agreed with my account of the doctrine of angels, you are already in trouble; but if you accept that, then there is no difficulty about this at all, it is what we would expect.

Notice, too, what we are told about Mary’s surprise, which of course was quite natural. It is obvious, is it not, from her very surprise, that she understood the significance of what the angel said to her. Here was an unmarried woman, a virgin, to whom this announcement was made, and at once she saw the difficulty, and did not hesitate to express it. How could she be the mother of a child when she had never known a man? And the angel gave her the explanation. He announced to her that this was something that was going to be done by the Holy Spirit Himself. He told her that she would be ‘overshadowed’ by the Almighty: ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God’ (v. 35). ‘Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary’, says the Apostles’ Creed.

But then the account in the first chapter of Matthew, from verses 18–25, is equally important, and, surely, equally interesting, because there we are told what happened to Joseph. Joseph discovered that this virgin to whom he was betrothed was with child. He was confused and unhappy. He was a good man, a righteous and a loving man. He decided he would not make a public example of Mary, but he must of necessity put her away or he would not be keeping the law, so he was pondering about all this and about how he could do it, when the angel appeared to him in a dream. And what the angel did, of course, was explain to Joseph what was happening: ‘Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost’ (v. 20). He was given exactly [p 262] the same explanation; and as we read the story I am afraid we often forget to observe the extraordinary faith of Joseph. He believed the angel’s message; he accepted it without any demur, without any hesitation, and he proceeded to act upon it.

That is what we are told in the record, and it teaches us that the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ as a man is entirely the work of God. The doctrine of the virgin birth must always be considered first and foremost in a negative way, and what it says negatively is that He had no earthly father. He was not born of the will of man, nor of the will or the energy of the flesh. Let me put it still more strongly. The male human being did not enter into the question of His conception.

Now that is a very remarkable thing because, as we have seen already in working with the great doctrines at the beginning of the book of Genesis, the glory of God, as it were, is in the man, and the woman is under the man. You remember how we worked that out. But here the man is put on one side; he has nothing to do with it. You notice that the very word, the promise that was given by God to the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden was this: ‘And I will put enmity between thee and *the woman*, and between thy seed and *her seed*; it shall bruise thy head’ (Gen. 3:15). And so it proved. The man had nothing to do with it—the very one whom God had appointed lord of creation, and to whom he gave power over the woman, and to whom the woman is subject by God’s own desire and ordination, as the result of creation and especially as the result of the fall. In spite of all that, when it came to the question of the incarnation, the male was put on one side and God used the woman only.

Surely, then, the significance and importance of that must be obvious to all—it is to emphasise again the total inability of man. Man, in the person of Joseph, is seen in his utter failure and incapacity. God took hold of human nature at its weakest, as it were, in order to produce out of it this human nature for His own Son. I have come across a very beautiful phrase which I think will help you to remember this: ‘As the Lord’s divine nature had no mother, so His human nature had no father.’ I think that puts it very well. It was entirely the work of God. He took on Him human nature from Mary, but it was done through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

‘What happened?’ asks someone. I cannot answer; no one can answer. That is the great mystery. But what we know is that the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and out of Mary, out of a cell in her body, the human nature of our Lord was made. We cannot go [p 263] further. It is a great mystery. But we have to go as far as that. It was the operation of the Holy Spirit, and it was obviously done in such a way that this human nature that the Son took unto Himself was sinless—you notice that the angel spoke to Mary of ‘that holy thing [that sinless, pure thing] which shall be born of thee ...’ (Luke 1:35). This does not mean that Mary herself was made sinless and holy. It does not even of necessity imply that any part of Mary was. All we know is that something was taken, was cleansed and rendered free from all pollution so that His human nature was sinless and entirely free from all the effects and results of the fall. Such was the effect of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon her.

What, then, of this doctrine? What have we to say about it in general, especially having in mind those who find it difficult? I would suggest once more that it is a doctrine which is quite inevitable if you really do believe the doctrine of the incarnation. If you really do believe that the babe in the manger in Bethlehem is the second Person in the Trinity—and that is the truth—then I cannot see that there is any difficulty about this doctrine of the virgin birth. Indeed, I would find myself in much greater difficulty if I did not have the doctrine of the virgin birth to believe. You see, the fact of the incarnation is so unusual, so exceptional, so miraculous and mysterious, that I would expect everything about Him to be the same; and so it proved to be. To put it another way: the virgin birth was the sign of the mystery of the incarnation. It was a kind of symbol of that mystery; there it was in a tangible form—this virgin birth.

Everything about our Lord is mysterious. His coming into the world was mysterious. His going out of it was mysterious. He did not enter into life like anybody else; He did not go out of it like anybody else. The resurrection was as unique as the virgin birth. It had never happened to anybody before. He is the ‘first begotten of the dead’ (Rev. 1:5); ‘the firstborn among many brethren’ (Rom. 8:29). The resurrection was equally startling. So I would say to anybody who stumbles at the virgin birth: Do you stumble in the same way at the resurrection? You see, if we start with the doctrine of the incarnation and realise what we are saying, if we realise that we are really speaking about the second Person in the Trinity, then surely you would expect His birth to be entirely unusual and exceptional? And so it was. He was exceptional from beginning to end.

But let me try to help you by putting it like this: If you do not believe in the doctrine of the virgin birth, how do you account for his [p 264] sinlessness? Are we not entitled to put it like this: If He had been born in the ordinary way, of a father and a mother, then surely He would have been like every other person, He would have been in direct sequence, in the direct line, from Adam, and therefore it would be true to say of Him also ‘as in Adam all die’ (1 Cor. 15:22). He would have died in Adam, and He would have been guilty of original sin and of original guilt.

But the doctrine of the incarnation at once tells us that that is not what happened. A person, I repeat, did not come into being there. This person was the eternal Person, the second Person in the Trinity. When a husband and a wife come together and a child is born a new person, a new personality, comes into being. That did not happen in the incarnation. But given a father and a mother, you would have a person in the direct line from Adam and therefore sinful and fallen. The only way to have prevented that would be to say that some similar kind of operation to that performed by the Holy Spirit on Mary, should also have had to be performed on Joseph.

But surely that does not help us. If you are already in difficulties about this miraculous operation on Mary, then you are doubting it and it is still more impossible. No, if we really took a firm hold of the

doctrine of the incarnation itself, that this blessed Person took unto Himself human nature that had to be sinless because He could not unite with anything that was sinful, then there was only one way for it, and that is that He had to be born not in the ordinary way of generation, but in this special way.

You will notice that the whole doctrine is surrounded by pitfalls and difficulties because when I put it like that, I am sure that many will think, 'Ah, I see! God created a special human nature for Him, did He?' No, He did not! I have already denounced that as heresy. He got His human nature from Mary, but it was acted upon by the Holy Spirit in such a way that it was rendered wholly free from sin and from all pollution.

And so we stand before Him. We stand before this mystery of godliness, God in the flesh! The strangest, the most amazing thing that has ever happened—indeed, I do not hesitate to say, the supreme act of God. It is so supreme that I expect it to be unusual in every respect, and I find the Scriptures tell me that it was. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, He was born of a virgin named Mary. Man was entirely excluded; the male did not come in. Joseph is there ever to remind us of that. It was entirely the work of God. And let us realise and **[p 265]** remember that it all happened so that we might be saved, that our sins might be forgiven. The Son of God became man that the children of men might become children of God.

24

Evidence for the Deity and Humanity of Christ

In our consideration of the doctrine of the virgin birth, we were looking at this babe in Bethlehem, of whom we assert that He is God the eternal Son. That obviously means that we must look a little more closely at what the Bible tells us about this person who came into the world as a baby, grew into a boy, developed into manhood, and set out on His public ministry. It is of vital importance that we should be clear with regard to the doctrine concerning Him; we have already adduced evidence to show the importance of that. So before we make any attempt to understand what the Bible teaches us about this great mystery, we must look at the evidence with which it presents us in order that we may arrive at an adequate doctrine of His person.

Now we find at once that the Bible tells us two main things. The first is that it makes many claims to the effect that He is divine; it asserts and teaches His divinity or, still more accurately, His deity. The evidence for this is voluminous and it could occupy a great deal of time, so we must just look at some brief headings at this point. You can look at the evidence and check it for yourselves at leisure; I simply want to classify it in order to make your study a little more easy.

The first evidence is that certain divine names are ascribed to Him. Indeed, altogether some sixteen names are ascribed to Him, each of which clearly implies His deity. Here are some of them. He is described as the 'Son of God' forty times; He is referred to as 'his Son' (God's Son); God refers to Him audibly as 'my Son'. So there in various forms is that title 'Son', 'Son of God'.

Then five times He is also referred to as the 'only begotten Son of [p 267] God'. You find it in John 1:18—'the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father'—and there are many others: a notable one is the parable of the wicked husbandman, when God says, 'They will reverence my son' (Matt. 21:37). The teaching there is perfectly clear, the words are uttered by our Lord Himself.

He is described in Revelation 1:17 as 'the first and the last', and in verse 11 of the same chapter as the 'Alpha and Omega', the beginning and the end. These are obviously terms of deity; there is nothing before the beginning and nothing after the end. Then Peter, preaching in Jerusalem—you will find it recorded in Acts 3:14—refers to Him as the 'Holy One': 'But ye denied the Holy One and the Just.' Again, these are terms of deity.

Take also that great term 'the Lord' which is used of Him several hundred times in the New Testament. That word is equivalent to the Old Testament term 'Jehovah', which we have already considered together, one of the highest titles ascribed to God. Another term used for Him is 'the Lord of glory'. You will find that in 1 Corinthians 2:8: 'Had they known it,' says Paul, 'they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' It is a most exalted term.

Then He is actually referred to as 'God'; Thomas says, 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28). He is also described as 'Emmanuel ... God with us' in Matthew 1:23; and there is a most remarkable statement in Titus 2:13 where He is referred to as our 'great God and Saviour Jesus Christ'. Again, another equally remarkable ascription is found in Romans 9:5: 'Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.'¹

So there you have a number of names which are ascribed to Him, all of which are divine names.

But, second, the Bible also ascribes to Him certain divine attributes. You remember that when we were dealing with the doctrine of God we considered the divine attributes. Now you will find that those very attributes are also ascribed to our Lord. For instance, omnipotence: Hebrews 1:3 says that He upholds 'all things by the word of his power'—no stronger statement than that is possible—and that 'all things are put under him' (1 Cor. 15:27). There are others also which you can find for yourself.

¹ For a full discussion of this text by Dr Lloyd-Jones see *God's Sovereign Purpose*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1991.

Then omniscience is attributed to Him: in Matthew 11:27 we read, [p 268] ‘No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.’ In John 2:24–5 you will find the same claim: ‘he knew what was in man’. It was not necessary for anybody to tell Him.

Then in a very extraordinary way omnipresence is attributed to Him also. In Matthew 18:20 it says, ‘For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I ...’ In Matthew 28:20 He says, ‘And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end ...’ And in John 3:13 there is a very striking statement: ‘No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.’ He said those words while He was on earth—the Son of man who is ‘in heaven’. And, indeed, the apostle Paul writes, He ‘filleth all in all’ (Eph. 1:23)—again, a very comprehensive statement.

Another divine attribute is His eternity: ‘In the beginning was the Word’ (John 1:1). We also have statements about His immutability: He cannot change. Hebrews 13:8 tells us, ‘Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.’ Then, of course, the Bible asserts His pre-existence. Colossians 1:17 tells us, ‘And he is before all things ...’ In John 17:5 He prays, ‘And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.’ And again, in the great passage in Philippians 2:6 Paul asserts that He was in the ‘form’ of God before His incarnation.

Finally, to sum it all up, we have another comprehensive statement of His deity in Colossians 2:9 where Paul says, ‘For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.’

Then, third, we go on to consider certain divine offices which He is said to hold and to fill. First of all creation: ‘All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made’ (John 1:3). You find the same thing repeated in Colossians 1:16, and again in Hebrews 1:10. But we are also told that He preserves everything. Hebrews 1:3 refers to Him ‘upholding all things by the word of his power’. And again in Colossians 1:17 you will find that ‘by him all things consist’.

Notice also that He did not hesitate to claim the power to forgive sins. He said to the paralysed man, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee’ (Mark 2:5). He also claimed power to raise the dead; you will find that mentioned several times in John 6:39–44, ‘I will raise him up,’ he said, ‘at the last day.’ The apostle Paul claims that He also has power to transform our bodies: ‘Who shall change our vile body [or this body of our [p 269] humiliation], that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself’ (Phil. 3:21).

Judgment, too, is committed to Him; read John 5:22–3: ‘For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.’ Again, Paul makes that claim in Acts 17:31, and you also find it in 2 Timothy 4:1: ‘The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead.’ So the power of judgment is given to Him, and also the power of bestowing eternal life: ‘And I give unto them eternal life’ (John 10:28). John 17:2 says the same thing: ‘... that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him’.

The fourth piece of evidence for His deity is this: statements in the Old Testament which are made distinctly of Jehovah are, in the New Testament, ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ and are definitions of Him. I shall not give you the words in full but I will give you the texts so that you can look them up for yourself: Psalm 102:24–7 (compare Hebrews 1:10–12); Isaiah 40:3–4 (compare Matthew 3:3; Luke 1:76); Isaiah 6:1, 3, 10 (compare John 12:37–8); Isaiah 8:13–14 (compare 1 Peter 2:7–8).

Now we can sum up all that by putting it like this: in the Old Testament the term ‘Lord’ is always used of God, except when the context makes it perfectly clear that it is used of a man in the sense of ‘Sir’. In exactly the same way when the term ‘Lord’ is used in the New Testament, it is always used of the lordship of Jesus Christ—that is, His deity—except when the context makes it quite plain that ‘Sir’ is intended. So we have this tremendous fact that these specific terms which are used directly of Jehovah are also used of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the fifth piece of evidence is the way in which the names of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are coupled together. There are several examples of this. Christ Himself said, ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’ (Matt. 28:19). Romans 1:7 speaks of ‘God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ’. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, in the so-

called 'apostolic benediction', we read, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.' 1 Thessalonians 3:11 says, 'Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.' And, indeed, you will find it in James 1:1, 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ ...' [p 270]

That brings us to the sixth bit of evidence: divine worship is ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ. He accepted such worship from men and women when He was on earth. You will find that in Matthew 28:9 and in Luke 24:52. But you get it also by way of exhortation in 1 Corinthians 1:2 where Paul refers to 'all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...' That is worship. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 Paul tells us, 'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice...'—it is the Lord Jesus Christ, that is quite clear from the context. In Acts 7:59 we read of Stephen, as he was being stoned: 'And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Indeed, our Lord Himself already prepared us for all this when He said, 'That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him' (John 5:23). There are other instances, also, of worship ascribed to Him, and the claim in Philippians 2:10 is that a time is coming when 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.'

And that brings me to the seventh point, which is our Lord's own self-consciousness and His own specific claims to deity. I shall simply give you some of the references which I regard as most important, though there are many others. The first is found in Luke 2, in the incident described in verses 41-52, when He said that He must be about His Father's business or, 'about the things of my Father'—a most remarkable claim made when he was but a twelve-year-old boy. You get exactly the same thing at His baptism. When He went to John to be baptised, John remonstrated with Him and said, 'I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?' Now our Lord did not reject that statement, but simply replied, 'Suffer it to be so now' (Matt. 3:14-15). In other words, He accepted John's words, and thereby acknowledged His superiority to John. And in this connection we notice again the voice from heaven that attested His deity (v. 17).

Then you find much the same kind of thing in the account of His temptation. The devil tempted Him like this each time—'If thou be the Son of God ...'—and He never said He was not. He accepted the devil's statement and proved to Him that He is the Son of God. Thus by accepting the statement He asserted and claimed His own deity. And He did so, of course, in many other ways. In the calling of the Twelve, for instance, He was clearly asserting it, and in giving power to them, in giving them the message and the power to cast out devils, [p 271] He was, again, claiming this uniqueness. And you also get it in the fact that He specifically said of believers in Him that, 'In my name shall they cast out devils' (Mark 16:17).

We find, too, that He made this unique claim of deity for Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. He did it by contrasting what they had heard from 'them of old time' with what He Himself said, (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33). And then there is the specific claim in John 8:58: 'Before Abraham was, I am.' Once more also I would refer you to that statement in Matthew 11:27 where He claimed unique knowledge of the Father. But in many ways the most important section of Scripture under this heading is to be found in John chapters 14-17. As you study them at your leisure, notice His claim to and His consciousness of His unique deity.

Then, the eighth piece of evidence is the virgin birth. This, of course, and everything that the Scriptures teach us about it, is again a proof of His deity. And to bring it all to its climax, the apostle Paul teaches us in Romans 1:4 that ultimately what proves and declares the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Son of God is His resurrection: 'declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.'

There, then, we have looked in general at the great scriptural evidence for His deity. As I have said, it is voluminous, but we have taken a kind of synoptic view of it, and those are the main headings into which it can be classified.

But, of course, we must also move on to the second great claim, and see that the Scriptures also, equally definitely, teach His humanity. And we cannot arrive at an adequate doctrine of the person without again looking carefully at the evidence which is provided in the Scriptures for His humanity. Now we have

already considered the first piece of evidence here; it, again, is the virgin birth, and all the arguments in connection with it. All those again establish the fact of His humanity—all the arguments about the precise nature of the doctrine of the incarnation, that it was not a phantom body, and so on, but that He really did take on human nature, that He was truly the son of the Virgin Mary, and that it was not an appearance but a fact; all those are our first proof.

The second, again, is provided by names. Take, for instance, what you read in 1 Timothy 2:5: 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' He is described as 'the man'. And you notice—you cannot have read the Gospels without [p 272] noticing—the frequency with which the term 'the Son of man' is used about Him. It is used over eighty times! Now the Son of man, of course, is a very special term, and it has a very special significance. At this point, I am simply concerned to remind you, and to emphasise, that He is described in this way. That clearly is an indication of His humanity.

Then the third thing that the Scriptures make abundantly plain and clear is that He had a typical human, physical nature. Take that statement in John 1:14: 'The Word was made flesh', or 'became flesh'. Consider also the statements in Hebrews 2 that we considered in the last lecture, particularly verse 14, where we are told that because the children are partakers of flesh and blood 'he also himself likewise took part of the same'. Then another very striking bit of evidence under this heading is that He obviously looked like a man. Not only that, we also have evidence to prove that He looked like a typical Jew. You remember what we are told of the incident of the woman of Samaria meeting our Lord at the well, and how she expressed her astonishment that He should speak to her: 'How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?' (John 4:9). She had no idea who He was, but when He spoke to her she at once recognised that He was a Jew.

Then, under this same heading of His physical frame, the Scriptures teach us that He still had this human body even after His resurrection. When He appeared to the disciples, when Thomas was present in the room and He was anxious to prove to Thomas that He was the same person, He said, 'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing' (John 20:27). But we find a still more specific statement in Luke 24:39 where He told the disciples that He was not a spirit: 'For,' He said, 'a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.' So He still had a true human body, even after His resurrection.

Indeed, I can go beyond that: there is evidence in the Scripture to teach us that He still has His human body in glory. In Acts 7:55–6 we are told that Stephen saw the Son of man in the glory, and he saw Him as the Son of man. He is still the Son of man, and recognisable as such. Or again, Paul says in Philippians 3:21, 'Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body ...' His glorious body; it is still the same body glorified. That is a most remarkable statement and a striking piece of evidence.

That brings us to point number four, which is that like all of us He [p 273] was subject to growth and development: 'And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him' (Luke 2:40). In the same chapter we read, 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man' (v. 52). Hebrews 2:10 says, 'For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings'—a suggestion of growth and of development. And, still more specifically, in Hebrews 5:8 we read, 'Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.'

The fifth evidence of His humanity is that here on earth he was subject to certain limitations in His knowledge. There is an instance of this in Mark 11:13—the incident of the barren fig tree. We are told that our Lord came to it expecting to find fruit. He did not know that it had none. Also, in Mark 13:32 we read these most important and momentous words: 'But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.' He said specifically that He did not know the precise time of this day which is coming; not only the angels, but even He did not know it, only the Father. Now in our next study, when we come to the doctrine itself, we shall try to consider the significance of these statements about the humanity and deity of our Lord. I am simply providing you with the evidence, the material out of which the doctrine is formed.

So that brings us to proof number six, which is that He was subject to physical limitation. Again in John 4, in the instance of the woman of Samaria, we are told that he was weary. He sat down by the side of the well, and did not go with the disciples to buy provisions, because he was physically tired. We read that He fell asleep in the boat on the sea, in the stern of the vessel (Mark 4:36–41). We are told that going one morning to Jerusalem, He was hungry—the incident of the barren fig tree again. He was thirsty; we are told that upon the cross He said, ‘I thirst’ (John 19:28). He endured physical agony; He was in an agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was there sweating great drops of blood. And finally, of course, and conclusively, and most important of all, He actually, literally died; and His death—this physical limitation—is the ultimate proof of His humanity.

The seventh evidence is that He was tempted. We find this in Hebrews 2:18, in addition to the Gospel accounts of the temptation in the wilderness; and in Hebrews 4:15 it is put specifically like this—[p 274] He was ‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’.

Proof number eight is that He needed to pray. Now here is a great theme. Watch the frequency with which our Lord prayed, and ask yourself why. Why did He pray all night before He chose His disciples? He was constantly engaged in prayer; and as He came to face the end, He went into that Garden to pray, and asked the three disciples to pray with Him and for Him. The need of prayer is an absolute proof of His true humanity.

And then you can look at it like this, as the ninth proof: He was given power by the Holy Spirit. Though He is the eternal Son of God, He needed the power, which He was given. Listen to Peter in Acts 10:38: ‘How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.’ God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power. That, of course, is the significance, partly, of His baptism and of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him then. Notice, too, John the Baptist’s statement in John 3:34 that ‘God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him’ (v. 34)—He had the Spirit in all His fullness.

Evidence number ten is that He referred to God as His God. In John 20:17, we read, ‘Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God’ (John 20:17).

But what you also see there is again a great comprehensive claim—this is the eleventh point—that He really was human in every respect. Hebrews 2:17 says, ‘Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.’ That is a crucial statement and we shall come back to it again. I am simply asserting now that it claims that He was made like unto His brethren in all things, though, remember always, without sin; but in body and soul and spirit He was human. He said, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful’ (Luke 23:46). He was truly human in every respect.

And yet finally we must emphasise this fact that the Scriptures also remind us everywhere that though He was truly human He was also sinless. Now we have seen that the angel had already told Mary about this. He said, ‘That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God’ (Luke 1:35). That is the first assertion of His [p 275] sinlessness. But also our Lord challenged people to convict Him of sin: ‘Which of you convinceth me of sin?’ (John 8:46). Then let us consider some of the great claims that are put forward in the epistles, for example, the classic statement of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21: ‘He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.’ And again there is the statement in Hebrews 4:15 which I have already quoted—‘[He] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’ In Hebrews 9:14 we are told that He ‘offered himself without spot to God’. No blemish; no sin; a perfect sin-offering, fulfilling the Old Testament type. In 1 Peter 2:22 we find Peter saying of Him, ‘Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,’ and 1 John 3:5 claims exactly the same: ‘In him is no sin.’

Now there are other statements which are careful to tell us (and you notice the importance of believing in the full inspiration of the Scriptures, and the importance of every word) that He came in the ‘likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom 8:3). He did not come in sinful flesh. Paul goes out of his way to say that. So we can, perhaps, put it best like this: the Scriptures claim that He was truly human, but they never say that He was

carnal. And this is a most important point, because carnality is not an essential part of humanity. Adam, as he was created perfect at the beginning, was truly human, but he was not carnal. Carnality is the result of sin, and the Scriptures therefore never say that Christ was carnal. So here again we see the importance of taking our doctrines in their right chronological and logical sequence, because we see that He took unto Himself human nature from Mary, as the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon her. He was truly human but free from sin.

Now I trust that no one is in any difficulty about the fact that He was subject to temptation, because this does not imply any defect in Him whatsoever. Of course, He could not have been subject to temptation if He had not become human: 'For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man' (Jas. 1:13). So the fact that He was tempted proves that His nature was truly human nature. So we assert that He was subject to temptation but was at the same time sinless.

Indeed, we can go further and say that He was not even subject to the fall. You remember the famous statement which I quoted when we were dealing with this whole subject of sin: that it was not merely the case that it was possible for Him not to sin, but rather, it was not **[p 276]** possible for Him to sin. And that is the essential difference between Christ and Adam; that is the difference between the first Adam and the second Adam. The first Adam was perfect. He had not sinned, but sin was possible. It was possible for Adam not to sin, but you could not say of him that it was not possible for him to sin, because he did sin. But of the Son of God we say that not only was it possible for Him not to sin—*posse non peccare*; it was also not possible for Him to sin—*non posse peccare*—because He *is* the Son of God. He is God-Man. Not only human but also divine. But still, because human, subject to temptation, and the devil did tempt Him. And so we see the importance of asserting at one and the same time the doctrine of His true humanity and yet also the doctrine of His complete sinlessness. In other words, it is not essential to temptation that there should be anything sinful in the one who is tempted. Temptation can be purely external, and the fact that it is so does not in any sense mean that it is no longer temptation. The devil tempted Him with all his might, in a way that nobody else has ever been tempted. It was a real temptation, but He at the same time was entirely free from sin, and it was not possible that He could or should fall. God sent Him to be the Saviour, and because of that there could not be, and there was no failure.

So we have looked in general at the evidence for His divinity and His humanity. We shall start our next study by showing that this person, of whom it is claimed that He is divine and human and that He is God the Son, nevertheless subordinated Himself to the Father. And then we shall consider what the Scripture tells us about His character, the nature of this person who is divine and human, and we shall attempt, in the light of the teaching of Scripture, to hold those two statements together.

25

God-Man: The Doctrine

In the last lecture we were considering a number of texts concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, some clearly asserting His deity, others equally clearly asserting His humanity; but before we go on to the consideration of the doctrine itself, there is just one other piece of evidence that we must give, and that is the fact that the Scriptures very clearly teach His subordination to His Father. We shall not consider this evidence in detail, so I shall just give you headings, but you can easily discover the scriptural references for yourself.

The first is this: He said specifically that His Father (or 'the Father') was greater than He Himself: 'My Father is greater than I' (John 14:28).

Second, He is described as 'begotten of the Father': 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son' (John 3:16). 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee'—how often is that repeated in the Scriptures (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5)!

Third, He told us that He lived because of the Father, or 'by the Father': 'As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; [or because of the Father]: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me' (John 6:57). That is most important.

In the fourth place, He said that He had been sent by the Father. There are innumerable examples of this. 'And this,' said our Lord in John 6:39, 'is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing ...'; or again, in John 8:29, He said, 'He that sent me is with me.' And he constantly repeated that.

In the fifth place, He said that he had received commandment from the Father as to what He was to do. John 14:31 tells us that, and so [p 278] does John 10:18—'This commandment have I received of my Father.' In the same way—sixth—He said that He had received all His authority from the Father. 'For as the Father hath life in himself: so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man' (John 5:26–7). All this is indicative, you see, of His subordination to the Father.

In the seventh place, He said He could do nothing independently of the Father. He could do nothing by Himself. In John 5:19, for instance, we read, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.' That, again, is a very striking statement of His dependence upon, His subordination to, the Father.

Indeed, in the eighth place, He actually said that He had received His message from the Father. He said, 'I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him' (John 8:26); and He continued, 'I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things' (v. 28). 'The words that I speak unto you,' He told His disciples, 'I speak not of myself' (John 14:10). His words were given to Him by His Father.

He said the same, in the ninth place, about the works that He did. 'The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works'—John 14:10 again. His words and His works were all given to Him by the Father, and what He did, He did because the Father had given Him this work to do. You will find it again in John 17:4: 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.'

Tenth, He said that a kingdom, His kingdom, had been appointed to Him by the Father: 'And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me' (Luke 22:29).

The eleventh argument is that we are told specifically by the apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:24, that at the end He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, and then that He Himself will be subject to the Father, 'that God may be all in all' (v. 28).

Twelfth, in 1 Corinthians 11:3 there is a most important statement to the effect that God the Father is the head of Christ: 'But I would have you know,' says Paul, 'that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.' You notice the sequence and the argument. The man is the head of the woman, Christ is the head of the man and God is the head of Christ.

Then, the thirteenth and last argument is that He said constantly [p 279] that it was His work, His function, to lead us and to bring us to God; and there are innumerable statements to the same effect in the various New Testament epistles—'in bringing many sons unto glory', says the writer of Hebrews (v. 2:10). 'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,' writes Jude, 'and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy ...' (v. 24). So the work did not end with our Lord Himself; He takes us and brings us to God.

Now all these, of course, are indications of the subordination of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Father. But let me emphasise this: you will notice that every one of them has reference only to the incarnate Lord. Not one of them says any of these things about Him before His birth, before His incarnation. They are not descriptions of the pre-existent Word of God. That is a most important distinction.

So, then, having thus collected our evidence, we must put the doctrine like this. The Bible states that Christ was truly God but that He was also truly man, and we must be most careful to assert both these things, and to do so correctly. Now as we consider this great doctrine we must always be careful to guard ourselves against certain dangers. Those who are familiar with the history of the Church will know very well that the Christians of the first three to four centuries spent much time debating the doctrine of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. All sorts of heresies came in. Very sincere, very genuine people, in an attempt to understand this amazing truth, began teaching what was clearly error, and several councils of the Church were held in order to correct them, and to define the doctrine.

So I would say once more that any Christian who says that he or she has no time for this sort of thing is not only displaying terrible ignorance, but is doing something that is exceedingly dangerous. Heretics were generally very sincere people, and some of them were very devout. Not only that. The New Testament itself warns us against heresy, and against the various antichrists and their teaching, so we must pay attention to these things. Let me, therefore, try to classify the particular dangers that we must avoid.

The first danger is that of denying the reality of His divine nature. That is one of a whole group of dangers propagated by the people who teach that He was only man. There were many such groups in the early Church and there are the Unitarians today. Now the people who fell into this error did so because they were anxious to safeguard the doctrine of what is called *monotheism*—the belief that there is only one God. As we have seen, they felt that if you asserted that Jesus [p 280] Christ is God, then you would be saying that there are two Gods, and if you say the Holy Spirit is God, you are asserting that there are three. So, in an attempt to avoid that, they went to this extreme of denying the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is heresy. And the whole purpose, in a sense, of the Gospel of John is to deny that particular error. John himself states it quite clearly. His object in writing his Gospel was that we might know that 'Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (John 20:31). This is an unmistakable assertion of His deity.

But the second group of errors, of course, goes to the opposite extreme; these deny the reality of His human nature. Many people, for instance, taught, and still teach, that Jesus was only a man but that the eternal Christ came upon Him at His baptism, continued in Him and worked through Him until just before He was taken to the cross, and then left Him, so that it was only the human Jesus that died. There were all kinds of refinements of this teaching, with which we need not be concerned, but we must emphasise the principles. They are all a denial of His true human nature—teaching that He had a phantom body, drawing a distinction between the eternal Christ and the human Jesus, and ideas like that. The first epistle of John was specifically written to counteract that error. John says that the test of the Holy Spirit is that, 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist ...' (1 John 4:2-3). So we must assert the reality of the human nature as well as of the divine nature.

Then the third group were errors and heresies that denied the integrity of the natures, the divine and the human. You may have heard of *Arianism* which was a great cause of trouble to the early Church. The error of the Arians was that they denied the reality of the divine nature. They said that this Logos, this Christ, was the first and the highest of all created beings. He was not God, but He was not man. He was something in between, the first created being, the highest of all the beings that God has ever created.

Then, on the other hand, there was once more a denial of the integrity of the human nature; people taught that Christ had a body and an animal soul, but that His mind and His spirit were not human. He was only human up to a point, they said. So they were not granting Him a full or a real human nature.

And the last group of false teachings with regard to His person were the denials of the unity of His Person. This is generally known [p 281] as the *Nestorian heresy*. The Nestorians said not that He was one person with two natures, but that He was two persons. They said, 'He is God and man, a personal God and a personal man.' They were so anxious to emphasise the two sides that they went too far and said that He was two persons, God and man, instead of saying that He was one person with a divine and human nature.

And, as a part of that particular error, we must mention the case of those who denied that there is a distinction in the two natures. It is extraordinary how these views always contradict one another; people always will swing from one extreme right over to the other. It seems very difficult for most people to keep to the middle of the road, and to hold the two in balance. The Nestorians said, 'Yes, we must emphasise the divine and the human, and they went so far as to say He was complete God and complete man—two persons. Then at the other extreme was the heresy which taught that the two natures became blended into one nature. Instead of keeping the divine and the human separate, they had blended them together, and taught that there is a new sort of nature, partly divine and partly human. But that is equally heretical.

So then, as over and against all these errors, we claim that the Bible teaches that He is one person who has two natures. I can do nothing better at this point than to read to you the famous statement of the Council of Chalcedon of A.D. 451. This doctrine had been discussed, let me remind you, throughout the centuries. People had met at their councils and conferences, and, at last, they made this great comprehensive statement, which is not so much a definition, as a statement of certain things which are and are not true. They found it impossible, as we still do, to give an adequate statement of the doctrine, but because of all these errors, they laid down certain statements to safeguard the true position, and this is how they put it.

Our Lord is truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body, consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days for us and for our salvation born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence; not [p 282] parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a glorious, what a magnificent statement! We rather tend to think, do we not—at least some people do today—that we have advanced a great deal since the fifth century; we are the wonderful people of the twentieth century! Yet that is the sort of thing they taught to Christian people in the fifth century. I hope we all appreciate it! Christian people lacking all our educational facilities and advantages were given truth like that. And you notice how comprehensive it is. It deals with practically all the errors and the heresies which I mentioned to you, and it lays down these great propositions. So that is the statement of the Council of Chalcedon of A.D. 451. Get it and read it for yourselves. Notice that its emphasis is this: one person, two natures, the two natures unmixed, joined but not mixed, not fused, not intermingled, remaining separate, God and man.

But why is it so essential that we should assert these two natures? Why did the early Church contend for it in this way, and why must we? Well, we must assert the manhood because since man sinned, the penalty must be borne in the nature of man. No one can bear the penalty of man's sin except someone who is man Himself; it is the only way to redeem man. Then the payment of the penalty involves sufferings of

body and of soul such as a man alone can bear; sufferings which God could not bear. 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death' said our Lord in the Garden (Mark 14:34). The suffering involved must include the body and the soul, so He had to be a man.

And then He has to be a sympathetic high priest, argues the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, and He can only be a sympathetic high priest by having a human nature, by being 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15). It is because He is like us that He is able to bear with us. He understands us, He knows our feelings and our frailty. We have a high priest who has been 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities' (Heb. 4:15). He knows us in that sense because He has a human nature.

And in the same way the Scriptures tell us so often that He is an example to believers. He is not an example to anybody-else, but He is an example to believers, for we are to follow in His steps, 'Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not' (1 Pet. 2:22-3). **[p 283]** We are to follow Him. He is our example in Christian living. There, then, are the main arguments for the absolute necessity of the human nature.

But it is equally necessary that we must assert the Godhead or the divine nature, and for this great reason: in order that His sacrifice might have infinite value, He had to be God as well as man. Or I might put it like this: in order that He might render perfect obedience to God, without failure and without possibility of failure, He had to be God. Adam was perfect, but he fell. God made him perfect, in His own image and likeness, but he fell. So in order to ensure a perfect carrying out of the law, in order that He might bear the wrath of God redemptively, and free us from the curse of the law, without the fear of failure, it was essential that the Godhead should be combined with the manhood.

So, having said all that, shall we try to bring it to a focus by attempting to consider the mystery of His person? We have been saying extraordinary things, as we must if we are scriptural. We have been making these great assertions about His deity, about His humanity, about these two natures in this one person, and people have always asked: How is all this possible? Now, let me make it quite plain that I do not pretend that I can give an adequate or a full explanation. No one can. We are confronted by 'the mystery of godliness' (1 Tim. 3:16). It is beyond us; it is beyond reason; it is beyond our understanding. As we have had to say in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity, and with many other doctrines, it is not for us to understand; our business is to submit ourselves to the Bible.

Constantly, you see, we come back to that. In a sense, that is what faith is—that we accept this, that we are guided by this. We know nothing but what revelation tells us, and we do not desire to know anything beyond that. And there is, therefore, a point at which we must always cease to attempt to understand. We must cease trying to span the infinite with our finite reason, indeed with our sinful reason, and we must receive the truth as it is given, knowing that if we do so we shall progressively understand, and that when we go to glory we shall understand fully and finally. But here we must accept by faith. So let us approach this doctrine in that way, and with those preliminary observations very much in our minds.

Now it has often been suggested that certain analogies may help us to understand this, and if we remember that they are only analogies, they will help us, but they are not the complete picture and we must **[p 284]** never press them too far. It has often been suggested, for example, that there is, in man himself, an analogy with respect to the two natures in the one person of our Lord. Man, after all, is body and soul. The body and soul are distinct and unmixed; they are separate and yet they are united together in one person. I can say, therefore, that I have a body and I have a soul. Everything that happens in the body, and in the soul, is essential to the person. For instance, if I have a pain in my body I say that *I* have a pain. It is really only in my body, but I say that I have a pain. And in the same way, if something happens in the realm of my soul and my spirit, I still put it in terms of myself. The things, you see, that happen in my body and my soul I ascribe to myself. From the two natures, as it were, I ascribe things to the one person.

In the same way, you notice that the biblical doctrine does that with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 'Had they known it,' says Paul to the Corinthians, 'they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2:8). The Lord of glory! Now, in a sense, you cannot crucify God, but He had to have a human body before He could be crucified. Yet Paul does not say that His body was crucified, he says that 'the Lord of glory' was crucified. In other words, what happens in the one nature or the other is ascribed to the one person.

It always seems to me, also, that there is another analogy. I cannot recall ever having read it, but I put it to you for your consideration. I am rather helped myself by the thought of ‘the old man’ and ‘the new man’ in the Christian (Eph. 4:22–4). Here am I as a Christian, and I am aware of the old nature and the new nature. These two are not intermingled and fused, I am aware of them as distinct entities, yet they are both united in me. I, as a person, contain these two or these two are parts and expressions of me, my person and my personality. Now I am only using that analogy in order that we may have some sort of a glimmer as to the possibility of our Lord having two distinct natures within Himself, yet being one person, not two persons.

However, let me put it to you in terms of Scripture. There is no doubt that the most helpful Scripture with regard to this question is in Philippians 2:5–8:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled [p 285] himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Now this passage has often been misunderstood. If I had been delivering these addresses, say, forty or fifty years ago, in the time of the new theology, so-called, and the ‘kenosis’ theory, I would have had to spend a great deal of time on these verses. The *Revised Version* unfortunately translates ‘made himself of no reputation’ as ‘emptied himself’, and that word ‘emptied’ has led to all the trouble. Incidentally, it is a bad translation; the *Authorised Version* is altogether superior there, as I hope to show you.

Now I often feel that people have got into trouble with this passage because they have forgotten the context. The passage begins, ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,’ and the context is, ‘Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.’ Paul is not setting out here to give a doctrine, as it were, of the person of Christ; he is giving a practical appeal about conduct. So what does he say? Well, take this word *form*—‘Who, being in the form of God’—what is this? Form is the sum total of the qualities that make a thing what it is. Take, for instance, a piece of metal; that piece of metal can be either a sword or a ploughshare, though it is the same metal. And when I talk about ‘the form’ of a sword I mean the thing that makes that piece of metal a sword rather than a ploughshare. So if I take a sword and smelt it down and turn it into a ploughshare, I have changed its form. That is a most important point.

Then there is this word ‘being’—‘Who, being in the form of God’—that means that He already was in the form of God before He came into this world. He always was God. That is the assertion. Then take the phrase, ‘thought it not robbery to be equal with God’. Now the *Authorised Version* is not quite so good here; the other translations are better: He ‘did not regard it as a prize to be grasped at’; He ‘did not regard it as something to be held on to at all costs’. No, He did not do that. He did not hold on to this form of Godhead, to this equality with God which He had. What, then, did He do? Well, instead of that, He ‘made himself of no reputation’. He did not ‘empty himself’ of anything; He took another form.

And so the apostle says, in effect, ‘Now you Philippians ought to be doing what He did. You are all of you looking after your own things and not the things of others. You ought to be very grateful that the Son of God did not do that. He did not hold on to His equality with [p 286] God; He made Himself of no reputation. He did not look on His own things; He looked on you and your needs, and He came down to earth in order to help you. You must do the same.’ Notice the emphasis. Paul is not telling these Philippians to turn their natures into something else. No. He says, ‘You must now humble yourselves, though you still remain what you are.’ So our Lord did not empty Himself of anything. He did not empty Himself of His Godhead. But He did not hold on to the manifestations of that Godhead. He did not hold on to the power of the Godhead, as it were, to the assertion of it. No, as Paul says again in verse 8, ‘he humbled himself’. He remained the same, but He came in this humble form. He came, Paul tells us, ‘in the form of a servant’. Now, as we have seen, the form is the consummation of those qualities that make a thing what it is, so He really was a true servant. He came and lived as a real servant, though He was still God. He did not empty His Godhead out or cease to be God. What happened was that He did not go on asserting this equality, but came in ‘the form of a servant’.

Now the apostle is obviously emphasising this point I am making, because why else does he say 'in the likeness of men'? If our Lord had left the Godhead behind and become a man, Paul would never have used that phrase; he would have said He was 'made a man'. But he does not say that; he says He was made 'in the likeness of men'. Then again, he says, 'And being found in fashion as a man'. Why these expressions? If He had emptied Himself of deity, if He had ceased to be God, Paul would not be talking about 'likeness' and 'fashion'; he would just say that He who was God also became man. Again, he does not say that, but what he does say is that though our Lord was still in the form of God, He became man also. Far from pouring anything out, He took something on.

That is the doctrine of the Scripture, that He who is still God, took the form of a servant, He was made 'in the likeness of men' and was found 'in fashion as a man'. He took on this something extra. He who was eternally God became man also. And He lived and did His work in this world as a servant. That is what Paul teaches. Let me give you a quotation from the great Dr Warfield which I think will help you: 'The Lord of the world became a servant in the world. He whose right it was to rule, took obedience as his life characteristic.' What a wonderful statement!

What, then, does all this mean? It means that there was no change in His deity, but that He took human nature to Himself, and chose to [p 287] live in this world as a man. He humbled Himself in that way. He deliberately put limits upon Himself. Now we cannot go further. We do not know how He did it. We cannot understand it, in a sense. But we believe this: in order that He might live this life as a man, while He was here on earth, He did not exercise certain qualities of His Godhead. That was why, as we saw in the last lecture, He needed to be given the gift of the Holy Spirit without measure. That was why He found it necessary to pray. He had not ceased to be God. He said, in effect, to Nicodemus, 'The Son of man who is on earth and who is speaking to you is still in heaven' (John 3:13). Yes; but He chose to live as a man. He did not cease to be God, nor did He resign any part of His Godhead, but He was now living in this form as a servant and as a man.

And as we look at it like that, we see how it becomes possible that He could grow 'in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man' (Luke 2:52). We see, too, how it was that He did not seem to know certain things at certain times, and yet clearly at other times asserted His Godhead and His unity with the Father, and said, 'Before Abraham was I am,' and so on. It was all true, and all this was happening at one and the same time. This eternal Son of God, who was still the eternal Son of God, having taken unto Himself this human nature; this one indivisible person, who had two natures instead of one, chose to, and actually did live as a man, taking the form of a servant and humbling Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Ah, we have been looking at a great and wonderful and glorious mystery. I know of nothing, as I have emphasised repeatedly, more wonderful for us to contemplate and consider. Do you not feel your minds being expanded and stretched? Do you not feel that it is a great privilege to be allowed to look into such wondrous mysteries and glorious truths? God has given us His word that we might do so, not that we might skip over it lightly, but that we might delve into it and try to grasp what has happened. For the message is that God so loved you and so loved me that He called upon His Son to do all this. The Son did it, though He is eternal God. He went into the womb of Mary and was born as a babe and was put into the manger, still God eternal, the Son by whom all things were made. Yes, and He even endured 'such contradiction of sinners' (Heb. 12:3) and was spat upon and crucified, and died and was buried. And He did it all because it was the only way whereby you and I could be saved. The only way [p 288] whereby our sins could be forgiven was that He should bear their punishment. The only way whereby you and I could become partakers of the divine nature was that He should have taken human nature. And having done so, He is able to give us this new nature and prepare us for heaven and for glory.

We have been contemplating the marvel and the mystery of the age, the thing that makes the angels in heaven astonished, the thing that they are looking into—God coming in the flesh and for sinners, vile and despicable sinners, rebels against God, to make them the children of God. Beloved friends, let us continue to look at Him, to consider Him, to look unto Him, and let us measure and estimate our spiritual life, not by feelings and experiences, but by our knowledge of Him and our love for Him. He is the centre of

everything. 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent' (John 17:3). May God give us grace to do so.

26

Christ the Prophet

Before we continue with our consideration of the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps it would be good for us to remind ourselves of our whole approach to the biblical doctrines. In our studies so far we have realised the importance of the fact that each doctrine leads to the next. You will see the value of that when talking to someone who is not a Christian and who wants to know what Christianity is about. If, as Peter puts it, you are to 'give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you' (1 Pet. 3:15), and be ready at all times to do so, you must know these biblical doctrines and must be able to consider them, in order to be helpful to every person. So it is easier for us if we know the logical sequence in which we can state and present them.

If we do not like that approach to the subject, well, here are people of the world, of modest living, with problems and upsets—and there are plenty of such men and women—who endeavour to solve their problems in various ways, through philosophy and reasoning and so on. But if we are honest, we must admit that we cannot arrive at an understanding and solution of the problems of life through these means. I am in agreement with the great French mathematician and thinker, Blaise Pascal, who said, 'The supreme achievement of reason is to show us the limit of reason'. If we do not start from Pascal's position we are left to ourselves, groping in the darkness, and the modern world does not know where it is going. Philosophers and teachers admit it, if they are honest. What are we to answer?

Our answer is that we need light from another, and we claim that we have that light. 'The world by wisdom knew not God,' says Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:21. People have always been conscious that there is a **[p 290]** God, but thought and reason cannot arrive at Him, so God has been pleased to give a revelation of Himself. We see it in history, in nature, in creation, but He has not spoken clearly in that way, though, in a sense, it is clear to all Christians. But men and women need something more and God in His infinite kindness has given something more. Our whole contention is that the Bible is the Word of God, hence it is a question of authority. Our entire case depends upon this book and this is the Word of God. We do not say that it contains the Word of God, but that it *is* the Word of God, infallible in all matters of faith and practice; there is nothing apart from what we are told in the Bible. So that was our starting point. We arrive at all our knowledge of the doctrine from this book. It is not what we think but what the Bible teaches.

Having reminded ourselves of this, let us now turn again to the great central point of all the revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have looked at His person and now we continue with what the Bible tells us about His *work*. It was essential that we dealt first with the person, because we never can understand the work until we are clear about who He is.

Let me put it like this: when you come to the Gospels, you often notice the curious inability of the disciples to understand our Lord's teaching about His death. They did not understand Him and were confused and offended at things He said about His rising again; they could not grasp it. Why? Our Lord said just before His death, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will skew you things to come' (John 16:12–13). Why not tell them at once? The answer is that it is quite impossible to understand the work of the Lord Jesus Christ until we are clear about the person; indeed the disciples only understood the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the light of the resurrection. It is my understanding of the person that enables me to understand the doctrine of His death and the atonement, which we are now beginning to approach.

So we come now to the work of Christ, which is defined in so many places in the Scriptures; He came into the world to reconcile us to God. We pointed out in the doctrine of the fall and its consequences that two main things are needful: reconciliation to God and restoration to that condition from which we fell with Adam. So the work of **[p 291]** the Lord Jesus Christ is the work of reconciliation and restoration. He came specifically and deliberately into the world for that. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:5, 'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' So now we are going to look at Him as

the mediator, at what exactly He has done and how He did it, at the way in which He is the One, as it were, who stands between God and man and brings them together.

There are three functions to His office and these have always been recognised and taught. He is Prophet, Priest and King, and it is foretold that we should consider Him in all those ways. Now, of course, in every one of the offices is also the other at the same time. He is a priestly Prophet, a royal Prophet, a prophetic Priest and a royal Priest, a prophetic King and a priestly King. He is one person and we cannot divide Him, but we must recognise that, in the nature of His work as mediator and redeemer, He does assume these three functions and they are very definitely given in the biblical teaching.

We see at once why it is necessary for Him to assume the three functions. We need a *prophet* because we need to be delivered and saved from the ignorance of sin. When we considered the doctrine of the fall and its consequences we saw that men and women had been left in a state of ignorance. The apostle Paul in particular describes the lost state of man in sin, when he says, 'This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart' (Eph. 4:17–18). 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,' says Isaiah 9:2; the pictures are endless, as we shall see. Christ as Prophet, because we need to be delivered from the ignorance of sin.

But we also need to be delivered from the guilt of sin. So we need a *priest*; because of the guilt of sin we need someone who can appear on our behalf in the presence of God. So Christ has to assume the function of Priest.

And then, of course, we have to be delivered from the dominion of sin—and the Scripture puts it that we have been delivered. We have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into 'the kingdom of his dear Son' (Col. 1:13). He does that only as He assumes the function of *king*, with power and authority. Only as King can He set us free and place us in the kingdom over which He rules and of which we have become citizens. [p 292]

But let us also look at it like this: Christ as Prophet, represents God with us; He speaks for God and from God to us. But as Priest, He speaks for us to God. He represents us with God, and that is equally necessary. Then as King He is the representative head of the new humanity.

It does seem to me to be always of the greatest spiritual benefit and value to consider our Lord and His work in this threefold way and there is nothing perhaps so helpful as to understand His work and glory. You see, in the Old Testament you have prophets, you have priests and you have kings, and these three functions were divided and set up in separate people. But the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is that He in Himself alone combines all the offices—three functions in the one person, and this is something which makes us realise the grandeur, greatness and majesty of the person of our blessed Lord.

So let us look for a moment at the Scripture and see what it tells us about our Lord Jesus Christ as Prophet. What is a prophet? In the Old Testament he is constantly referred to as 'a man of God', a messenger from God, one who has been given a word to speak by God. We must not go into this now, because we considered it, in a sense, when dealing with the whole question of inspiration. The prophet gave his message from God in various ways, sometimes in a kind of trance; he was not clear about the mechanism but the message was quite clear. We read the words, 'the Lord spake to me and said', or, 'the word of God came to me in a dream suddenly'. So the prophet is a man who has been given a message by God to pass on to men and women for their instruction and enlightenment.

Another thing we must always bear in mind when considering the prophetic function is that it is not only confined to foretelling and prediction. We tend to use 'prophecy' in that sense only and it is a part of the prophetic office, but it is not the only part. In addition to *foretelling* there is the office of teacher and instructor—*forth telling*. The Old Testament prophets were not only confined to foretelling, a good deal of their writings show censure and blame of Israel. In addition to the foretelling, they were sent by God to warn people, to chastise and rebuke them, to remind them of the character of the law, and of God's

promises. So we must remember that these aspects are as vital as the foretelling, and in our Lord Himself they were prominent.

Look for a moment at certain proofs given in the Scriptures of the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Prophet. Look at Deuteronomy 18:15: 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the [p 293] midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.' That is one of the most basic texts in the Scripture with regard to the person of our Lord, and in the Gospels you suddenly find references to 'that prophet', in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. People who heard His words and saw His miracles said, 'This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world' (John 6:14). The whole nation was waiting for the coming of this Prophet, this teacher who would speak from God. Peter in preaching about Christ in Acts 3:19-26, refers to Moses' words in Deuteronomy 18 and goes on: 'Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.' So there was this great prophecy that the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, would be a prophet.

But let us go further: our Lord Himself claimed to be a prophet. In Luke 13:33 our Lord, replying to some of His followers who were warning Him not to go to Jerusalem, said, 'Nevertheless I must walk to day and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.' He prophesied there that He was going to die in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and this was the case with all the prophets, they were all stoned and died in Jerusalem. In John's Gospel you also find repeated statements by our Lord that everything He taught was given to Him by God. 'The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself' (John 14:10). Or again in John 8:26 we read, 'But he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.' These are very explicit. He was speaking there, as a prophet, the message that had been given to Him. We have the same thing in John 12:49-50: 'I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.' And the people themselves recognised that He was a prophet: 'For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes' (Matt. 7:29). There, then, is the certain evidence that our Lord was indeed the Prophet predicted and prophesied by Moses.

Second: in what ways did our Lord exercise this prophetic function? First, He exercised it even before the incarnation, even before He came into this world. John 1:9 says, 'That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' This is tremendously important. It is the doctrine of Christ as the *Logos*, as the [p 294] Word of God, giving knowledge and light.

Now there is a light in the world apart from the gospel. Take all human glimmers of moral and intelligent enlightenment, take everything in the world that limits the darkness of Satan, where does it come from? The Bible says that the light in all people, whether unregenerate or regenerate, comes from God, from Christ, any light has come from Him. Now, if we were lecturing on theology we would go on to speak of this doctrine as the doctrine of *common grace*. People like Shakespeare, and the great scientists who are given knowledge and understanding, all receive their ability through Christ word is the Word that lights every man; no light, no knowledge, no understanding whatsoever, comes apart from Him. And as we have seen, He who was described in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Covenant was undoubtedly the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the reasons why He came as the Angel of the Covenant was to teach, instruct and warn. Christ was in a prophetic office even before the incarnation. In Isaiah 9:6 He is called 'Counsellor'; a teacher, an instructor, one who gives wisdom.

Still more specifically, all knowledge, all light and instruction, every ability that was given to the prophets came from Christ. The apostle Peter talks about this when he speaks of the prophets before Christ, 'Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow' (1 Pet. 1:11). Christ was the Spirit enlightening the prophets even about Himself. As they spoke their prophecies and expressed them, He was the Prophet teaching the prophets; He gave them their message.

Then, second, He also exercised the function which was laid on Him as a prophet here on earth after the incarnation. He said, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but

shall have the light of life' (John 8:12). What is the light? He is the light, the Prophet, the one who came to teach. Then again in John we see that, 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him' (John 1:18). He manifested light, He gave out knowledge and instruction concerning Him whom no man has seen. The Son declared Him and revealed Him.

How did He act as Prophet on earth? He did so in all His teaching: His teaching concerning God, the Father; His exposition of the law in the Sermon on the Mount; in all He told us of God's love, of God's gracious purpose, of His nature and His person. All this was a part of [p 295] the exercise of His prophetic function, and, supremely, He told us about Himself. All this is vital, and I emphasise it because we sometimes forget that a part of our salvation consists in our receiving this knowledge that our Lord has given. That is why we must realise that this gospel applies to us. All He taught applies to us; the gospel is vital for Christian people and for Christian living. Christ is our Prophet as well as our Priest.

And then He taught us by His life and example. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9). 'Look at me,' He said, in effect. 'Have not my works shown you?' (See John 10:37-8.) 'Hast thou not known me, Philip?' (John 14:9). If you only look at Me you will learn about God.

We are to live as He lived, to follow in His steps, as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:21-2: 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.' He left us an example, showing His love and forbearance and all His other attributes and we are to live as He did. So He exercised His prophetic function while here on earth.

Then let me go on to show you how He has continued to exercise His prophetic function ever since His ascension, after He left earth and returned to heaven. He said that He would speak through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would not speak of Himself, or about Himself, but the Holy Spirit would be told what to say. He would send the Holy Spirit to instruct. As the Son did not speak of Himself but from the Father, so the Spirit speaks as our Lord instructs Him.

Then we are given direct revelation by the Spirit. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, 'Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God' (1 Cor. 2:12). The Church has received this revelation in the same way; every one of these books in the New Testament was guided by the Spirit and controlled by Him; there is no error. And Christ still exercised His prophetic function as He guided the Church by the Spirit. He guided the Church when the canon of the New Testament was being formed. He guided them as to what was to be put into the canon.—He led them into all truth as He had promised. Our Lord exercises His prophetic function even in us. He is still teaching us through the Spirit concerning spiritual things, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2.

Finally, He will continue in this prophetic office until He has ultimately presented us spotless before God. He has given us this final [p 296] truth that He will continue His prophetic office until we see Him, until we share His glory, the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world (see John 17:24). He will lead us, He will instruct us until we see God, until we have the ultimate beatific vision in glory.

I have gone into this in detail because it seems to me so vitally important. John 3:13 says, 'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light ...' Sin is ignorance and darkness; He says there is no excuse, the light has come. Or again in John 15:22, we read, 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.' 'I have come and brought light,' He said in effect, 'before, they were in darkness, but now they have no excuse for their sin.' Then finally in John 12:47-8 we read, 'If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.'

We cannot, and we must not forget that our blessed Lord and Saviour is a prophet. As the Prophet He has brought the light and knowledge into this world which it lacked. He alone can lead us to God and give

us the knowledge of God which we desire. It is He who finally brings all knowledge and instruction to those lost in the ignorance and darkness of sin.

Christ the Priest

In our consideration of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have found that essentially He is described in the Scriptures as the mediator, the one who stands between God and ourselves. And, further, we have seen that He has three main functions to perform as the mediator: he is Prophet, Priest and King, and we need Him in these three ways. Because of the terrible ignorance that results from sin, we need someone to teach us. Because sin is constantly described in the Scriptures as ignorance—sinners are those who dwell in darkness, their minds are darkened, they need to be enlightened—He came as the light of the world, the teacher, the Prophet, and we considered the ways in which He prophesies.

Now we are going on to consider what the Scriptures tell us about Him as *Priest*. The priest is one who represents us with God, the prophet is one who represented God with us. The prophet is one who came with a message from God to man; the priest is one who goes from man to God, one who approaches God on behalf of man. And, as we have seen, we shall be constantly repeating and emphasising our greatest need of all, which is, of course, the need of a priest. We need not only to be delivered from the darkness of sin and its ignorance, we need still more to be delivered from its guilt and from the poverty that attaches to the guilt of sin.

Now the Bible teaches us everywhere that the Lord Jesus Christ is our great High Priest—what exactly does it mean by that? There is a wonderful account of this in Hebrews 5:1–5. The author's object in writing his epistle, in a sense, was to show the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. In particular, he wanted to show His pre-eminence over Aaron, and especially that He is the great High Priest who had [p 298] done this perfect work. But the author says that he finds himself in difficulties. His difficulty is that he wants to expound the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is our great High Priest 'after the order of Melchisedec', but, he says, 'We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.' Then he goes on to explain that a little, and to say that his difficulty is that these Hebrew Christians are still shaky about the 'first principles' of the doctrine of Christ. They are still 'babes', because they are still living on spiritual and religious milk and are not capable of digesting meat, having never really exercised the faculties and the powers which God Himself has given them in order to discern both good and evil.

And, unfortunately, there are still large numbers of Christians who are in that position and who say, 'I cannot stand doctrine; it is too much for me. I find it difficult and boring. Give me the sort of Bible lecture which will do the whole of Hebrews in one evening and I will be very happy, but this doctrine I find hard to follow.' Now if that is so, the only thing that is true of such people is that they are babes in Christ, and it is because so many of them are babes that they miss so much about the Christian faith, and in addition so often find themselves in trouble and perplexity, not knowing what to do or think.

But at the same time we must not think that this means that these doctrines are simple. It is because they are not simple that they have so frequently been the cause of difficulty in the long history of the Christian Church. I suppose there has been no subject about which there has been such confusion as this doctrine which we are now considering. The devil obviously has been more concerned to attack the faith at this point than at any other. This doctrine is the crucial thing, so he has concentrated his energy on it in an exceptional way, and the result is that throughout the centuries you have had errors and heresies with regard to this matter, and you have them still in this modern world. But that makes it all the more important that we should study it, however difficult it may be, in order that we may know what the truth is, and then we shall be able to refute the false teachings that are around and about us.

So many cults are very active at the present time. False teachers claim that they only have the real Christian faith and that those of us who preach the evangelical faith are not emphasising what they emphasise. Now the thing to do with all those teachings is to examine what they have to say about the atonement, about the way of reconciliation, and if you do that you will find that it is at that point that [p 299] they are defective. So that really this is of the utmost importance for us. It is always important that we should know what to do and what to believe, but it is of tremendous importance if we want to

safeguard both ourselves, and others who may be weaker than us, from being led away by these strong delusions and subtleties of sin which so often masquerade today as angels of light.

So it seems to me that the best way of facing this matter is to start first of all by a consideration of what the Bible teaches about a priest or the priesthood in general. That is a very good way of approaching this doctrine and there is a great deal of teaching in the Scriptures on the subject. In other words, the way to discover what the Bible says about the Lord Himself as the great High Priest is to take it on a lower level to start with, because it is all one piece—the Old Testament points to the New; it is a kind of type of which Christ Himself is the antitype.

What, therefore, do we know about the nature and function of a priest? Well, the best definition which we find anywhere in the Scriptures is in those first five verses of Hebrews 5. Let me give you some headings from what we are there told about a priest.

The first thing we are told is that he must be taken from among men in order to be their representative (v. 1).

Second, we are told that he is chosen and appointed by God—‘No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron’ (v. 4).

Third, he is active in the interests of men in things pertaining to God. That is brought out quite clearly: ‘For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God’ (v. 1).

The fourth characteristic is that he has to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (v. 1).

Those are the four things which are emphasised in those verses. But it is also taught elsewhere in the Scriptures that a priest must be holy, that he must be morally pure, that he must be consecrated to the Lord. Leviticus 21:6–8 says:

They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he is holy unto his God. Thou shalt sanctify him therefore; for he offereth the bread of thy God: he shall be holy unto thee: for I the Lord, which sanctify you, am holy.

[p 300] Priests were set apart; they did not have to do certain things that other people did; they were consecrated to the Lord.

The function of a priest, therefore, we can summarise in this way. The priest is essentially a mediator who does two main things. First, he propitiates by sacrifices; second, he intercedes on behalf of the people. So let us consider this word ‘propitiation’. It is a word that is used in the third chapter of Romans in that great section starting with verse 24: ‘Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God,’ and John used it again in his first epistle: ‘And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2:2). What, then, is propitiation? It is that which satisfies the demands of violated holiness; it means a satisfaction that is rendered to the violated holiness of God Himself.

Now I have summarised the functions of a priest under those two main headings. It is his first business to propitiate God and then he has to intercede on behalf of the people, and that at once brings us to a very vital aspect of this whole subject. The priest propitiates by making offerings and sacrifices; you cannot read the Old Testament without constantly coming across that. But I find that many Christian people never read those portions of Scripture; they say that they do not understand them. I agree that they are difficult, but they are mentioned in the New Testament, and especially in the epistle to the Hebrews, so let us look at the main teaching of the Scriptures about offerings and sacrifices.

Now these were offered before the time of Moses as well as after him. Offerings and sacrifices were, however, defined in a very special way in the law that God gave to Moses—you will find it in the book of Leviticus. They were tabulated and defined in a more detailed way there, but there had been offerings and sacrifices before that. So what meaning must we attach to them? We need not waste time in dealing at

length with the false views, though I am sorely tempted to do so because there are so many today who read books on what is called 'Comparative Religions' where very false ideas are taught about these matters. Not only that, all who know anything about missionary work in different countries will know that pagan people have entirely wrong notions as to the purpose and function of offerings and sacrifices.

[p 301] So let us, in passing, just hurriedly mention some of these false views. There are those who believe and teach that the main function of these offerings and sacrifices is to serve as a kind of gift which is meant to secure favour. That, they say, is their object. People make offerings in order to get favour from their god. And there are those who teach that that is the meaning of these things in the Bible. They say that you must not believe what the Bible tells you, because it tells you that God made man perfect and that man started in a relationship to God and then went astray. But they teach that men started off as animists who thought that every natural object had its own god. They went up the scale until they eventually arrived at a belief in one God, but they retained, as it were, their primitive ideas of sacrifices, which were incorporated wrongly into Christianity.

Or it is said that a sacrifice is a kind of symbol which represents a communion of life with a god. Men kill an animal and take that animal's blood and put it on the altar. They believe that the spirit of their god is in the animal, so by putting the blood of the animal on the altar, they think that they are having communion with the god through this symbol of the blood.

Then there are others who believe that sacrifices are a sort of sacramental communion. They say that God is actually in the animal, so when they kill the animal and eat it they are feeding on their god and are receiving his life and are built up in him in that way.

Others teach that sacrifices and offerings are just a way of paying homage or tribute to a god.

Those, then, are the false ideas about offerings and sacrifices; but what is taught in the Scriptures? To answer that, I must introduce you to a term. What is taught in the Scriptures is that offerings and sacrifices, especially the sin and trespass offerings—and this was the case before the Mosaic system was introduced—are *piacular*. Now what is the meaning of that? Well, I took the trouble to turn up two volumes of the Oxford Dictionary to see what it would have to say about that word and it said that *piacular* means expiatory. I thought, 'That is very interesting; how characteristic of a dictionary—it keeps you looking up words! You are in trouble about *piacular*, so you are introduced to expiatory!' However, let us look at some of these terms together because they are of vital importance, and we must be clear in our minds as to what they mean.

First, propitiation, which means, as we have seen, satisfying the demands of violated holiness.

[p 302] Second, expiation. To expiate means to extinguish guilt, to pay the penalty, to make reparation for something. When sin is expiated it is put aside, it is blotted out, it is wiped out, it is done away with.

Third, atonement. To atone means to set at one; it really means at-one-ment; it means that two people who were formerly divided are brought together and made as one. So the whole business of reconciliation is the restoration of friendly relations between two parties that formerly were separated; and the great biblical doctrine of reconciliation tells us how God and sinners have been brought together, how an at-one-ment has been produced.

So, to summarise, there are three main things which are the essentials for our Lord to do as our Priest in order to secure this reconciliation of sinful people with God. First, satisfaction must be offered to the offended God (propitiation). Second, there must be a substitution of suffering and death on the part of someone who is innocent for the deserved punishment of the guilty (expiation). And third, a community of life needs to be brought about between the one who has been offended and the offender (atonement). Now the claim of the Scriptures is that the Lord Jesus Christ has done all that.

If you look at all this in terms of the Old Testament sacrifices and what was claimed for them, you will see that they did those three things. For instance, we are told quite definitely and explicitly in Leviticus 1:4: 'And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' And in 4:20: 'And he shall do with the bullock as he did with the bullock for a sin

offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make an atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them.' Then we read in Leviticus again how the people or the priest representing them had to put their hands on the head of the animal that was to be sacrificed—what was the object of doing that? It was the sign of the transference of their sins and their guilt to the animal to be killed on their behalf. So you see the sacrifice was definitely piacular, or expiatory—the guilt was transferred in order that the sin and guilt might be removed.

In the same way we read about the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the mercy seat. That drop of blood was another reminder of sin, showing that life is in the blood, and that this life had been taken and put on the mercy seat in order that sinful people might be propitiated with God; the offence that had been committed was thereby dealt with. And further, of course, we are constantly told in [p 303] the Old Testament that the effect of doing all this was that the sins of the people were thereby forgiven and covered (Lev. 4:26).

That seems to have been the great teaching of the Old Testament sacrifices. They were offered on behalf of God's chosen people, the children of Israel, who, though they were the children of God, still fell into sin and thereby got into a wrong relationship with God. And the purpose of the burnt offerings and sacrifices was that God's people might be restored again to their communion and covenant with Him, to their place and privilege as His people, that they might enjoy His blessings which had been forfeited either by neglect or transgression.

And, of course, another great function was that sacrifices and burnt offerings were types of the Lord Jesus Christ and of God's way of reconciling man to Himself. They were pointing to Him in various ways—but we shall come back to that later.

There, then, is the main Scriptural teaching with regard to the function of a priest. We have seen what would be true of Him. He was a man and we have seen that his work consisted of making sacrifices and sacrifices for these reasons, and at the same time He goes on to intercede for the people.

Now the great claim of the Scriptures everywhere is that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. Before I give you the Scriptural evidence, let me point out that there is one great difference between Him and everything we read about priests in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the priest had to find his sacrifices—the lamb, and so on—but in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, the priest and the sacrifice were one and the same. He is the Priest. What did He offer? He offered Himself, He offered His own life, His body, as the sacrifice. So once more we find that He combines in His person the things that were separated in the Old Testament. We have seen that under the old dispensation the prophet, priest and king were separate people, but Christ is all three.

So what are the evidences for saying that He is God's appointed High Priest? Well, it is interesting to observe that there is only one book in the Bible which describes Him directly and explicitly as Priest, and that is, of course, the epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews describes Him as such in a number of verses—Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1. Collect them for yourself, it is a very rewarding study to trace this and to follow it right through.

But, of course, in many other places the teaching is implicit—by implication it is there. For instance, listen to our Lord Himself. He [p 304] said, 'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). This is also something that is constantly taught by the apostle Paul. In Romans 3:24–5 he says: 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.' He says the same thing in Romans 5:6–8, and in 1 Corinthians 5:7: 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.' Then 1 Corinthians 15:3 is a great statement of this doctrine, and I could quote many others. You find the same teaching in the writings of the apostle John. John the Baptist said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Or again we read in John 3:14–15: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life'—it is the same teaching, and also in 1 John 2:2 we read, 'And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' Peter teaches

this in his epistle, 'But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet. 1:19); 'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed' (1 Pet. 2:24); 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit' (1 Pet. 3:18).

Now the claim is that He is our great High Priest, and if you examine the teaching concerning Him in the light of the desiderata which are laid down in Hebrews 5, you will find that He satisfies them every one: He is taken from among men; He does not take this unto Himself; He is called and appointed of God. Furthermore, He makes representation for the people in the things pertaining to God and He offers gifts and sacrifices. So He fulfils everything perfectly and completely.

And not only that, having thus as the Priest offered the sacrifices, He then intercedes on behalf of His people. We shall just touch on that briefly now because to look at our Lord as the one who intercedes on our behalf is to anticipate later studies, but it is good, perhaps, to consider our Lord's work as Priest as a whole. He prayed for His followers just before His death—you find that in John 17, in His high priestly prayer—and we are told that 'he ever liveth to make [p 305] intercession for us', in heaven with God (Heb. 7:25). He is our Advocate, and it is quite clear that when He pleads on our behalf, His very presence is an intercession in itself because it is a reminder of the expiation that has been made, the propitiation that has been offered. In John 17 we see Him praying that we may be kept from the evil one, that we may be sanctified by the truth, and that we may be where He is to observe and behold the glory which He had with the Father before the world was made.

His intercession is an endless one, and we, as believers and as children of God walking through this world, should we fall into sin—well, it is a blessed knowledge which we have, that we have an Advocate with the Father, an Advocate who is still the propitiation and who has propitiated once and for ever (1 John 2). This is the one thing that can give us assurance that our sin is forgiven, that we must not lie down in sin. It tells us that we must not listen to the devil when he would have us believe that because of that sin we have lost our relationship with God and that it can never be restored again. We answer all that by saying, 'The Advocate is there and He is the propitiation, and we know that we are forgiven if we confess our sins for he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and [again] to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9).

So you see that our Lord satisfied all the demands which are laid down. He did it in His person through being born as a man. He could not have been our High Priest if He had not taken human nature unto Himself. He must be one who is 'taken from among men', so the incarnation was essential. He therefore became man, the Word was made flesh. He took unto Himself human nature in order that He might represent us as one taken from among us, and knowing us and understanding our frame. Having Himself experienced the infirmities, though still without sin, having been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, He is the High Priest who can represent us and speak on our behalf. And we have seen that He has an offering to offer, a sacrifice to present that has been accepted of God. So He intercedes and ever lives to make intercession for all who come to God by Him.

28

The Atonement

We have come in our consideration of these biblical doctrines to the point at which we find ourselves face to face with the great doctrine of the atonement. We have seen that there is only one way whereby men and women can be reconciled to God and that is in and through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and we have started our consideration of His work, having first considered His person. The work is divided, as we have seen, according to the Scriptures themselves—Christ is Prophet, Priest and King. We have considered the teaching concerning Christ as Prophet and we are now considering His work as Priest. We have seen that He satisfies the desiderata which were laid down so clearly in Hebrews 5:1–5; He fulfils all those demands. And we saw that the two main functions of the Priest are to present offerings and sacrifices and to make intercession. I ended that lecture by saying that He has an offering to offer and a sacrifice to present that God has accepted. This brings us inevitably to the consideration of what it is our Lord does offer, and did offer to God, as our great High Priest. And at once we come face to face with the doctrine of the atonement. This concerns primarily, but not only, as I shall be at pains to emphasise, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore our main subject now will be a consideration of the biblical teaching with regard to that.

Now the great question is: What exactly did happen when our Lord died upon the cross? Obviously this is a most vital question, indeed, the most vital question we can ever face together. It would be vital even if we were to look at these things merely from the prominence that is given to this truth in the New Testament itself. It is an actual fact that the death of our Lord upon the cross is mentioned directly

[p 307] 175 times in the New Testament and indirectly many more times. That in itself is staggering and arresting, and it shows the importance which is given to it in the New Testament Scriptures.

Or look at it like this: take the four Gospels; we realise that they are but four portraits of our Lord; they do not tell us everything about Him. John, you remember, ended His Gospel by saying, 'And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written' (John 21:25). But these are written; they are samples, if you like, they are books, they are portraits. And, of course, they are short. Each one of the Gospels is a comparatively short book and yet the striking thing is that in each of them practically one third of the space is devoted to the death of our Lord. It is exactly one third of Matthew; it is nearly one quarter of Luke; and in the case of Mark and John it is over one third.

So we can say that on average, of the space that is given to the coming of the Son of God into this world and all that He did and said, one third is devoted to His death and the events immediately leading up to it. So obviously the implication is that the Gospels are thus bringing us to see that while His incarnation and His life and teaching are of vital importance, the event that exceeds all others in importance is His death upon the cross. So there, again, is another reason why we should consider this very, very carefully and especially, let me remind you, when we bear in mind that the people who wrote those Gospels, under the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit, knew very well that this very thing that they were so emphasising was, as Paul reminds the Corinthians, a 'stumbling block' to the Jews, and 'foolishness' to the Greeks (see 1 Cor. 1:23). Though they knew all that, they put it in the forefront.

Then when you look at the book of Acts, you will find that His death is given the same prominence. The apostle Paul's method, wherever he went, was that he went into the synagogue and he did two things. He proved and established that 'the Christ must needs have suffered', and, second, he said that 'This Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ' (Acts 17:3); and when you go on to the epistles the same thing is made abundantly clear. The apostle says, 'I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2); and he goes on repeating it: 'I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our **[p 308]** sins according to the scriptures ...' (1 Cor. 15:3); and there are other similar verses.

Also, as you look at the epistles of the other writers you find the same thing; 'Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot ...' writes Peter (1 Pet. 1:18-19). 'He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,' says John (1 John 2:2). And the same is true of Revelation: '[They] have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14), and so on. And so anybody who reads the New Testament, even superficially, unless he is a victim of serious prejudice, is bound to gather the impression that, according to the writers of this book at any rate, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is of paramount importance. That is why we are bound to consider this, and the real question that confronts us is: What exactly happened there? What was really taking place when our Lord died upon the cross? What is the meaning, the explanation, of that death?

Now I know that many people are not really concerned to know that. They say, 'No, I am not theological or doctrinal; all I know is that the cross is marvellous and wonderful and that the Lord died there.' And there are many who seem to think that that is the right attitude. They think that this is too sacred for anybody to examine, that you must never come to the cross with your mind but only with your heart, that the doctrine of the cross is something to be felt, not understood. But nothing is more terribly dangerous than that. If I understand the New Testament aright, there is no place where we should be more careful to go with our minds fully operating as to the cross on Calvary's hill. And I will tell you why: it is because this is the central thing; there is no truth concerning which the adversary and the enemy of our souls is so anxious to muddle and confuse us as this particular truth.

The history of the Church, as I shall show you briefly, is something that bears endless record to that fact. Let us put it like this: those people who are not interested in doctrine say that all they need is to fall on their knees before the cross; they say that they are not interested in the meaning. But my reply is that that is impossible. Everybody has *some* view of the cross; and when you say you believe in Christ and look at the cross, you must ask yourself what you believe about it. You have your own interpretation and because of the terrible danger of having the wrong interpretation, we must examine [p 309] the truth and be certain that we are biblical in our understanding of what happened upon the cross.

I emphasise this because I find that so many people—forgive me for saying it once more, but this is one thing about the evangelical position today that really does alarm me—so many people have this tendency to say that it does not matter very much what people believe, that the doctrinal definitions do not count as long as people talk about the cross. I remember a few years ago a man said to me: 'I hear that so and so—naming a well-known preacher—has changed recently.'

'Oh,' I replied, 'on what grounds?'

'Well,' said the man, 'he has just produced a book of sermons on the cross.' And because this preacher had done that, my friend had assumed that he had become evangelical. But when he read the book, he discovered that the man's view had not changed; it was a view that made the cross of Christ of none effect. He had imposed upon the records his own philosophical ideas and fancies. It is very dangerous to assume that because a man is always talking about the cross—he may even have a cross suspended above the pulpit or somewhere else in his church—that he has the true doctrine of the cross.

No, the question is what do we believe about the cross? It is the apostle Paul who tells us that we can make it of none effect 'through philosophy and vain deceit' (Col. 2:8). The cross of Jesus Christ, the death of Christ, is still an offence to the natural man or woman and I sometimes think that they show that most plainly when they talk about it in a wrong and false way. And so I make no apology for considering with you some of the wrong ideas with regard to what happened when the Son of God died upon the cross.

Some people regard it as a tragedy or as an accident. They say it was just one of those things that should never have happened; it was entirely due to the stupidity of the people. It was partly political, they say. The high priests and Pharisees and scribes believed that the people were being misled and that there was a danger that their authority would be taken from them, so they worked up an opposing party. These people go further and say that it was something that took our Lord completely by surprise, that He never expected it and when He said, 'It is finished,' He was really saying (I am quoting from a book): 'It is all over.' His life had ended in failure; He could, they say, have persuaded the people to follow Him and live a

godly life, but they would not listen. He was only thirty-three; what a tragedy it [p 310] was that this young teacher was put to death so unexpectedly and so surprisingly, especially to Himself.

Well, I am sure it is scarcely necessary for me to refute something which is so far removed from the scriptural representation. Our Lord talked about the cross, and He prepared His own followers for it, especially after Simon Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi when our Lord at once began to teach the disciples about the cross, about His death and resurrection. Peter objected because he did not understand, but, you see, the Lord was beginning to teach them (Matt. 16:13–23). On another occasion He said, 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:28)—this was an explicit statement of His reason for coming to this earth and dying. Read the Gospel of John especially and keep your eye upon the phrase 'the hour'. Our Lord repeatedly talked about some hour that was to come, the hour for which He had come into the world; it was about to arrive, it was the hour of His death, leading finally to His glorification (John 12:23; 17:1). Then we are told that on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah talked about 'his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem' (Luke 9:31). Are we not also told that 'He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51) and when His disciples warned Him against going He said, 'It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem' (Luke 13:33). He knew He was going to die.

That other idea is too monstrous because there is all this abundant evidence to show that He came into the world in order to die. As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, He came 'to taste death for every man' (Heb. 2:9). He tells us later on that, 'As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil' (Heb. 2:14). Then we are told that after His resurrection He talked to His disciples, who were somewhat confused, and told them to read through the Scriptures, pointing out that they would see from the Scriptures that everything that had happened to Him had been predicted and that He had come to fulfil the things that God had already promised (Luke 24:13–35).

Then when you come to the explanations of the apostles themselves in their writings, you find they say exactly the same thing. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost Peter did not say that Christ's death had been an accident. He said, 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked [p 311] hands have crucified and slain' (Acts 2:23), and he repeats that message in his first epistle. He tells us that this thing was planned in eternity; that it had now literally happened and was being preached and declared (1 Pet. 1:20).

But let me point out something which is of fascinating interest in this connection. There is one most important passage in Matthew's Gospel: Matthew 26:1–5, especially verse 5, which settles this matter once and for ever. In verse 5, the word 'day' should not be there; what the rulers said was, 'Not on the feast day'—not during the festival—'lest there be an uproar among the people.' Now what all that means is this: here was our Lord on the Tuesday of that week, which is now sometimes called Holy Week. He was predicting that He would be betrayed and crucified on the Friday: 'Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover'—that is the first thing—'and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified'—He was fixing the time. You notice that these authorities who were plotting His death said: 'Not on the feast day,' not during the festival. They agreed, in other words, that He was not to be crucified on Good Friday, but He was crucified then, as you know. Now it was the custom that the Jews should not put anybody to death during the festival—if you want confirmation of that, you will find it in Acts 12 where we are told that Peter had been arrested by King Herod, but they were told to keep him in prison because, 'Then were the days of unleavened bread' (Acts 12:3–4). But our Lord not only knew that He was going to die, He knew the exact moment He was going to die and He gave warning of it those three days ahead, of time. Yet people tell us glibly that it took Him by surprise, that it was an accident!

Another wrong idea—and the people who hold it feel that they are a bit in advance of the previous people—is that His was the death of a martyr. What they mean is this. Here was this wonderful teacher; people tried to make Him recant but He would not, He was ready to die, so He died a martyr's death. It seems to me that a very simple statement can be made about this, and I say it with reverence. If the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was the death of a martyr and nothing more, then He was inferior to many martyrs who have died in this world. I prove that like this: the whole glory of the martyrs is that they went to the

stake, or whatever it was, with triumph and rejoicing. They thanked God that at last they had been found worthy to suffer for His name's sake—indeed, they rejoiced while the flames were licking their very flesh.

[p 312] That is the martyr's death, but what do you find when you come to our Lord? You find that every time He thought of it He groaned in spirit. When He knew that His hour was come He said, 'What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour' (John 12:27). But the thought was there: might He be spared from this hour? He shrank from it. What is the meaning of the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane? He pleaded with His Father, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me' (Matt. 26:39)—the martyrs never prayed like that. No, the answer is quite simple: it was not the death of a martyr. That is the only explanation: it was in a category of its own, it was bigger in every sense than any martyr's death ever has been, or can be. It was a unique death which can only adequately be explained in one way.

Very well, His death was not an accident; it was not a tragedy; it was not a martyr's death; nor was it something that might or might not have happened and all would have been well. No, the New Testament makes it plain that it was something that was essential to man's salvation. But even when you have said that, you have not said enough. In what way was it essential? Now it is at this point that a variety of explanations have been put forward throughout the long history of the Church, and they are still being put forward. There are people, for instance, who teach that the death of Christ is for our salvation, but is only a part of our salvation. The explanation they give for this view is quite unscriptural. So once more I must ask you to consider some of these false explanations before we can pass on to the true explanation. Let me be quite clear about this. I am not foolish enough to suggest that I can understand the meaning of the death of my Lord upon the cross exhaustively. I cannot. But I can say that an explanation is given in the Scriptures themselves which I must uphold; and I must test any view that anybody may put forward with regard to the death of our Lord by what the Scriptures show me I am to know. As we have seen, it is our business, always, to go as far as revelation leads us. It is our duty never to try to go beyond that, and I think I shall be able to show you that in all I shall put forward I am not going beyond revelation. But I am certainly going, and must go, as far as revelation takes me.

So let us consider some of the false theories that have been put forward throughout the centuries and are still being put forward with regard to the death of our Lord. Here is the first—I am taking them historically. It is the so-called *ransom theory*, not the true ransom **[p 313]** teaching, but a false theory. Some of the early Christians themselves taught that when our Lord died upon the cross He was paying homage to the devil; He was paying a ransom price to the devil in order that He might liberate those who were held captive. Now our answer is that there is no scriptural statement about that. The Scriptures do give teaching with respect to the devil and his powers and the cross, and I shall return to that, but they in no way suggest that he has any right or authority. He is a usurper, he has no rights and our Lord did not acknowledge him in any way at all. So we must reject that theory *in toto*.

The next false teaching was put forward towards the end of the eleventh century by an Archbishop of Canterbury called Anselm. It was the first attempt ever made to formulate a false doctrine of the atonement or the death of our Lord. What is Anselm's theory? Sometimes called the *satisfaction* or the *commercial theory*, it says that when man sinned, the honour—not the justice, you notice—of God had been wounded. The sin was an insult to God and, therefore, Anselm said, before men and women could be delivered and forgiven, God's honour must somehow be vindicated. But men and women themselves could not do that, as they had sinned against God. God could respond to them in one of two ways: He could punish them or forgive them; but, Anselm said, God cannot forgive until His honour has been satisfied. So the teaching was that our Lord had come to pay tribute to the honour of God.

Anselm said that by His death Christ had paid this tribute to the honour of God. He was sinless and He had no need to die, but He did die and so brought infinite glory to God. In serving God He went even to the death of the cross and thereby He did something beyond what was necessary. He had kept the law, because He was 'under the law' (Gal. 4:4), and the honour of God was satisfied. So God was pleased and wanted to reward His Son for dying, but the Son needed no reward for Himself and He said, 'Give the reward to the people.' That theory would have us believe that our salvation is a work of supererogation, a kind of extra work that the Lord has done and has given to us as a free reward. Now there are many

objections to this theory, which I hope to show you when we come to consider the substitutionary teaching and explanation of Christ's death, but the vital objection to this particular idea of Anselm's is that it does not mention the justice of God, merely a kind of wounded honour. Christ's death is not, therefore, essential, whereas the biblical teaching shows that it is [p 314] God's justice that makes Christ's death absolutely essential.

Another theory is commonly called the *moral influence* theory. Now this is the most popular of the theories; let me summarise it in this way. It says that God had no difficulty in forgiving us; as far as God was concerned there was no need to do anything. His love is so great that He always, at every point, is full of forgiveness; but the difficulty was to get mankind to believe that. So, they say, what really happened on the cross was a marvellous display of the love of God. I remember once listening to the sermon of a man who ridiculed the substitutionary atonement. 'You must not say,' he said, 'that God was offering forgiveness because of the cross. God forgives even without the cross, but the cross was the proof of God's love. God is telling us on the cross: "Though you have killed my only begotten Son, I will still forgive you."' Christ's death was a manifestation of the love of God. In the cross we see Him suffering in and with His sinful creatures and taking upon Himself the woes and griefs of human life. So the cross is meant to break us down; as we look at it our hard hearts are to be softened. The death of Christ is to do something to us alone.

Now that theory, again, as I think we shall see when we come to the positive theory, is entirely wrong, because it does not mention the justice of God at all. It says that nothing was necessary on God's side—there was no obstacle there—but the trouble was only with man. So Christ is not a mediator, because He was dealing with man and not at all with God. The theory takes no notice whatsoever of some of the most glorious scriptural statements which we shall be considering together.

Another idea is that the *death of Christ is just an example*. He came into the world to live a perfect life. He kept the law, yes, and He wanted to leave a good example of obedience to God and His will, so He went as far as death. He was ready to do even that in order to do God's will and thereby He provided us with an example. The answer to that is that we still have to save ourselves and we save ourselves by imitating His example. We are not saved by Him, it is not His blood that redeems us. Furthermore, what about those who lived before Christ?

Another theory is given the name of the *governmental theory*. I mention it partly because it was the view of the cross that was advocated by the great preacher of the last century, Dr Dale of Birmingham. Originally propounded by Grotius, a Dutchman in the seventeenth century, it says that the death of our Lord did not take place because [p 315] the justice of God demanded it since God's law is not something which is absolutely final. If He wished He could change it. So He could have forgiven men and women in another way if He had chosen to do so, but He chose to do it in this way because, in order to preserve moral life in this world, God had to do something drastic about sin. If He had forgiven sin without Christ's death, we would have said that it did not matter very much whether we sinned or not. But if we said that, where would the moral character of the universe be? So, to preserve His own moral government of the universe, and because He takes such a serious view of sin, says this theory, God sent His Son to the cross, and the Son went to the cross in order that mankind might realise that sin is serious and forbidden.

Of course, once again there are fundamental objections. The justice of God is ignored and, still more serious, supporters of His view do not understand that God, because He is God, cannot go back upon His own law. As I want to show you when we come to the positive doctrine, there is a teaching of the death on the cross which is altogether greater than this. It is that Christ died upon the cross for no reason except this; it *had* to happen; it was an absolute necessity; there was no other way whereby man could be forgiven.

I must mention one other theory and that is the *mystical theory*. This was popularised in London early in the nineteenth century by Edward Irving who had come down from Glasgow where he had been assistant to the great Dr Chalmers, one of the most eloquent preachers of that time. Edward Irving captured London; society crowded after him, drawn by his oratory. It was he who introduced the modern idea of speaking in tongues. He founded what is called the Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square and

there he developed strange ideas. Alas, he went astray in many respects, not only in his view of the death of Christ upon the cross. But we are interested in his view of Christ's atonement. It was not his own original idea. He said that Christ, the Son of God, came from heaven, and took the form of human nature. But Irving did not believe that Christ's human nature was perfect; he said that the human nature that Christ had was sinful, but He kept it without sin by the power of the Spirit. Not only that, but by dying upon the cross He purged sin out of it, so what really happened was that our Lord, by living and by dying, purged human nature of sin. He removed the original depravity and united human nature to God. Again, there is nothing here about satisfying God's justice, nothing about honouring the law; the very essence of the true [p 316] idea taught in the Scriptures is not there at all, merely this strange, mystical conception which is never taught anywhere in the Scriptures.

And finally, and this is the most modern of all the ideas, there is what is called the *vicarious repentance* idea of the atonement. This was very popular at the beginning of the twentieth century and there are many who teach it. It is said that what our Lord was really doing on the cross was offering repentance on behalf of mankind. Man has no true conception of sin and therefore he cannot repent truly. God cannot forgive until man does repent, so what our Lord was doing was making a confession on behalf of mankind. He was saying, 'Sin is a terrible thing; I am going to show mankind that it deserves death, and I am offering repentance on their behalf by dying on the cross, submitting to that as an act of repentance.'

There is one vital objection to this theory and it is that our Lord, as we shall see, certainly took our sins upon Him, but there was one thing that our Lord of necessity could not do: He had no experience of what it is to sin; He had no experience of what it is to feel guilty; He had no feeling of remorse. Because He is God and man, because He is perfect, He could not know what you and I know when we have sinned; and surely it is quite impossible for anyone to repent, or to offer penance, without a feeling of guilt, without a sensation of what sin, in a creature, is against God. Without having our sensation and feeling and experience of being in sin, our Lord could not repent on our behalf.

Now we have spent some time in considering these false ideas of what happened when our Lord died upon the cross on Calvary's hill. Having got them out of the way, we shall come next to the positive biblical teaching. I shall give you evidence and arguments; we shall look at it together and we shall see that the substitutionary idea of the atonement, which is the biblical teaching, not only clarifies the whole thing where nothing else can, but it magnifies the cross and the love of God in a way that all these other theories, which have been put forward in order to safeguard the love of God, completely fail to do.

Substitution

Having considered some of the false theories with respect to the doctrine of what exactly happened when the Son of God died on the cross, we come now to a positive exposition of what I claim to be the biblical teaching. It is certainly the view of the atonement that was taught by all the Protestant Fathers. It was taught by Martin Luther and John Calvin and by the Reformers in Britain.

So what is it? The biblical teaching emphasises the supremacy of the substitutionary element in the atonement. It asserts that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered the penalty of the broken law vicariously, as the substitute for His people. That is, in a brief compass, a statement of what has been known as the *reformed view of the biblical doctrine of the atonement*. Now you will notice at once that there is a difference between this and those false theories which we have considered. This view has two main characteristics. The first is the emphasis upon the fact that Jesus Christ has done something as our substitute, and the second is the penal aspect—it states that the law pronounced a penalty which He, as our substitute, has borne in our stead.

Notice that neither of those two characteristics was really mentioned in any of the false theories that we previously mentioned. The objection to this view has mainly been with respect to the penal aspect, but I shall not delay over this objection because I am anxious to give you a positive statement of the doctrine. Let us then look at the biblical teaching on which this view is based. There are many different ways in which one could approach this subject but the most satisfactory way, it seems to me, is under the following headings.

The first is this: the New Testament clearly teaches that our Lord's work is entirely in line with the Old Testament teaching on sacrifices. **[p 318]** Our Lord Himself claimed that, you remember, and did so more than once. As we have already seen, He was the Priest who offered the sacrifice. The New Testament teaching about Christ's work parallels everything we are told about the work of the priest who made offerings and the sacrifices under the Old Testament dispensation. Our Lord Himself said, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil' (Matt. 5:17)—that was His specific claim, and it has reference to all the Levitical rules about sacrifices. It includes the whole law in all its fulness, not only the moral aspect, but, in a very special way, the ritual aspect which is concerned with the offerings and the sacrifices. And not only did He claim it there, He made the same claim after the resurrection: 'And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me' (Luke 24:44).

But then, of course, there is a sense in which the whole of the epistle to the Hebrews was written to establish that point. The argument of Hebrews is that the Old Testament was nothing but a kind of shadow, pointing everywhere to the substance; it reveals to us the types pointing to the prototype. 'You must not go back to the shadow,' says the writer in effect, 'now you have the substance.' Since the Old Testament types pointed forward to Him, we are entitled to argue that they were of the same kind and the same essential quality. If you read chapters 7 and 9, particularly, of the epistle to the Hebrews, you will see that argument worked out in considerable detail.

What, then, does the Old Testament teach with regard to the function of the sacrifices that were offered by the priest? The first thing we are told is that the purpose of the burnt offerings and sin offerings was to propitiate God. They were designed to make God look with favour and with pleasure upon the people who had sinned against Him. We have already looked at that term but let us consider it again as we find it in the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the taxcollector who went up to the Temple to pray. In the *Authorised Version*, we are told that the tax-collector 'would not lift up so much as his eyes', but said, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Now what he really said was, 'God be propitiated to me a sinner' (Luke 18:13). The object of the sacrifices was that God should look upon sinful people in a benign manner, in a manner that was ready to receive them.

I emphasise that because you remember how many of those false [p 319] theories would have us believe that the sole purpose of the death of our Lord upon the cross was to do something to *us*. But at the very beginning they are wrong. The object of the burnt offerings and sacrifices was—if I may put it reverently—to do something to God, not to influence man; they were designed to propitiate God. This is a most important point.

The second thing that we see clearly in these Old Testament Scriptures is that this propitiation was secured by the expiation of the guilt, and the definition of expiation, let me remind you, is to wipe out the guilt of sins. These sacrifices were meant to propitiate God, and the result of that was that God expiated the people's sins.

And the third thing the sacrifices and burnt offerings teach is that this expiation was effected by the vicarious punishment of a victim. You remember what happened? A victim was taken, an animal was substituted for the sinner, and this animal then became the one who bore the punishment of the sinner. So we are entitled to teach that those Old Testament sacrifices show, very plainly and clearly, that it is because the animal was substituted for the offender and his sin was dealt with in the animal, that his guilt was expiated, and God was propitiated with respect to him.

So the last thing the sacrifices teach is that the effect of such sin offerings and burnt offerings was the pardon of the offender and his restoration to communion with God.

If you study the book of Leviticus you will find that that was the great function and purpose of those sin offerings, and the burnt offerings in particular. Sin was dealt with in a substitute and the result of that was that the sins of the people were covered and they were restored to a position in which they could be blessed by God. There is a phrase in Hebrews 9:22 which sums all that up: 'without shedding of blood is no remission'. That is the great message of the Old Testament. That is why God, through Moses, commanded the children of Israel to take all those animals and kill them and offer their blood. And all the ceremonial, which people so often omit in their reading of the Bible because, they say, 'It has nothing to do with me,' has everything to do with us! God was teaching the people that 'without shedding of blood is no remission' of sin. The Old Testament sacrifices were pointing forward to the perfect sin offering that was to come; they are types of the Lord Jesus Christ in His death.

That is the first major principle, now let us come to the second. The New Testament teaches specifically that Christ saves us by His death [p 320] —that is its essential teaching. There is so much Scripture which could be quoted at this point; let me just give you the most important references. In John 1:29 we read: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' Here John the Baptist describes Him as 'the Lamb of God', going back to those Old Testament lambs that were offered. Take also Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5:7). Or again, Romans 3:25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation ... for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.'

Then there is Romans 5:6: 'For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly,' and the same thing is repeated in the tenth verse of that fifth chapter: 'For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.' Again, Galatians 1:4 reads, 'Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.' And Paul says in Ephesians 1:7, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.'

Ephesians 2:13 says, 'But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' The 'blood of Christ' means life laid down, and in the epistle to the Hebrews you find this stated almost everywhere, especially in Hebrews 9:12: 'Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.' He has obtained eternal redemption for us by laying down His life on our behalf. The fourteenth verse in the same chapter is of equal significance: 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.'

The tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews also has a very important statement here: 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (v.10); then: 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God' (v.12); and: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (v. 14). (Notice the repetition of the word *one*.) Peter, too, says the same thing: 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet. 1:18–19). You see, we cannot [p 321] understand these terms unless we are familiar with the Old Testament.

Then take 1 Peter 3:18: 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit,' and 2 Peter 2:1 says: 'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, *even denying the Lord that bought them*, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.'

The apostle John writes, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7); and in the book of Revelation we read, 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood' (Rev. 1:5).

Now that is a small selection of the New Testament statements, but what a selection! They are some of the pivotal passages that at once bring before us the idea of the substitute and the penal suffering, the bearing of the guilt and the guilt being punished in the substitute. And you notice the repetition of *the blood*. I have known people who have called themselves Christian who have said that they dislike this thought about the blood. But apart from the blood we have no redemption! 'In whom we have redemption through his blood.' It is by the precious blood of Christ, the laying down of the life, the poured out life, that our redemption is secured.

But let us go on to the third proposition. The New Testament terms that are applied to Him and to His work for us and on our behalf prove the truth of this doctrine. Take first the word *ransom*. You will find that mentioned in Matthew 20:28: 'Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many'; and in 1 Timothy 2:5–6: 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.' And what is a ransom? It is a price paid for liberating either a person or thing that has been taken or possessed by another. And the teaching here is that Christ, by His death, looses our bonds and sets us free, who were prisoners; and that He does so by paying the price; and the price He has paid is His own precious blood. 'Ye are not your own,' says Paul.

'For ye are bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Again, Peter puts it, 'Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ' (1 Pet. 1:18–19)[p 322] —ransom money has been paid and the captives are set free.

The word *redemption* has the same idea. You redeem something by paying a price to get it back, and it has come back to you.

The next word is *propitiation*. This is mentioned in Romans 3:25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God'; and in 1 John 2:2: 'And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' Now a propitiation is an appeasing, or the means of appeasing. The offering was taken by God and it was meant to appease the wrath of God. There are some who say that the meaning of the term is derived from the 'mercy seat', or the lid of the ark of the covenant which was in the Holiest of Holies in the Temple. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled sacrificial blood upon it to cover the sins of the people. Our Lord's death is that by which God covers, overlooks and pardons, our sins. Indeed, the teaching goes further in the New Testament dispensation: our sins are blotted out, so that a penitent and believing sinner is again reconciled to God.

And that is the next term—*reconciliation*. You will find it in Romans 5:10: 'For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be

saved by his life.' And it is also to be found several times in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19. Those, then, are certain terms that we have to reckon with—ransom, redemption, propitiation and reconciliation and each time they refer to His death.

But let us come to the fourth proposition. There are certain crucial New Testament terms which teach substitution and specifically emphasise the vicarious element in His death. He is one who acts for us. First of all, again consider the Old Testament types. Those Old Testament animals that were offered were vicarious and the way we prove that is this: the priest was commanded to place his hands upon the head of the beast. Why was that? It was to transfer the people's guilt on to the beast and the beast was then killed. Yes, but before it was killed, their sins had been transferred to it—it was the substitute.

So our sins have been laid on the Lord Jesus Christ and He has borne them. Isaiah 53 is a crucial passage here. 'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' (v. 6); this verse specifically says that our sins have been laid on Him; and it is there again in verse 12: 'Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the [p 323] spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' Again I would remind you of John 1:29: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'; 2 Corinthians 5:21: 'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him'; and Galatians 3:13: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.' We are told that we are delivered from the curse of the law because Christ has been made a curse for us. Again, you will find it in Hebrews 9:28: 'So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many'; and 1 Peter 2:24: 'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.' The teaching is quite clear: the guilt of our sin is now transferred to Him; He becomes liable for the punishment that was due; our sins are imputed to Him.

Then the next evidence under this heading is to be found in particular words which are translated by the word *for*. There are three different words in the Greek which are translated in our English Bible as 'for'. One means 'on account of'. You get that, for instance, in Romans 8:3: '*for* [on account of] sin', and in Galatians 1:4: 'who gave himself *for* our sins'; and again in 1 Peter 3:18 where we are told, 'For Christ also hath once suffered *for* sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God'—suffering for us, you notice it each time. Then there is the statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3: 'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died *for* our sins according to the scriptures.' He has fulfilled the Old Testament sacrifices, and again we find in 1 John 2:2: 'He is the propitiation *for* our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.'

Another word which is translated 'for' means 'on behalf of', or, 'for the benefit of'. In other words, the idea of substitution comes in very strongly here. We see it in 2 Corinthians 5:14: 'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died *for* all, then were all dead.' Verses 20 and 21 continue: 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin *for* us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' This is constantly repeated, for example, we see it [p 324] again in 1 Timothy 2:5–6 and in 1 Peter 3:18.

But the strongest of these words translated 'for' is the one which is found in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45: 'Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom *for* many.' In its fullest sense it means, 'as a substitute for' many. So there is the evidence which specifically teaches His substitution and all these passages emphasise the vicarious element.

The fifth evidence is that there are numbers of statements which emphasise our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. The main place you find this, of course, is in the epistle to the Romans, in the great argument in the fifth chapter, beginning at verse 11, and especially in verse 12. The argument is this: that just as we all were responsible for Adam's sin, and died according to the similitude of Adam's transgression, so we are saved by Christ. Take the one sentence: 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous' (v. 19). The teaching is that the whole human race

is in Adam so, when Adam fell, we all fell. Then the other side is that all who are in Christ have the full benefit of everything He has done; in other words, when He died, they died.

And that is still more clear in Romans 6:3–8:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

You see the argument? We are in Christ; we are a part of Him; we are one with Him; we are identified with Him; as we were in Adam, so we are in Christ.

That again is the great argument of 1 Corinthians 15, the great passage on the resurrection: ‘As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (v. 22). He acts on our behalf, we have died with Him, we rise with Him, we are in Him and belong to Him—a most important and vital argument.

But I cannot stay with that because I must hurry to the sixth proposition or argument. All the statements which tell us that His death [p 325] liberates us from the law are of crucial importance. All the statements that show that He has set us free from the law teach this same substitution and penal idea of the atonement. ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14); in other words, He has delivered us from the law. And there are other arguments that show the same thing. Take the one in Romans 7, the first part particularly, where our position, before He saves us, is compared to a married woman. She is bound as long as her husband is alive, but if he dies she is free. So we were bound by the law, but have been set free by Christ’s death.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19 we read, ‘To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.’ That, too, is an important statement. We are told that our trespasses had been imputed unto us because they belonged to us, but that is no longer so—why? Because He has been made sin for us. God has imputed our sins to Christ. He has punished them in Christ and now He does not impute our sins to us, but imputes to us the righteousness of His own Son. Again, take Galatians 2:19–20: ‘For I through the law,’ says Paul, ‘am dead to the law, that I might live unto God’—because of what Christ has done, he has died with Christ—‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.’ He has set me free from the law. ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree’ (Gal. 3:13). What can be stronger than that?

Now all these passages show that He has delivered us from the law, the penalty of the law, the penalty of our guilt, the curse. It cannot be more specific, but still I want to go on to a final statement or proposition and, in many ways I think that this is the most important of all. There are a number of statements which emphasise the Godward aspect and God’s activity in the death of our Lord. You see the importance of that? All those false theories kept looking at us, and if they did not look at us, they started looking at the Lord Himself. But I shall give you statements which show that God the Father was in this.

First of all, certain Scriptures teach us that it was in God’s mind and plan before the foundation of the world—there is an eternal aspect to what happened on the cross on Calvary’s hill. Take Acts 2:23: ‘Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.’ It [p 326] was the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that sent Him to the cross. Or 1 Peter 1:20 says: ‘Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you’—it was planned before the foundation of the world. And again we read in Revelation 13:8, ‘And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’ There are some who say that that should have been rendered, ‘... whose names are not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb slain’. It does not matter which, the fact is that names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world and when He did that, He did it because He knew that that person was to be covered by the death of His only begotten Son.

But let me end by giving you this specific statement which literally tells us that it was God who was doing this thing on Calvary: Isaiah 53:6: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.' But have you ever realised that John 3:16 says this? 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son'—to the death of the cross—it is God who gave Him. Take again Romans 3:25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God'—there it is again. Or Romans 8:32: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' He, God, He 'spared not His own Son but delivered Him'—it was God who did it.

Then there is that great statement in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19, 'And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ...' It was God who was doing it, God the eternal Father. God was doing this by means of the cross, through Christ.

And then, above them all there is the last verse of 2 Corinthians 5, 'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (21). You will never find anything stronger than that and any view you might hold of the atonement must cater for that. Indeed, I feel that that one verse is enough. There it is, a specific statement of the eternal Father: *He* made Him sin, *He* imputed the guilt of our sins to Him; *He* put them upon Him; and then *He* tells us that *He* punished them in Him. Any [p 327] idea or theory of the atonement must always give full weight and significance to the activity of God the Father.

In my next lecture I will go on to one final piece of scriptural evidence which I think will clinch this debate for you.

30

The Necessity of the Atonement

We are now considering, let me remind you, what has always been regarded as the essential Protestant doctrine concerning the atonement. Not that it is confined by any means to the period in the Church subsequent to the Protestant Reformation, because it can be clearly shown that it has, in a sense, always been the main exposition of the doctrine of the atonement from the very beginning, but it is often called the Protestant emphasis. A better name is, of course, the *substitutionary* teaching of the atonement because it is the doctrine which emphasises the substitutionary penal elements in the atonement, and we summarised it under seven main headings.

I ended the last lecture by saying that I had another, a final argument and, speaking for myself, this is one of the most cogent if not, indeed, the most cogent of the arguments. I would put this eighth point like this: we are going to consider statements in the Scriptures which emphasise the fact that the death of our Lord upon the cross was an absolute necessity. Obviously these are very crucial matters so I would subdivide those statements in this way: first of all, statements which describe our Lord's own conduct; second, statements which He made Himself about His death; and third, statements which others made about it. All these, it seems to me, prove quite conclusively that His death was an absolute necessity.

The first, of course, is what we are told about the events in the Garden of Gethsemane. Why did our Lord endure that agony? Why did He sweat those great drops of blood? What is the meaning of it? The view that our Lord's death was a martyr's death, is, as we have seen, a totally inadequate explanation—the martyrs did not behave as Christ did face to face with death. Our Lord in the Garden was facing the **[p 329]** fact that there was an element in His death which was utterly abhorrent to Him, something that caused Him such agony as to lead to this bloodstained sweat. We have to explain that, it must be accounted for, and I suggest to you that all those other ideas and theories about the atonement completely fail to do so.

But, you remember, we are left, not only with the need of explaining what took place in the Garden, but also what our Lord said. Do you remember His prayer, 'O my Father, *if it be possible* let this cup pass from me' (Matt. 26:39)? He went on to say, 'Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.' But the request was there. Now that cannot refer merely to the fact of physical death, because, again, this would make Him inferior to the martyrs, His own followers. No, something, which He foresaw, was going to happen in His death which He was anxious to avoid if it was possible.

Now, we must emphasise this. It was the only time during His earthly life that our Lord ever made a request like this to His Father and obviously, therefore, it was something very exceptional. It points to this, that there was something in His death that was absolutely necessary. The question He asked was: Is it an absolute necessity? Is it possible for me to do this work in any other way? Let not this happen if it is possible. But, He said, if it is not possible, I submit to it. Now there, surely, is a final and conclusive argument that the death of our Lord upon the cross, in the way in which it happened, was an utter necessity.

Nothing can be stronger than that, but then we can add something that confirms it and, in a sense, repeats it. It is the cry of dereliction upon the cross: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34). Now, no doctrine of the atonement is adequate which does not explain that. And again, it is obviously inadequate to suggest that mere physical suffering produced that cry, because the whole argument about the martyrs again applies. No, no, something was happening there which was in a category on its own. Our Lord was conscious of being forsaken of God. His communion with the eternal Father was temporarily broken. He, who had come from the eternal bosom and had been with God from the beginning, for the one and only time in all eternity was not able to see the face of God. Surely again, here is another of those all-important and conclusive arguments which demonstrate, beyond any cavil whatsoever, that when a thing like that happened there could be only one reason for it—it *had* to happen. None of the other theories can account for that cry of dereliction.

[p 330] Then the second group of statements I would describe as statements which directly affirm the absolute necessity of His death on the cross. Those others have been stating it more or less indirectly but here now is something direct. It is the specific statement which is to be found in Romans 3:25–6 and which is undoubtedly the *locus classicus* in connection with this whole subject: ‘Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness:’—God’s righteousness—‘that he’—God—‘might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’

Now that is a tremendous statement. You see, Paul is saying that the problem which arises is this: How could God overlook or cover the sins of the children of Israel under the old dispensation? How can we account for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God? And Paul’s answer is that the death of our Lord upon the cross does that; that is one of the things it is meant to do. But, Paul says, it goes beyond that. His death not only explains how God could cover the sins that are past, it explains how God can forgive sin at any time, and it is the only explanation. Here is the problem: How can God, at one and the same time, be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus? How can this eternal, holy God who is just and righteous and unchangeable, ‘the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning’ (Jas. 1:17), the God who ‘is light, and in him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5), the God who is of such a pure countenance that He cannot even behold evil and sin, how can He forgive sin and still remain what He eternally is?

And the answer that the apostle gives is this: The only way in which God can do that is what He did to His Son upon the cross—He has set Him forth as a propitiation of sins, and He has done it in that way, ‘to declare ... at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’ And, you see, there is only one explanation of that. God, who is just, can forgive sin because He has punished sin in the person of His only begotten Son. So He remains righteous; He remains just. He has done to sin what He said He would do, and yet, because He has done it in the substitute, He can forgive us, He can justify us ‘who believe in Jesus’.

Now the argument of the apostle is that that was the only way in which God could forgive sins. And indeed, I say again, that for myself, if I had no other text, that would be enough. None of the [p 331] other theories can explain that text, and they do not. The only explanation for Christ’s death is that it was an absolute necessity. It was the only way in which, if I may so term it, the eternal character of God could be reconciled with itself and could be vindicated, not only before the whole world of men, but before the principalities and powers in heavenly places, indeed, even before the devil and all the citizens of hell. God proclaims His eternal justice and yet can forgive the sins of those who believe in Jesus—a most amazing, a most profound statement.

And then my third and last group of references under this heading I put like this: there are certain other statements in the Scriptures which suggest that this was an absolute necessity. Take, for instance, Hebrews 2:9 where the author says, ‘But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.’ He had to suffer death; He had to ‘taste death’. Now take that word ‘taste’. What a word it is—what a strong word. Do we realise the full content of that tasting? There is a sense in which it can be said that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who has ever tasted death in all its bitterness and horror. That is why we see Him there sweating blood in the Garden. That is why we hear Him crying out upon the cross. That is why He died so soon and the authorities were surprised that He was already dead. That is why His heart literally broke, it actually ruptured. It was because he *tasted*. And my argument is this: Would God the eternal Father ever allow His only begotten, beloved Son to endure that if it were not absolutely essential?

But take another statement which says the same thing—Romans 8:32: ‘He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?’ Notice especially the first part: ‘He that *spared* not’. What does that mean? Spared Him from what? Spared Him from that agony, that shame. He delivered Him up. He, God the Father, delivered Him to that; it was the only way. The Son volunteered, the Son went voluntarily, but it was the Father who sent Him. He did not spare Him. And when the Son bore our sins the Father spared Him nothing. The full wrath of God against sin, the full

blast of it, descended upon Him. 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.' Indeed John 3:16 says exactly the same thing: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave ...', and that giving includes the shame and the suffering and the agony of the death upon the cross. And my argument again is this: is [p 332] it conceivable that God would have delivered up His own Son to that, even to the point of that break in the eternal communion that was between them? Is it conceivable, I ask, that God would have done that unless it was an absolute necessity? Well, this doctrine, this substitutionary penal view of the doctrine of the atonement asserts all that and that is why I say again that it is the only adequate and satisfactory explanation of the biblical teaching.

But if you require certain subsidiary arguments, take these: first, the doctrine of the wrath of God. If you believe at all in the doctrine of the wrath of God against sin, then obviously sin must be punished. The penal element comes in and that leads to the necessity of substitution. Or take this argument—the majesty and the immutability of the divine law. 'Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matt. 18). 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,' said Jesus (Matt. 24:35).

Then another argument is that if we do agree that sin is guilt and not merely something negative, not merely some weakness, not merely some theory to develop, if we agreed, when we were considering the doctrine of sin, that sin is transgression and lawlessness, that sin, therefore, involves guilt, then, obviously, we will have to agree that guilt has got to be dealt with, and that somehow or another it must be punished. And this is the only view of the atonement that really does that.

Then, lastly, there is no other theory which shows us why it is essential to believe in Christ and why it is believing in Him and on Him that saves us. Take any one of those other views. The moral influence view, which tells us that the love of God is displayed by the death of Christ upon the cross, says that the cross is supposed to melt our hard hearts and do away with our enmity against God. Well, I say, if that is its function, what it does is make me believe in God. I do not have to believe in Christ. He has merely shown me God. I must believe in the God whom Christ has shown me, not in Christ. And if He is an example, it is the same thing, and so with all the other theories. This is the only view of the atonement that shows us why we must believe in Christ; that we do not know God without believing in Christ, and that belief in Christ is the thing that saves us.

Very well, that, then, allows us to consider, very hurriedly, some of the objections that are brought forward to this particular teaching. Of course, all people who deny that sin is something which renders us [p 333] guilty disagree with this doctrine. I cannot stay to argue that. We have already demonstrated that sin is guilt, and so if you believe that, you must immediately accept this doctrine.

Then there is the argument which says that surely God's love is enough. The argument is put like this. It says, 'We forgive one another without any substitution and without any punishment, and if we, in our love for one another, can do that, surely God, whose love is still greater, should be able to do it with still greater ease.' To which, of course, the reply is this: If God were only love there might be some force in that argument, but God is light, and God is holy, and God is just, and God is righteous. Not only that; there is no greater fallacy than the argument that goes from men to God. It is a very common error today. People are constantly arguing like that—if this is true of us, they say, how much more so of God? As if God were in series with us! The truth is, of course, that we are in sin and all our ideas are wrong; our conception of love is more wrong than anything else and if we begin to think of God's love in terms of what *we* do and what *we* think, then—I say it with reverence—God help us! If we are going to attribute our sentimental, loose, unjust and unrighteous notions of love to the everlasting Godhead, then we place ourselves in the most precarious position.

Another form of that last objection is that this substitutionary view of the atonement detracts from God's character, from His justice. People say that it would be unjust in God to punish someone who is innocent, to which the reply is that when the innocent person volunteers and takes upon Himself the sins of others and asks God to put them on Him, and punish them in Him, there is obviously no injustice at all. This was the great decision of the eternal Council, between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son said, 'Here I am, send me,' and God provided Him a body. There was perfect agreement and therefore no injustice.

I have just dealt with the argument that says that the substitutionary view of the atonement detracts from God's love. People say, 'Fancy God demanding blood as an appeasement before He can forgive!' And the reply to that is what I have just been saying. Then there are those who feel that we derogate from the pardoning grace of God when we insist that God demands a payment before forgiving. But, again, the answer is still the same—that God is one. He is a God of holiness and justice. We cannot separate all the great and eternal attributes of God. Therefore this argument collapses.

[p 334] Then there is another argument which used to be very popular. It is not as popular today but still one finds it. People say that the substitutionary penal view of the atonement was the invention of the apostle Paul. They say that if it were true, of course our Lord would have taught it, but you do not find it in the Gospels, you only find it in the epistles. But that is not correct. We saw in the last lecture that our Lord *did* say this. He said, 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:28). It is all there in that word 'ransom', as we saw, but that is not the end of the argument. There were very good reasons why our Lord could not give a full exposition of the doctrine of the atonement before He accomplished it upon the cross.

Do you remember what happened? Let me suggest this as a bit of research for you. Read your Gospels and observe what happened every time our Lord spoke about His death. You will find that each time the disciples misunderstood it; they did not grasp it; they were cast down by it and objected to it; and our Lord Himself explained why this was so. He turned to them just at the end—you will find this in John 16:12—and He said, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,' and they could not bear them. Their minds were darkened, their hearts seemed to be held. It is most interesting to watch that in the Gospels and it is not difficult to understand.

Indeed, their whole idea of Him was still not clear. Peter had made his confession at Caesarea Philippi but he had not understood it all. It was the resurrection that convinced them of the ultimate truth concerning the fact that He was the only begotten Son of God, and in the light of that they began to understand the atonement. After His resurrection, you remember, we saw that He took them through it all, right through the Old Testament, and then they were able to receive it. So that argument which people put forward about our Lord not teaching the substitutionary view likewise has no real substance and no foundation.

Let me sum it up like this: the real difficulty people have with this doctrine is generally due to the fact that their whole view of God is inadequate. They forget some aspect of His character. They emphasise one side only, to the exclusion of others. If they were to take God as He is and to realise the truth about Him, their difficulties would vanish.

There is one argument that I am particularly anxious to demolish **[p 335]** and it is this: there are those who say, 'I don't like that substitutionary penal view because what it says is that God was reluctant to forgive us, and that our Lord had to die and go to God and plead His death and plead the merit of His blood before God would forgive.' Unfortunately, sometimes evangelical preachers have put the doctrine like that, and there are hymns which do the same, as if our Lord had to plead with God in order to persuade God to forgive! It is a terrible travesty of biblical truth!

I have already answered this argument. I dealt with it when I showed that it is God Himself who has done all this. Why did the Son ever come to earth? Why did the Son die? And the answer is, 'God so loved the world.' It was the love of God that thought out this way of salvation so that God might be 'just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.' It was His love that carried it out. The cross is not something that influences the love of God; no, the love of God produced it. That is the order. Were it not for His love, God would have punished sin in us, and we should all suffer eternal death. Indeed, I do not hesitate to go so far as to say this: nothing anywhere in the Scripture in any way approaches the substitutionary and penal doctrine of the atonement as an exposition and an explanation of the love of God. Is there anything greater than this, that God should take your sins and mine and put them on His own Son and punish His own Son, not sparing Him anything, causing Him to suffer all that, that you and I might be forgiven? Can you tell me any greater exhibition of the love of God than that? The moral influence theory and all these other theories which people put forward because, they claim, they believe in the love of God, actually fail to comprehend

it. It is *there* you see the love of God, when His own Son suffered, as our substitute, the penalty of the law that you and I have incurred and so richly deserve.

As we have seen, we must be forgiven and reconciled to God fully before we can be justified. The law must be honoured, it must be satisfied, and that is something that must take place in two respects. First and foremost the law comes to us and tells us that unless we keep it and honour it, unless we live it, we are condemned. 'Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law,' says Paul, like this: 'That the man which doeth those things shall live by them' (Rom. 10:5). We failed to keep God's law, but our Lord dealt with that guilt, as we have seen, upon the cross. He was there; He offered Himself. He presented Himself, His body, His life. And God put our sins upon Him. He was passive; God was doing it. It was God's action; Christ's passive obedience.

[p 336] Ah yes, but in His life He gave an active obedience. Paul says, 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law' (Gal. 4:4–5). And this is how He did it: He rendered a perfect obedience to the law. He kept it fully. He carried it out in every jot and tittle. He said He was going to do it: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil' (Matt. 5:17). And as we have seen, 'One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matt. 5:18). And He did so. He kept the law perfectly.

This, then, is how He saves us. We are in Him, as Paul says in Romans 5. We were all in Adam. Adam was our representative, our federal head. When he fell we all fell with Him. We, who are saved, Paul argues, are in Christ. As we were in Adam, so we are in Christ. All that was true of Adam is true of us. All that Adam did became true of us. And all that is true of Christ is true of us. All that Christ did becomes true of us. When Christ honoured and kept the law by His act of obedience He was not only doing it for Himself, He was doing it for me, and therefore I can say with the apostle Paul, 'Ye are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). Christians are no longer under the law in the sense that it is the keeping of the law that will save them. As far as they are concerned, the law has been kept, it has been honoured, it is imputed to them for righteousness. God 'bath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor. 5:21). Or take the mighty statement in Romans 8: 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3). Why? 'That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us' (v. 4).

In other words, it is this great doctrine of our being one with Christ, in Christ. The atonement works in that way. What He did actively is imputed to us. What He did passively is imputed to us. So in Christ, believing in Christ, incorporated in Him, we can face the law without any fear, without any tremor or quiver. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that unless we are able to say that, there is something wrong with our faith. We are no longer under the law, we are under grace and we all ought to be ready to say with Augustus Toplady,

The terrors of law and of God

With me can have nothing to do,

[p 337] My Saviour's obedience and blood

Hide all my transgressions from view.

What a glorious statement! But how very inadequate so many of our hymns on the death of Christ are. How few of them state these magnificent doctrines as they are stated in the Scriptures. Toplady has stated it there—it is the hymn which begins,

A debtor to mercy alone,

Of covenant mercy I sing,

Nor fear with thy righteousness on,

My person and offering to bring.

'The terrors of law and of God,' says a man who is a sinner, but he must say it, and so must we, 'with me can have nothing to do'. Why? 'My Saviour's obedience'—active—'and blood'—passive; 'My Saviour's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.'

So then, when we come eventually to consider the doctrine of justification, we shall have to return to this and we shall see more fully what it means. But with regard to the atonement, it means that I am fully atoned for, and thus covered, because my sins are blotted out and because I have the righteousness of Christ. We shall go on to consider some of the results and consequences of this perfect work of our Lord on our behalf, and it is a greater subject than we sometimes think.

31

Christ the Victor

We have been giving an exposition of what has always been the traditional Protestant interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, namely, that it is substitutionary and penal and that our sins were actually punished in our Lord, in His body upon the cross. We also considered certain objections to that view of the atonement and the replies to those objections. And now, at this point, we must turn to a consideration of certain results of this work of our Lord.

It is rather difficult to know how to put this matter of the results and it seems to me, after much consideration, that perhaps the best way of putting it is this: there are certain results of the work of our Lord which might, perhaps, be more conveniently considered as a part of His work. In other words, there are those who would say that as a part of our doctrine of the atonement we should consider certain additional matters over and above the ones that we have already emphasised. The main work of our Lord in His death upon the cross was, beyond any question at all in the light of scriptural teaching, the work that was essential to propitiate God—the substitutionary, penal part of the work. But there are many statements in Scripture which show very clearly that at the same time as He was doing that, our Lord was also doing certain other things. And I, personally, would not disagree with those who would argue that these other things are, in a sense therefore, a part of the atonement.

There is, then, this further addition to be made. Our Lord, upon the cross, as we have seen, was rendering passive obedience. God was putting our sins upon Him and dealing with them. We did indicate that, in His life prior to that, He had rendered active obedience which is also part of the atonement, but, in addition to that, there was a [p 339] further activity and this emphasises the active element in our Lord's work on our behalf. This is a view that has often been taught in the Church. Some of the early Church fathers in the first centuries were very concerned indeed to emphasise this aspect. You will remember that in considering some of the false theories of the atonement, we mentioned, among others, the view which taught that our Lord had paid a ransom to the devil. Now we rejected that, but there is something in it which is perfectly true. Our Lord, in doing this work, did deal with the devil, and it is that aspect of His positive work that I am anxious to emphasise here.

Now this view of the atonement has sometimes been called the *classical view*, classical, because it was taught in the early centuries and has been repeated very often since. A man who repeated it in his usual forceful manner was Martin Luther. He generally put it in this way: he said that man, in this life and born in sin, has five main enemies: Satan, sin, death, the law and the wrath of God, and, according to Luther, before a man can be saved those five enemies have to be dealt with. Now, without committing ourselves to this entirely, let us look at it like this. There is no question at all, as I shall show you, that the Scriptures do teach very definitely and clearly that our Lord in His work did deal with these five factors. We have already dealt with the law in expounding the substitutionary interpretation of the atonement, and in the same way, of course, we have dealt with the doctrine of the wrath of God; but it remains for us to deal with the other three—Satan, sin and death.

Now I call your attention to this, not only because it is taught in the Scripture but because this aspect of the atonement tends to receive a great deal of attention at the present time. There has been a modern revival of this view. It is being taught in a striking way by certain Lutheran teachers in Sweden and they, in turn, are influencing thought in Britain. A book was published in 1931 which has made this view very popular. It is called *Christus Victor*, and is by a Swedish writer called Gustav Aulen; those who are interested in this would greatly enjoy reading that small book.

Let me make this quite clear. I do not say that I agree, ultimately, with the views put forward by Aulen, but I do think that his description of this view is well worth reading. Unfortunately, like many others, he tends to minimise the importance of the substitutionary and the penal view and emphasises the other active view. My own position would be, primarily and most essentially, as we have seen, [p 340] that our

Lord came into this world in order to bear the punishment of our sins in His own body on the tree, to be a substitute for us; that is the first thing.

So as we go on now to these other things, we are doing so not to subtract from what we have said but to add to it. And, to me, one of the great pitias about this present tendency is that they are putting forward this active element to detract from the other view, instead of adding to it. So, having issued that warning, let me put it like this: there is no doubt at all but that our Lord in doing His work was waging a battle. Look at your hymn books and you will find that many of the hymns refer to Him as 'the mighty Victor'. Not only has He come to bear the punishment of our sins at the behest of His Father, not only was something happening between the Father and the Son upon the cross, but at the same time the Son was waging a mighty battle.

So as you look at the resurrection you are looking at a victor. The mighty Victor has arisen. That is why we should always be filled with a sense of triumph as we think of His resurrection. And one of the enemies that He dealt with was, of course, Satan himself, Satan and all his forces. Now first let me give you the Scriptures which state this. In 1 John 3:8 we read this: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.' There it is, a general statement of one of the purposes of His coming into this world. Then take John 12:31. Our Lord says, 'Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.' There He says it Himself. Then listen to the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:15: 'And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.' This is a reference to the cross—a most important statement. And then another important passage is Hebrews 2:14–15 where we are told that He took on Him flesh and blood for this reason: 'That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' Now, obviously, we must reckon at once with those Scriptures, and you see why it is that there are those who very rightly say that when we are considering our Lord's work and what our Lord has done to reconcile us to God and to put us right with the Father, we must, in addition to talking about His substitutionary work, mention this active work which He did against the devil. So the question is: How do we interpret these verses? [p 341]

Our Lord, we are told, came to destroy the works of the devil, to cast out the devil. We are told that He put Satan and his forces to an open show especially by dying upon the cross. But how do we interpret this? Well, surely, in this way. By his life of perfect obedience to the law of God and by His honouring God in everything that He did, He was, incidentally, attacking and ultimately defeating the devil. He did so very specifically in conquering temptation. The devil tempted Him. He tried to kill Him through Herod and others at the beginning, and, as the record shows, he attacked Him and tempted Him in the wilderness. And when our Lord defeated him there, we are told that the devil only left Him for a season. He came back and attacked our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. He attacked Him upon the cross. He was attacking Him everywhere. But our Lord defeated him and thereby destroyed his works.

Now this was particularly true, of course, upon the cross. Our authority for saying this is the apostle Paul, again, in that statement in Colossians 2. How exactly did our Lord put to an open show the devil and his powers upon the cross? Well it is clear that it is something like this: the devil undoubtedly thought that our Lord would shrink from death because of the physical suffering involved. His hope was that when it came to the point, our Lord would suddenly fail on physical grounds. In addition to that, he probably also thought that our Lord's obedience would fail. His argument was that it was all right for our Lord to obey His Father while it was a question of living and not committing sin and honouring the law. But when it became a matter of death, His obedience might fail.

Furthermore, he probably thought also that our Lord's faith might fail. There were some grounds for this. It was a tremendous thing, as we have seen, and our Lord Himself, you remember, in the high priestly prayer, prayed to His Father saying, 'Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee' (John 17:1). Undoubtedly He was appealing to God to strengthen Him that He might fully glorify His name. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us that 'when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears', he was heard because of His piety, because of His godly fear (Heb. 5:7). The test was very severe and the devil thought that our Lord's faith in His Father might fail at that point; and especially, of

course, did he assume that this would happen when it came to that ultimate point, when, our sins being laid upon Him, that separation took place between our Lord and the Father. [p 342]

So there is very little doubt but that the devil and his forces thought that at the cross their supreme moment of victory was going to arrive, that our Lord would fail for one of these reasons or perhaps all of them together. But what actually happened was that our Lord triumphed. He triumphed in that He proved that He is indeed the Son of God. He did that in the whole of His life but He did it especially upon the cross. To the thief who said to Him, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,' His reply was, 'To day shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:42-3). His very statement, 'It is finished' (John 19:30) proves that He had finished the work which the Father had given Him to do. He had already prayed about that in John 17, but there upon the cross He said, 'It is finished.' In other words He said, 'I have finished it; I have gone right through, right through to the end,' and then, having done so, He committed His spirit to the Father.

And, then, of course, finally, this was all proved by the fact of the resurrection: 'Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1:4). By His implicit obedience, and by His faith, and by going right through with it, our Lord finally demolished the whole case of the enemy, the lie of the enemy. The devil, we are told, is a liar. He has misrepresented God to men; he did it in the Garden of Eden: 'Hath God said?' (Gen. 3:1). By which he meant, 'Is it fair for God to say?' 'God is against you,' he said to Adam and Eve. He has been a liar from the beginning and his supreme lie is against God and against the love of God in particular. But as we have seen, more clearly than anywhere else, the love of God was displayed upon the cross. There we know that the love of God is as great as this, that He did not spare 'his own Son, but delivered him up for us all' (Rom. 8:32). He gave His only Son, even unto the cruel death of the cross. He 'made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin' (2 Cor. 5:21), and He did it all for rebels, for sinners, for those who deserve nothing but hell. It is the supreme manifestation of the love of God, and therefore it is the point above all others where the life of the enemy was destroyed, where the works of the devil were put to nothing, and where he was finally put to an open shame and utterly and completely routed.

So, then, we must emphasise that upon the cross our Lord was doing all that. But still, you notice, I have not mentioned what we are told in Hebrews 2:14, and I have not mentioned it under that heading because I choose to take it under my next heading, which is this: our [p 343] Lord has not only vanquished the devil, He has also vanquished death. Now death is one of the enemies that sinful men and women always have to meet. That is the statement, of course, which is made in Hebrews 2:14-15: 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'

Now obviously this is a very important statement and it has often caused people a good deal of perplexity. They ask, 'What does it mean when it says that the devil has the power of death? We thought the devil was a usurper and has no power at all. So what right have you to say that he is the one who controls the power of death?' Incidentally, you see where the idea gained currency that it was to the devil that the ransom was paid. It was because they faced this verse in Hebrews 2:14 that some of the early Church fathers said that our Lord had paid the ransom price in order to liberate us from the power of death. They based it on that verse, but clearly it was a false interpretation.

So what does it mean? Well, surely, it must mean this: the devil, as we see clearly, not only in the book of Job but everywhere else in Scripture, only has power as God allows him to have it. He has no absolute power. He has no authority in and of himself, but God allows him to exercise certain powers, and undoubtedly one of them is this power over the realm of death. That is why in other places the devil is described as 'the god of this world' (2 Cor. 4:4); and 'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' (Eph. 2:2).

You can look at it like this. Man, when he sinned, when he listened to the suggestion of the devil, fell from God, fell from his true relationship with God and from that life which he had with God, and he fell into the dominion of the devil, the realm in which the devil already lived. The devil himself, by falling, had

fallen into a state of death. There is a reference in 2 Peter 2:4 to the fallen spirits that are held captive in chains. That is the same suggestion. The devil, by falling, became the head of that realm which is outside the life of God, and so you can describe it as the realm of death. Therefore it follows that when Adam fell he went into the realm of death; he entered under the dominion of Satan which is the dominion of death. Satan is the one who reigns in everything that is covered by this final death, and that, I suggest, is what is meant here [p 344] by saying that the devil has the power of death.

Let me put it still more explicitly. Christ delivers us from that power of death in this way. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:56–7, ‘The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Now that means that the thing which really makes death terrible and which makes the sting so powerful is sin. It is not death itself but the fact that it is the consequence of sin.

In other words, you and I are guilty under the law and it is that fact which makes death terrible, because, to the unregenerate, death just means that they go on to that endless condition of spiritual death, outside the life of God. And that is why men and women apart from Christ are all their lifetime subject to bondage through this fear of death. People who do not believe in God, and who do not believe in sin or in the devil, nevertheless hate the thought of death. Why? Well, in spite of their minds, they have the fear in them; it has come down through the whole human race from the beginning. They think, and they are right, that death is an enemy, that death is something horrible, that it is a realm which holds us enchained in misery and wretchedness. And it is the devil who asserts that right. Because we are born in sin, and because of our own sin, we are under his authority and under his power.

And what our Lord did was this—He satisfied the law; the law no longer condemns us, so we are no longer condemned to death, and therefore we come out of the territory of death and out of the territory of Satan and sin. We are liberated from this other enemy which is called death. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews teaches quite clearly that by dying upon the cross, our Lord was not only conquering Satan, he was conquering death. Thanks be unto God, Paul says, we have the victory in Christ. Death has lost its terror. ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ (1 Cor. 15:55). That is the Christian’s view of death. We can face it and speak like that because of what Christ has done. Death should have lost its terror for us. The devil can no longer terrorise us with it; because we are out of the realm of death we are out of the realm of Satan also. So there you see that in addition to the devil, the second enemy, which is death, is likewise conquered.

The third enemy—sin—is conquered in exactly the same way. Paul says in Romans 6:2: ‘How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?’ Now that is a very strong statement. We who are [p 345] Christians, he says, are dead to sin, and in the eleventh verse he puts it like this: ‘Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ In the twelfth verse he says, ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.’ ‘For sin’—in verse 14 —‘shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.’

So again we can put it like this: man, as the result of his fall, his disobedience of God, not only fell under the dominion of the devil, he also fell, as we saw when we were dealing with the doctrine of the fall, under the dominion of sin; and we all know that by experience. Sin reigns in the natural person, in lust, in desire, in the bias towards evil. In addition to what the devil does to him from the outside, as it were, sin is reigning within, in man himself, he is under its dominion. But, says the apostle Paul, there in those words in Romans 6, by the death of our Lord upon the cross we are delivered from the dominion of sin; we have ‘died unto sin’ (v. 10); ‘sin shall not have dominion’ over us (v. 14).

Or, to take the words of the apostle John, ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin’ (1 John 3:9). By this John means that he does not abide in sin; he does not continue in a state of sin. There are still remnants of sin, in his old nature, but he is no longer under the dominion of sin. He may fall, but he does not belong to sin’s territory. He may be foolish enough to listen to the enemy, but that does not mean that he belongs to the dominion of the enemy.

So you see that our Lord by His work, and especially His work upon the cross, in addition to bearing the penalty and punishment of our sins as our substitute, was also destroying the works of the devil. He

was delivering us from the bondage and the dominion of the devil, and was also delivering us from the territory of death. We are no longer dead in trespasses and sins; we do not belong to the realm of death, we are alive unto God. And likewise He has delivered us from the tyranny and thralldom and power of sin.

Having, then, put it like that, I can go on to what I would call the results proper, because, as I have explained, though we might have regarded all those things as results, I think it is better to put them as a part of the work. Now here again the classification is important but a little difficult, and I suggest to you that the following is the best classification. The first result of our Lord's work that we must of necessity consider is that with regard to God Himself. It is clear that as the [p 346] result of our Lord's work God is propitiated, He is satisfied, He is 'just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26). As the result of our Lord's work it is God Himself that justifies. Do you remember Paul's famous question in the eighth chapter of Romans? 'Who is he that condemneth?' he asks. 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' And the answer is, 'It is God [Himself] that justifieth' (Rom. 8:34, 33). And He does so because of the work of Christ. What a tremendous statement.

May I again just warn you in passing that we must be careful how we say all this lest somebody think that we are teaching that there is some essential change in the inner being of God as the result of our Lord's work. That is quite wrong. The only change that is effected by our Lord's work is God's relationship to us. It does not change God's character. It does not affect His love because, as we saw, it was His love that sent Christ. There is no change in the inner nature and being of God. But there is a very definite change, and thank God for it, in His relationship to us, because now He looks upon us as children, whereas formerly we were under His wrath.

The second result is this—and it is an extraordinary statement—I wonder whether you have ever realised that our Lord, by doing His work upon the cross, has even effected a change in heaven? Let me give you my authority. We read in Hebrews 9:23, 'It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.' God called Moses up to the Mount and there He gave him instructions about the building of the tabernacle, about the measurements, and how he was to furnish it and exactly what he was to do. And, as the author of Hebrews reminds us, when God had shown Moses everything, He gave him these words of instruction: 'See ... that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount' (Heb. 8:5). So Moses went down and carried out the instructions. And, as the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, everything that Moses made had to be purified and it was purified by taking the blood of calves and of goats and water and scarlet wool and hyssop, by sprinkling the book of the law and the people and the various vessels of the ministry and everything in connection with the tabernacle.

Now this is the author's argument: 'It was therefore necessary,' he says, 'that the *patterns*'—in other words, these earthly things; the tabernacle in the wilderness was not 'the things in the heavens', it was [p 347] only something made on the pattern of those things—'the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these'—the blood of bulls and of goats, water, and so on—'but the heavenly things themselves [must be purified] with better sacrifices than these.' And then he goes on, 'For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us' (Heb. 9:23-4).

So his argument can be put like this: the patterns were purified by blood of bulls and goats but that is not good enough to purify the thing itself, the heavenly tabernacle; this must be purified by something better. And it has been purified by something better. It has been purified by the blood of the Son of God Himself. He offered His own blood. I do beg of you to read again this ninth chapter of Hebrews, indeed, read chapter 8 as well! Go further and read the entire epistle in order that you may grasp this argument. It is a most glorious statement and one of the most mysterious statements in the whole of the Bible. We are taught here quite clearly that it was necessary that the heavenly place itself should be purified and that it has been purified by the blood of Jesus Christ Himself.

Now the question is: What does this mean? Let me be quite frank and answer that there is a sense in which no one can be too dogmatic about the answer to that question. But it seems to me we must say this: in some mysterious way there is a tabernacle in the heavenly places. There are statements about our Lord

entering into that heavenly tabernacle, that holiest of all. I do not pretend to understand it but the statements are made and therefore we must believe that what was made on earth was made on the pattern of that which is in heaven.

And, further, we can say this: Satan fell from heaven. Our Lord says, 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven' (Luke 10:18). Satan, as we saw when we were considering the biblical teaching concerning him, was undoubtedly the brightest of the angels in the presence of God, and when he fell, when he rose up with pride and rebelled against God, he did so in the heavens itself. And thus, it seems to me, we arrive at a kind of understanding of what is meant here by the necessity to purify even the heavenly tabernacle itself. In a way that we cannot understand, and that seems to be inscrutable, evil has affected heaven itself. This vile, this foul thing that first caused the fall of Satan, and then caused the fall of man has, if one may use such language, introduced a kind of impurity even into **[p 348]** heaven—into the heavenly tabernacle, at any rate. And according to this teaching, as I understand it, it was necessary for our Lord to purify and to purge the heavenly tabernacle of that taint, and the statement here is to the effect that He has done so.

This, I think, helps us to understand various statements which we find in Scripture, such as Colossians 1:20 where we read, 'And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.' Through Christ God is going to reconcile all things unto Himself in heaven as well as on earth. I am not suggesting that that is the only explanation but I am suggesting that that is a part of the explanation. And so we are confronted by this truly amazing and remarkable statement, that our Lord, as it were, had to take His own blood, even into heaven itself to get rid of this taint, this foul smear that was left by the fall of Satan. And so, ultimately, heaven, to use the language of the author of Hebrews, is purified entirely; and all evil and all its effects everywhere in heaven as well as upon earth have been removed.

I would again impress upon you the importance of bearing in mind this further element in our Lord's work. We must not confine our doctrine and our teaching concerning the work of Christ solely to His acting as our substitute and sin bearer. Let us remember that at the same time He has done what we have been considering with regard to the devil and sin and death. And if you agree with Luther that the law and the wrath of God must be regarded as enemies against us, He has also dealt with them, and thus everything that stands between us and God has been dealt with and has been removed.

Personally, I always like to think that our Lord had all that in His mind when He uttered those beautiful and comforting words which are to be found at the beginning of John 14: 'Let not your heart be troubled.' He had just been telling His disciples about His going, then: 'Let not your heart be troubled,' He said, 'ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.' Then, He said, 'I go to prepare a place for you' (John 14:1-2), and I think that He meant that He was going to remove every obstacle that stood between us and heaven and being with God and enjoying His glorious presence. He cannot prepare a mansion for us in heaven without first of all destroying the works of the devil, destroying sin and its dominion, destroying death and the grave. In addition to satisfying God's justice and God's holy law and **[p 349]** offering this propitiation that removed the wrath of God, He had to do all that before He could prepare a place for us in heaven and then come back and receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also.

32

The Blessings of the New Covenant

We have reached the stage in our consideration of the biblical doctrine of the atonement in which we are looking at the results of the work of our Lord upon the cross. We have considered two of the immediate consequences. The first was the effect upon God's relationship with sinful mankind, and the second was the effect upon heaven itself. Now we must consider other consequences and sequels of this great work.

Another thing, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, that happened when our Lord died was that the new covenant was ratified. God made a new covenant with man and that covenant was ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ shed upon the cross. Now there are a number of verses, especially in the epistle to the Hebrews, that state that quite clearly. Let me remind you of some of them. In Hebrews 7:22 we read this: 'By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant'—it is 'testament' in the *Authorised Version*, but it is better to translate it by the word 'covenant', that is, the new covenant. And then in Hebrews 8:6 we read, 'But now hath he [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.'

Then still more important are those statements made in the ninth chapter which we have already considered, especially verses 15–22, which, as you will recall, start like this: 'And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament [covenant], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament [covenant] is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator [or the covenantor].' And the [p 351] writer goes on to say that death is essential in this ratification of the covenant. Then you get the same teaching in the tenth chapter, particularly verses 15–18, and there is also a notable statement in verse 29: 'Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?' That is one of the terrible warnings that are found in the epistle to the Hebrews. And then it is also stated in chapter 13, in those beautiful words in verses 20–1: 'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'

Now there are a number of statements which are indicative of the fact that this new covenant between God and man was ratified by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself had foretold this. In Luke 22:20 we read, 'Likewise also [he took] the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament [the new covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you,' and the same is to be found in the corresponding passages in Matthew and Mark. Furthermore, the apostle Paul quotes it in his statement about the communion service in 1 Corinthians 11:23–5: 'The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and ... After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood.' So that is a specific statement by our Lord Himself in which He said that the new covenant was ratified by the shedding of His blood.

Now, obviously, this is a most important subject and it is because of its importance that I would remind you of how this teaching is given us first of all in the Old Testament. All God's covenants with mankind were ratified by blood. The first account of this, and in many ways one of the fullest, is found in Genesis 15 where we are told about God making a covenant with Abraham. We read in verses 9–10 that God said to Abraham, 'Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.' Then in verses 17–18 we read, 'And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold [p 352] a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham

saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.'

Also, if you read the other verses that come between those two groups of verses, you will find that God made further promises, some of the most gracious and wonderful promises that He ever made to Abraham. But the point I am emphasising is that the covenant was ratified by the shedding of the blood of these animals and by this remarkable sign that God gave there to Abraham.

But exactly the same thing happened when God renewed that covenant with Moses and added certain sub-covenants. You may remember that when we were dealing with the biblical doctrine of the covenant, we pointed out that the fundamental covenant was made with Abraham. It was hinted at even in the Garden of Eden but it was made specifically with Abraham and then there was an addition, for the time being, made with Moses. It is described in Exodus 24:5-8, but I would especially emphasise verse 8: 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words'; and you will find that a description is given of how the blood was sprinkled, even upon the book of the covenant itself and upon the altar and upon certain other utensils (cf. Heb. 9:19-21).

We see, then, that this is a great principle in the Bible. God never makes a covenant with man without ratifying it by the shedding of blood. And the thing we are concerned about now is that when our Lord died upon the cross His blood was shed. In addition to all that we have already considered, this new covenant between God and man was thereby ratified and truly introduced. And it is, therefore, something which we should always bear in mind when we are considering the covenant. God had promised this new covenant, you remember, through Abraham. Through Jeremiah He had promised that He would make a new covenant with the people (Jer. 31:31), not like the covenant He had made with them when He took them out of Egypt, and you will find that that new covenant is described in the eighth chapter of Hebrews: 'For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. [p 353] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ...' (vv. 8:8-10). And then He goes on to describe that new covenant.

There, then, is a very great principle and a wonderful truth. And it leads us on to the next result, which is, from our standpoint, one of the most glorious of all because we are now going to consider the results that accrue to us who are believers, what the cross of Jesus Christ has done for us. We shall consider this in detail when we come to consider the application to mankind of the salvation worked out upon the cross. But at this point we must, at any rate, give a summary, and we can put it like this: *all* the blessings we enjoy as Christian people come to us because of what happened on the cross. The cross is the most crucial event in history. It is from the cross that every benefit ultimately comes. What, then, are these benefits which we can describe as the blessings of the new covenant? Well, let us continue to read this eighth chapter of Hebrews, starting at verse 10:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:10-12

That is the new covenant. Then the author of the epistle to the Hebrews winds it up by saying, 'In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old' (v. 13).

But we are concerned now with the blessings of this new covenant What are they? Well, we must put first and foremost *the forgiveness of our sins*. And we must emphasise that our sins are forgiven once and for all. This is what the writer to the Hebrews wants to emphasise in chapter 10. He starts off by saying, 'For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then

would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins' (1–2). But, he says, that was not the case. In those sacrifices there was a remembrance made of sins every year. They were simply covered, they were not dealt with, they were not blotted out. But the glory of our position is that what our [p 354]

Lord did, and what was done in Him, upon the cross, was once and for all. If you read that great tenth chapter of Hebrews again, keeping your eye on that, you will find that it is the thing that the writer emphasises and it is one of the most glorious truths that you and I can ever grasp. 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (v. 14)—you and me. In that one act God has dealt with sin and has forgiven it once and for ever.

Do you regard this as an overstatement, as too bold a statement? But as I understand the Scripture, this is the teaching. As Christian people, as children of God, we must say that all our sins—past, present and future—were dealt with once and for all, perfectly, upon the cross. There is no need for any fresh action on the part of God to deal with any sin that any believer may ever commit. It *has* been dealt with. 'The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son,' says John in 1 John 1, meaning the same thing, 'cleanseth us'—still cleanses, ever will cleanse—'from all sin' (7).

I am tempted to stay with that, but we must go on. If you are a believer, if you are a Christian, then God, I say it with reverence, remembers your sins no more. God can do something that you and I cannot do. *We* cannot forget our sins, we find it very difficult to forget the sins of other people, but God can cast sins into the sea of His forgetfulness. There is no more remembrance of sins. He has dealt with them, finally and absolutely, perfectly and completely, in the work done upon the cross.

Then the next thing that we emphasise is that in the light of that, we have a new way of approaching God, a new access to Him. Our consciences are now cleansed. 'Let us draw near,' we read in verse 22 of this same tenth chapter, 'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.' In other words, as we saw in that summary of this new covenant in chapter 8, there is nothing more wonderful about it than this, that it enables us to come into the presence of God with a holy boldness. Under the old dispensation the high priest alone went into the holiest of all, once a year only and in fear and trembling, and the people were always apprehensive as to whether he would come out. And when they heard the movement, the ringing of the little bells on the hem of his garment, how delighted they were that he could have gone into the presence of God and still come out. But you and I by the blood of Jesus ...!

Is there anything, I wonder, in the whole of Scripture which is more [p 355] glorious than this nineteenth verse, 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest'—the holiest of all—'by the blood of Jesus.' That is how we should approach God. That is the new covenant. He has opened the way. He Himself has prepared it, and where the high priest went only once a year, we can go whenever we desire to go, 'by the blood of Jesus'. Oh yes, it is a *holy* boldness, but it is a boldness, remember. Emphasise both words. It must be holy for our God is a consuming fire. We approach Him with reverence and with godly fear (Heb. 12:28)—yes; but we approach Him with a holy boldness; with assurance and confidence in the blood of Jesus; with full assurance of faith.

So let us be clear about this. It is no sign of humility, no mark of saintliness, to go into the presence of God doubting whether God is forgiving you. That is unbelief, lack of faith. That is a failure to understand the truth. So, my friend, never again try to give the impression that you are such a sensitive Christian that you do not like to be certain that your sins are forgiven. It is our business to *know* that our sins are forgiven! We derogate from the grace and the glory of God and the wonder of this gospel if we are uncertain about it: 'Having therefore, brethren, *boldness* to enter into the holiest of all.' Not in my merit, not in my righteousness, not in terms of my understanding, but by the blood of Jesus. He has opened the way. And, therefore, we go knowing that God has said in this new covenant, 'I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people' (Heb. 8:10). It is the most glorious thing ever said to men and women; we are God's people. And there you can put, if you like, the great doctrine of adoption, which we shall consider later. Not only are we given new birth, we are also adopted into the family of God. All these blessings are

included in that one great statement. Regeneration, adoption are there, and, of course, justification and sanctification, and all the other doctrines.

But I am anxious to emphasise this aspect: that as the result of this new covenant we are no longer under law but under grace. Now we go, of course, to Paul for that, to Romans 6 where he has given his greatest exposition of it. 'For sin,' says Paul in verse 14, 'shall not have dominion over you.' Why? Well, here is the answer. 'For ye are not under the law, but under grace.' They had been under law—the subsection of the old covenant had been the introduction of the law. That is why our Lord had to be 'made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law'—(Gal. 4:4–5). But, as [p 356] Christians, we are not under the law but under grace. Paul says the same thing in Romans 7:4, 'Wherefore, my brethren,' he says, 'ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.' When Christ died to the law, you and I, in Christ, died to the law also. You will find it again in those words that I have already quoted from Galatians 4:4–5.

I trust we are all clear about this. We shall, of course, have to repeat it as we go on to other aspects of the doctrines. It does not mean we do not have to keep the Ten Commandments. They still apply to us. But we are not under the law in this sense: when God gave that law through Moses, He said to the people, 'If you keep this law, you will save yourselves, and I will forgive you. *If* It was left to them to carry it out. They were under the law in the sense that that was the way in which they faced the question of salvation. And it was impossible. But we are not under the law in that sense. Christ has kept the law for us; He has honoured it, as we have already seen. So we are now in this new relationship. He has delivered us from the law and the curse of the law in order that we may live the law and keep it. Paul puts it perfectly in Romans 8: 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that'—in order that—'the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Rom. 8:3–4). So, in a judicial, forensic sense, we are not under the law; but God have mercy upon the man who says, 'Because I am not under the law I can do what I like.' What Paul says to him is this: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?' (Rom. 6:1). Because we are not under the law, can we do what we like? Be not deceived, says the apostle: 'God forbid.' Our Lord died for us in order to enable us to live the law and to keep it, not to give us licence to sin. That is the terrible sin of antinomianism, one of the most dangerous heresies that can ever afflict the people of God. It is the idea that as long as you believe the right things and say them, it does not matter what you do. 'Faith without works is dead,' said James (James 2:20). There is no value in a profession unless it leads to results in our lives.

Now I can prove that still more conclusively in this way: you will notice that in the new covenant God now does something with this law which he did not do before. Before, He had written it on tablets of stone, it was outside us, but now this is what He is going to do: 'I will [p 357] put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts' (Heb. 8:10). That is why I denounce the terrible sin of antinomianism. The man who says, 'I'm no longer under law, I'm under grace,' and who regards that as licence to sin is showing his ignorance of the new covenant. What the new covenant does is this: instead of giving me a law which is external and asking me to keep it, God puts that very law into my mind; He writes it in my heart; He puts it within me so that I want to obey it. 'His commandments are not grievous' to the Christian (1 John 5:3) because they have been imprinted upon the very tablets of our mind and of our heart.

But we can go even further, and this is the final nail which should put out once and for ever that false antinomian idea, consider what is actually said in those noble verses in Hebrews 13:20–1: 'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will'—notice—'*working in you* that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.' Here is the most glorious thing of all. In the new covenant God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has not only put the law in our minds and our hearts, He is even working in us a predisposition in favour of it, a desire to keep it, and He gives us power to do so.

I wonder whether you have ever realised before that there in those two verses you have exactly the same statement which the apostle Paul makes in Philippians 2:12–13? These words are more familiar, are

they not? 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do'—He puts in the desires—'both to will and to do'—both the power and the ability to do it. God is working all that in us. That is an essential part of this amazing new covenant that was ratified by the shed blood of the Son of God upon the cross on Calvary's hill.

But there is still something else. This new covenant also guarantees our continuance in this life. A wonderful statement of this is made in Hebrews 7:25. The author is contrasting the old priests with this perfect High Priest, this unique Priest 'after the order of Melchisedec', and there is nothing more wonderful about Him than this: 'They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood' (v. 23). Oh yes, but how does it affect me? Like this: 'Wherefore'—because of His unchangeable priesthood—'he [p 358] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.' He is always there; He will never fail.

And that is the kind of High Priest we need. For we fall into sin and we need to go back; we need to confess and we need further cleansing and we have this blessed assurance that He will never fail. He has sat down for ever and He will never move. He is ever making intercession. He saves us, therefore, to the uttermost, to the very end. I remember once hearing a man preach on that verse and he said it could be paraphrased: 'Wherefore He saveth to the guttermost,' as if it were a description of the scope, or the ambit of this power of salvation. It is not that. He does save to the guttermost, thank God, because He saves from all sin and from all forms of sin, but that is not what is being emphasised here.

It is, rather, that He does not merely start the process and then forsake it. You see, these other priests were men who were priests, yes, but they became old and infirm and died, so others had to be appointed. And there was a danger, perhaps, that a gap might occur and the people might not be covered, but there is no danger of that with the Lord Jesus Christ. He ever liveth and therefore He is able to 'save to the uttermost'. He not only starts our salvation, He goes on with it. He will continue until He presents us faultless and blameless and without spot in the presence of His holy Father. He guarantees the perpetuity, the continuance, of the work.

And the result of all this is that you and I enjoy the blessings of assurance of salvation. Our salvation is certain. Let me give you one verse to establish this, again out of the tenth chapter of Hebrews: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified' (v. 14). Now there is nothing stronger than that, and you will never find anything that can give you a greater assurance. That is why the writer keeps making that appeal: 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter ... and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith' (vv. 19, 21–2) and so on. The writer continually repeats it, and he does so, of course, because we can be sure of this: our Lord is seated there at the right hand of God; He has completed the work that was necessary and will sit there until the final consummation.

A little earlier on, the writer says, 'Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice [p 359] for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God'—notice—'from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool' (Heb. 10:11–13). Now that means this: He is the Deliverer, the Messiah. He has conquered all; He is waiting; He is sitting, until all His enemies shall be made His footstool and then He will finally usher in His kingdom. And because that is certain about Him, it is certain about me. I am in Him. I belong to Him. And, therefore, as I think of Him seated there, waiting until all His enemies are made His footstool, I know that my future is certain. In Him that glory is absolutely certain. His being seated is the proof of that. He has sat down. Why? Because He has finished the work. He is simply expecting now—sitting is an attitude of expectation—until His enemies shall be made His footstool. And because of our relationship to Him, it means that our eternal future and glory are guaranteed. Nothing and no one shall be able to separate us from Him. He has said, 'No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand' (John 10:29). We belong to this Shepherd, and no thief and no enemy can ever take us from Him.

So there we have a kind of summary of the blessings that accrue to us who are believers from the work that was done upon the cross. Once more I find myself in the position of falling very far short of what I had

intended to do. I make no apologies. I cannot stand in this pulpit, passively, and talk about such things without being moved. And I have been preaching to you. These are announced as lectures and as discourses but I thank God that I cannot lecture on such a theme. When I realise what it means, and means to me, and means for me, my passions are aroused, my feelings are disturbed, my whole self is engaged, though I had intended perhaps just to read out a list of the results and the benefits and the blessings that accrue to us from what happened upon the cross. Oh, as we have looked at them together, have we not all felt our hearts moved and warmed? Do you realise, my friend, that this is true of you? Do you realise that you are in this new covenant, that it has been ratified by the blood of the Son of God? It is sealed, signed and settled. Do you know your title deeds? Have you got them? Are you certain that your sins are forgiven? Do you go to God with this holy boldness, knowing that you are accepted; knowing that He is your God and that you are His child? You should, and if you have not known it until now, go and confess it to God with shame. Confess your unbelief, confess your ignorance, but, believing and accepting the truth, act upon it, go in faith to Him. Do not wait for any feeling. Believe the word and act on it and you [p 360] will get the feeling. Do not let the devil rob you of joy and assurance. Stand in the position that is given you by this faith. Go to God and thank Him for it all and your heart will begin to warm. Your feelings will begin to move. The more you thank God for it in faith, the more you will enjoy it and rejoice in it and the more you will feel the love of it all.

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Christ the King

We are considering the results and the consequences of the work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and especially His work upon the cross, the results and the consequences of the atonement. And perhaps, in order that we may carry the sequence—the logical sequence—in our minds, I will hurriedly remind you of what we have already considered.

First of all, we saw that there were certain consequences in the relationship of God to man. There was no change in God's character, in God's being, but clearly there was a change in God's relationship to mankind.

Then, second, we saw that there was a change in heaven itself; as the epistle to the Hebrews teaches us, the heavenly sanctuary had to be purified—and was purified—by the blood of Jesus Christ. In other words, all effects of sin and of the fall of Satan—including in heaven itself—have been dealt with.

Third, by dying upon the cross, and in the shedding of His blood, the new covenant between God and man was ratified. We also considered some of the results that accrue to those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We become inheritors of this new covenant, and we saw some of the glorious privileges which we enjoy as the result of that.

The next consequence, which we must now go on to consider, is that in addition to these special and particular blessings that are received and experienced by His people, there are certain common blessings which result from the work of our Lord upon the cross. Now this is something which is oftentimes forgotten, ignored or not realised as it should be, but there can be very little doubt that were it [p 362] not for the work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the world would probably have come to an end and would have been destroyed the moment Adam sinned and fell. It is surely in the light of the cross and the work that His Son was going to do, that God spared the world.

We have seen already that there is very plain teaching to this effect. We have seen that all the sins committed by people during the Old Testament dispensation were only covered because of what was going to happen on the cross. God could forgive the sins of His own people under the old dispensation only because this work was going to be done. That is the argument of Romans 3:25–6, is it not? It was there, Paul tells us, that God justified the passing over of the sins of the old dispensation. Well, in the same way it can surely be said that the only thing that made it possible for God to continue to have any dealings or any relationship with this world at all was the work that our Lord was going to do. So it was the cross, as it were, that spared the world and allowed it to continue.

And in the same way, it is the cross and the cross alone that spares the life of anybody who ever sins at any time. It is only because of the work of the cross that God can even tolerate sin in any shape or in any sense. Now that, therefore, I put under the heading of common blessing. And let us be careful to emphasise that even the unbeliever derives that blessing from the cross. The fact that he is not cut off immediately is entirely due to that. It is in the light of the cross that God can exercise His patience towards those who are opposed to Him and remain finally impenitent.

And in the same way the blessings of what is generally called common grace are likewise to be derived from the cross. We have already considered common grace in an earlier lecture. It is differentiated from special grace, which is the grace of redemption, the grace of God towards those of us who are saved in the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is such a thing as common grace. It means any type of blessing that is derived by anybody in this world. For instance, you will remember how our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount that God 'maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matt. 5:45). Now that is common grace. The unjust and the ungodly derive the benefits that come from the sun and rain.

Not only that, they derive many other benefits. There are many general benefits of Christian salvation which are enjoyed by people [p 363] who are not saved themselves. Take, for instance, any great revival which has ever taken place. Now a revival not only means the salvation of a number of individuals, there are certain general common blessings that always accompany it. There is no doubt at all but that the great evangelical awakening of two hundred years ago was the means of bringing untold blessings to millions of people who died impenitent and unbelieving. As the result of that awakening in the eighteenth century, not only were thousands of people converted, but the whole level of life in this country was raised. As the result of that revival, the Factory Acts were passed and many other beneficial things came about.

Now those are instances of common grace, and it is important that we should impress this upon the minds of those who are unbelievers. Though they do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning work upon the cross, they have derived benefits from that work, certain common, general benefits. And thus, you see, when you come to think of it, this world in which we live has derived a great deal from the work of the Son of God.

The next heading is this: it is clear from the teaching of Scripture that even the angels have benefited from this work. Now there are two key passages which teach this. Ephesians 1:10 is the first where we read, 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.' The parallel statement is in Colossians 1:20: 'And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.'

Now these are both very great and very mysterious statements. There is certainly no unanimity of opinion as to what exactly they mean. But it is generally agreed by most commentators that they do not merely refer to blessings in the physical heavens but to more than that, and there can be no doubt but that it does mean that the angels in some extraordinary way derive a benefit. They do not derive the benefit of salvation, as we do, but there have been those who have suggested—and I must say the suggestion commends itself to me—that when Satan fell, the angels lost their leader, their head. I mean even the good angels. It seems clear that the devil—the one who became the devil—was the leader of all the host of angels. You remember that a number of angels fell with him, the evil angels, who belonged to Satan. Yes, but it seems, therefore, that the good angels [p 364] which did not fall with him were left, as it were, without a head. And the suggestion is (it has been put forward many times in the history of the Church) that our Lord, when He returned to heaven and in the fulness of this redemption, made Himself the head of all the angelic host. He is the head of all creation, not merely that which we see here on earth, but of all created beings in heaven as well as upon earth. And so we see that even the angels have derived this benefit as the result of His work during His life in this world. And that is something which surely should cause us to be filled with a sense of wonder and amazement.

Now with that I would couple this: certain cosmic results follow from what our Lord has done. The whole universe benefits by the work of our Lord upon the cross. That is undoubtedly a meaning which simply cannot be excluded from Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:20 which we have just looked at. You remember how Paul argues in Romans 8: 'For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope' (v. 20). The whole creation, he says, groans and is in travail waiting for 'the manifestation of the sons of God' (v. 19). You see, when man fell, even creation suffered. We considered that when we dealt with the doctrine of the fall. The ground was cursed, briars grew, thorns began to appear and illness came in—all those consequences in nature. Well, our Lord's death upon the cross has dealt with all that as well. It is not merely that you and I as individuals are reconciled to God, but ultimately the whole cosmos will be reconciled to Him. Eventually, we are told, there will be 'new heavens and a new earth' wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13). That is the ultimate result, in a cosmic sense, of the work of the Lord upon the cross, and it could not have been produced without that work. He is the one who mediates in every respect, not only between men and God but between the whole cosmos and God. It is very wonderful to think that eventually, as Paul argues, all things—'whether they be things in earth or things in heaven'—all things will finally be reconciled back to God. You notice Paul does put it like that: 'And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself' (Col. 1:20).

So, then, we have been looking at the results of our Lord's work as it is to be seen in its effects upon all those who have suffered and upon all things that have suffered as a result of sin. Now then we come to something which, in a sense, is still more amazing. We must now go [p 365] on to consider the results as regards the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, because there is very plain and explicit teaching in the Scripture to the effect that our Lord Himself has been affected by His own work upon the cross. Now the crucial passage here, of course, is in Philippians 2:5–11 and we must read it all because it is such a great statement.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore* [because of that, as the result of that] *God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:* that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now there are other statements which say the same thing. Our Lord Himself has said it: 'The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified' (John 12:23). And then you remember in the high priestly prayer in John 17 we get this: 'Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee' (v. 1). He realised that as the result of His death upon the cross He was going to be glorified and that God was going to glorify Him in it and through it and as the result of it. There are many who have stumbled at this because they say that surely He had always shared the eternal glory of the Father and had never ceased to do so. That, of course, is perfectly true. So this glory to which He refers here and to which Paul refers in the second chapter of Philippians, must be some special and, in a sense, a new glory.

And surely it must be this: there is a special glory which attaches to the Lord Jesus Christ as the glorified God-man. This is a different glory. He had the glory of the Father before the foundation of the world, before His incarnation. Yes, but at the incarnation something unique happened. He took human nature unto Himself. He was then God-man. And it was the God-man who was going to be glorified. No longer would He be in the state of humiliation, He was going to the state of exaltation. This is a very important and vital distinction. And He was given this special, this messianic glory, as the God-man because of, as the result of, His humbling Himself to the obedience of death, even of the cross. And this is important for us in that we know at this moment that there, sharing the glory of the eternal Father in [p 366] this unique sense, is one who represents us. Human nature has been taken up by Him and with Him and is now glorified in Him. This is something that was not true before the incarnation. Human nature had not been there in the glory before; it is there now. There is a new glory, a special glory, His messianic glory.

But also we read something further. We read that as the result of His work upon the cross, the fulness of the Holy Spirit was given to Him for the formation of the Church, of which He is the Head. Now this is, of course, of obvious, vital importance. Let me give you two pieces of evidence. Take the statement in John 7:39: 'For the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.' This is a prophecy, a prediction, about the day that was going to arrive when those who came to Him should receive the Holy Spirit and out of their inward parts should flow rivers of living water—a great picture of the work of the Church and of the members of the Church throughout the centuries. But, says John, this is future.

Then take Peter's sermon to the crowds at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. He was giving them an explanation of the descent of the Holy Spirit and this is what he said: 'Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted'—he was referring to our Lord—'and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear' (Acts 2:33). Now the explanation of all this, said Peter, is that this Jesus, who is the Son of God, who had been delivered to death by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, has been raised again from the dead by God. And now God has exalted Him and given Him this gift which He had promised before, this gift of the Spirit, which He had now shed forth, and so constituted the Church. This is a direct consequence of His atoning work: God the Father gave to the Son this fulness of the gift of the Spirit, so that with it and by means of it and through it He might form this body of His which He called the Church, of which He Himself is the Head.

The same thing is stated towards the end of Ephesians 1 where Paul prays:

That ye may know ... what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the wording of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only [p 367] in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Ephesians 1:18–23

There are also other passages which teach precisely the same thing. But we cannot stay with that, we just note that it is a direct consequence of the atoning work.

Then let us go on to another consequence which is also dealt with in the epistle to the Ephesians: 'Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men' (Eph. 4:8). In other words, this is once more a consequence of His humiliation and His work upon the cross. Our Lord ascended, He is given these gifts for men by God and He gives these various gifts to those members of His body who constitute the Church. There is a list of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and a shorter list in Ephesians 4. But the point is that He is only able to give us these gifts because of His work and His exaltation. Now we did not consider the gifts in the last lecture because I deliberately held them back until this point. We looked there at the general blessings of salvation and our relationship to God, but every faculty, every special spiritual gift which we have—and everyone of us is given some gift—every gift that we use is given to us as the result of the atoning work of Christ.

Then let us come to something which again is transcendent in its glory. I want to consider with you now the results of the work of our Lord while here on earth, and especially upon the cross, upon His kingship. Now let me again try and link up the sequence of thought. We have seen that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is Prophet, Priest and King. Now here we are making the transition from His work as Priest to His work as King and this work of His as King is—according to this teaching—a direct outcome of His work upon the cross. So the one leads to the other. We said that we divided the work into the three departments, not because they are absolute divisions, nor in order to separate them, because He is the same person always, but for the sake of clarity of thought.

So now we can look at His kingship in the light of His work upon the cross. As the second Person in the blessed Trinity, our Lord has always shared in God's dominion over all from the commencement of creation. But, as God-man, He has a special kingship which is generally referred to and described as His *mediatorial* kingship—His [p 368] kingship as mediator. Now let me give you a definition of that: His mediatorial kingship is His official power to rule all things in heaven and earth for the glory of God and for the execution of God's purpose of salvation.

This is a great theme in Scripture. Now there can be no question at all but that our Lord was appointed to this mediatorial kingship in eternity, before time. There are many references in the Bible to events which happened before time, 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph. 1:4): our names were 'written in the Lamb's book of life' (Rev. 21:27) and so on. As we have seen, there was an eternal council in heaven between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit when this whole plan of salvation was fully discussed and worked out and there is no question but that this particular work was handed over to the Son. The whole work of salvation was placed in His hands. He was the one who was going to come and do it. When He took upon Himself the responsibility of saving the world from the consequences of the fall and of sin—all before man was ever created—from that moment this aspect of the work was handed over to Him. The kingdom was handed over to Him, He became the mediatorial King.

That is when the appointment was *made*. But when did He begin to *function* as this King? And here the answer must be that He began to rule in that respect immediately after the fall. Oh no, not after He was born, but immediately after the fall of Adam because, as we have already seen, it is quite clear that, were this not the case, Adam would have been destroyed there and then. God, you remember, gave the promise about the seed of the woman. That is an indication that He had already been appointed as the mediatorial King. The fall was known beforehand and He was appointed beforehand. The announcement was made in Eden, but the fact was already established, and already our Lord came in, as it were. If I may use a picture, He even there stood between Adam and God and saved Adam from destruction at that point.

You will remember what we saw when we were considering the angel of Jehovah, how we agreed that He was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Whenever He appeared, it was always a part of this work of salvation and of redemption. Indeed, there is very little doubt that He was working in this way through the judges and the kings. The whole of the history of the children of Israel is a part of the plan of salvation. Let us never forget that. So the judges and the kings were a part of the process. God was preparing the people out of [p 369] whom the Messiah was to come according to the flesh. So He was already functioning as the mediatorial King, even there.

But, of course, He was clearly publicly and formally declared to be the mediatorial King at the time of His ascension. He was the King when He was here on earth among men but He had not then assumed the throne; He had not been publicly declared or formally placed upon it. That clearly happened at the time of His elevation and exaltation.

Now there are, again, a number of statements which indicate this very clearly. For instance, in Acts 2:29–30 we read, ‘Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you,’ said Peter, ‘of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.’ He would raise Him up. And He has done so, at the ascension and the exaltation. And again in verse 36, ‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ He has made Him that; it is the official declaration. He has assumed the mediatorial throne in a formal sense. And again I would refer you to that great passage in the second chapter of Philippians.

What, then, are the aspects of this kingship? How does He exercise it? First of all, we had perhaps better be agreed as to what kingship means and as to what His kingdom is. What is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ? Well, it means His reign, His rule. Wherever the rule of Christ is acknowledged and delighted in, there is Christ’s kingdom, and there Christ is King. So, then, if you accept that definition, we can look at His kingdom in this way.

First of all, the spiritual aspect of the kingdom. Christ reigns as King over His people, over the Church, He is the Head of the Church, He is the King of the Church. He reigns in the hearts of all of us who are believers in Him. He administers His kingdom by means of His Word and by means of the Holy Spirit. Every statement about His headship of the Church is an indication of His kingship. And it is exercised in a spiritual manner. Now some people are sometimes confused as to the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Church. The way to look at it is this: the kingdom of God and the Church are not co-equal; they are not co-extensive; they are not the same thing (though the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are). The kingdom of [p 370] God is the rule of God, wherever He reigns there is His kingdom, and the Church is one of the external manifestations of it. He rules, He reigns in the Church in the hearts of His people in this spiritual sense. So we must differentiate between the kingdom and the Church. At the moment, His reign in the Church is invisible, but one day it will be visible.

Second, there is the general aspect of the kingship. We read in Psalm 2, ‘Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession’ (v. 8). Our Lord Himself said, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth’ (Matt. 28:18), and ‘Thou hast given him power over all flesh’ (John 17:2). Hebrews 2:8–9 and Ephesians 1:20–3 tell us the same thing and, of course, there is the great passage in Philippians 2 where we read, ‘Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’

He has all power. He is crowned because He suffered and conquered, and He has control over everything for the sake of His people, for their protection and for their ultimate salvation. That is why we read in Romans 8:28, ‘And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.’

This mediatorial kingship will last until the new heavens and the new earth have been brought into being—until ‘the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21). It will last until the great passage in 1 Corinthians 15 is fulfilled: Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

1 Cor. 15:24–8

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OF THE BIBLE**

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GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

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Preface

On Friday evenings after the war, Dr Lloyd-Jones held discussion meetings in one of the halls in Westminster Chapel in London. The subjects of these discussions were practical issues in the Christian life and the meetings were attended by many people. The questions which arose demanded a knowledge of biblical teaching of all kinds; often, too, a matter of doctrine would arise which the Doctor would deal with, usually in his summing up at the end of the discussion. It was partly as a result of this, partly, too, because the numbers were becoming too large for the hall, and, perhaps even more, because so many people were asking him about the biblical doctrines, that he felt it right to move the 'Friday night meeting' into the Chapel itself and to give a series of lectures on those great subjects. He did this from 1952 to 1955 and after that he began his magisterial series on the epistle to the Romans which continued until his retirement in 1968. The doctrine lectures were very much appreciated by the large congregations who heard them and, over the years, many have borne testimony to the way in which their Christian lives have been strengthened by them.

Later, the Doctor himself felt happier about preaching doctrines as a part of regular exposition—'If people want to know about a particular doctrine, they can find it in the doctrine text books,' he once said. But the great strength of his doctrinal studies is that they are not arid text-book lectures. He was, above all, a preacher and this shines through in all of them. He was also a pastor and wanted men and women to share his sense of wonder and his gratitude to God for the mighty facts of the gospel; so his language is clear and not encumbered by complex academic phraseology. Like Tyndale, he wanted the truth to be in words 'understood of the people'. Also he did not want the teaching to remain in the head only, so there is an application in each lecture to make sure that the heart and will are touched also. The glory of God was his greatest motive in giving these lectures.

Those who know the preaching and the books of Dr Lloyd-Jones will realise, on reading the lectures, that his views on a few subjects developed over the years and that his emphases may not always have been the same. But this is all part of the richness of his ministry as it has been of the ministry of many of the great preachers of the past. However on the essential, fundamental truths of the Word of God, there is no change and his trumpet does not give an uncertain sound.

We have had one difficulty in preparing these lectures for publication. They were delivered in the early days of tape recording so that in a few places the words have been difficult to decipher and a few tapes are missing. Also, only a very few of the lectures were taken down in shorthand so in one or two cases we have neither a tape nor a manuscript. Fortunately, however, the Doctor kept his very full notes on all the lectures so we have used them, though, of course, it means that these chapters are not as full as the others.

The Doctor's tapes are distributed by the Martyn Lloyd-Jones Recordings Trust and, of all his tapes, by far the largest number of requests is for these doctrine lectures. The lack of knowledge of the vital truths of the Christian faith is greater now than ever before—certainly greater than it was in the 1950s—so it is our prayer that God would use and bless these lectures again to our strengthening and to His glory.

The Editors

[p 1]

Introduction

We began our lectures by saying that we find ourselves, as men and women in a confused and difficult world, aware of principalities and powers which we cannot understand and which we cannot explain. The spirit of man, therefore, searches for something which it cannot find, and having shown that no human learning or teaching could ever solve that problem, we came to the conclusion that there is no hope for men and women save that they submit to the revelation that God has been pleased to give of Himself. He has given that revelation in nature. He has given it in history. He has given it by sending His only begotten Son into this world and, in a very special way, He has given it in and through the book which we call the Bible. We, therefore, are to spend some time in examining our authority. We have no authority apart from this book, and we either take it as it is or else we must of necessity be in the position in which we say that we are superior to it, and we can pick and choose, and select and reject. There is only one logical, reasonable attitude. Either we do accept the Bible as God's word and God's revelation and submit ourselves to it whether we understand it or not, or else—I repeat—we assert that our understanding is the supreme authority.

So, coming to the Bible in that way, as little children, confessing our ignorance and our inability, we listen to its message, and it starts with a message about God Himself. So we spent our time at the beginning on the doctrine of God—His character, His nature, His attributes, then His works in creation and especially in the creation of man. Also, we considered the being of God—the three Persons in the Godhead, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And then, having looked at those mighty doctrines with fear and trembling, we came to the [p 2] biblical teaching about man, because, in a sense, that is our starting point from the experiential standpoint. Why is man as he is? Why is the world as it is? Well, the Bible has its answer. It is all due to what it calls *sin*. So, having looked at man as he was made by God, we saw sin coming in at the suggestion of the devil, and that was the doctrine of the Fall with all its consequences in Adam himself and in all his posterity. We considered the biblical teaching with regard to all that. And we summed it up by saying that as we consider men and women we can use the analogy made by an old Puritan. Sometimes you see an old ruin in the country, an old castle or hall, and there is a notice saying that 'So and so once lived here.' And the old Puritan said that that kind of notice can be put up over human beings: 'God once dwelt here.'

But then comes the glorious doctrine of salvation. So we went on to consider the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The teaching of the Bible with regard to His person is that there are two natures in one person. We did not claim to understand all this but we said that it is vital and essential biblical teaching.

Then, having looked at the person and at various heresies which had arisen even in New Testament times, and which still are current with regard to His person, we went on to consider His work. And that brought us face to face with the great central doctrine of the atonement as it is expounded in the Scriptures. And there we saw that He made a perfect provision. He became a substitute for us. Our sins were punished in His body and He has reconciled men and women to God in that way.

1

The Person of the Holy Spirit

In our consideration of these biblical doctrines, our method has been to follow the order and the plan of salvation, so we come now, by a logical sequence, to the great doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Now I cannot begin to talk about this doctrine without pausing for a moment to express again my sense of wonder and amazement at the plan of salvation. I believe that people who are not interested in the plan of salvation as such, are robbing themselves of a great deal. When you try to stand back and look at it as a whole, you must at once be impressed by its glory, its greatness, its perfection in every part; each doctrine leads to the next until there it is, the complete whole.

It is a very good thing in the Christian life to stand back periodically and look at this great plan. That is why I think it is important to observe Christmas Day and Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and to preach on those days. They are convenient occasions for reminding ourselves of the whole plan of salvation. Look at it as a whole, look at the separate parts; but always remember that the parts must be kept in their relationship to the whole.

So it is very important that we should be studying the Bible in this particular way. I would always recommend that you read the Bible chapter by chapter, that you go steadily through it—that is also good. But in addition I do suggest that it is of vital importance to take out the great doctrines that are taught there, and look at them according to the plan or the scheme of salvation. The Church has done this from the very beginning, and it is a tragedy that it is done so infrequently at this present time because if you are content only with reading through the Scriptures, there is a danger of missing the wood for the trees. As you read through, you become so immersed in the details, getting the [p 4] right translation, and so on, that you tend to forget the big, outstanding doctrines. So the reason for taking a series like this is to remind ourselves that the purpose of the Bible is to tell us God's plan for the salvation of this world.

Another thing which I must emphasise is this: I know nothing which is such a wonderful proof of the unique, divine inspiration of the Scriptures as the study of Christian doctrine because we see then that this book is one, that it has one message though it was written at different times by different men in different circumstances. There is great unity in the message, one theme running from the beginning to the end. From the moment mankind fell, God began to put the plan of salvation into operation, and we can follow the steps and the stages right through the Bible. And so as we come to consider the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded that here again is a doctrine that appears both in the Old and the New Testaments. We find a reference to the Holy Spirit in the second verse of the Bible, and the teaching goes right the way through. This amazing unity, I repeat, is proof of the unique, divine inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures.

So, then, we find that in this great plan the Holy Spirit is the applier of salvation. It is His work to bring to us, and to make actual in us, in an experiential manner, that great salvation which we have been considering together and which the Son of God came into the world in order to work out. In the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the executive, the executor. I shall have to come back to this again when we deal particularly and specifically with His work, but that is His great function in the plan.

Now it is a remarkable and an astonishing thing that this doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His person and His work, has been so frequently neglected in the Church—yet that is an actual fact of history. It is quite clear that the first Christians believed the doctrine, they almost took it for granted. Then you come to the early centuries of the Christian era and you find very little reference, comparatively speaking, to this doctrine. That is not surprising, in fact it was more or less inevitable, because the Church was constantly engaged, in those first centuries, in defending the doctrine concerning the Son. The Son of God had become incarnate: He had been here in this world. Jesus was preached, Jesus as the Christ, and, of course, the enemy was constantly attacking the person of Christ. This was the linchpin in the whole of the gospel and if it could be discredited, the whole scheme would collapse. So the attack was upon the person of the Son and the [p 5] Church had to give herself in defence of that doctrine in order to establish it.

Tragically, the result was that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was comparatively neglected, until the time of the Protestant Reformation. Now it is our custom to say that the Protestant Reformation is primarily the epoch in the history of the Church in which the great doctrine of justification by faith only was rediscovered in the Bible, and that is perfectly true. But let us never forget that it is equally true that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was also rediscovered in a most amazing manner, and the great Dr B. B. Warfield is surely right when he says that John Calvin was the great theologian of the Holy Spirit. With the whole Roman system the Holy Spirit was ignored; the priesthood, the priests, the Church, Mary and the saints were put into the position of the Holy Spirit.

So the Protestant Reformation rediscovered this mighty doctrine; and let us, in Britain, take partial credit for that. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was, beyond any question whatsoever, worked out most thoroughly of all by a Puritan divine who lived in this country in the seventeenth century. There is still no greater work on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit than the two volumes by the mighty Dr John Owen, who preached in London and who was also at one time, during the period of Cromwell, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford. And not only John Owen. Thomas Goodwin and other Puritans also worked out the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It has never been done so thoroughly since, and certainly had never been done before.

Now generally speaking, the position today is that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is either neglected or it tends to be emphasised and exaggerated in a false manner. And I have no doubt at all that the second is partly the cause of the first. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is neglected because people are so afraid of the spurious, the false and the exaggerated that they avoid it altogether. No doubt this is why many people also neglect the doctrine of prophecy, the last things and the second coming. 'The moment you start on that,' they say, 'you get into these extravagances and these disputes.' So they leave the whole thing alone and the doctrine is entirely neglected.

So it is with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Because of certain exaggerations, excesses and freak manifestations, and the crossing of the border line from the spiritual to the scientific, the political and the merely emotional, there are many people who are afraid of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, afraid of being too subjective. So they neglect **[p 6]** it altogether. I would also suggest that others have neglected the doctrine because they have false ideas with regard to the actual teaching concerning the person of the Holy Spirit.

In view of all this, therefore, it is obviously essential that we should consider this great doctrine very carefully. If we had no other reason for doing so, this is more than enough—that it is a part of the great doctrine of the blessed Holy Trinity. Let me put it very plainly like this: you would all agree that to neglect or to ignore the doctrine about the Father would be a terrible thing. We would all agree that it is also a terrible thing to neglect the doctrine and the truth concerning the blessed eternal Son. Do we always realise that it is equally sinful to ignore or neglect the doctrine of the blessed Holy Spirit? If the doctrine of the Trinity is true—and it is true—then we are most culpable if in our thinking and in our doctrine we do not pay the same devotion and attention to the Holy Spirit as we do to the Son and to the Father. So whether we feel inclined to do so or not, it is our duty as biblical people, who believe the Scripture to be the divinely inspired word of God, to know what the Scripture teaches about the Spirit. And, furthermore, as it is the teaching of the Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the one who applied salvation, it is of the utmost practical importance that we should know the truth concerning Him. I am very ready to agree with those who say that the low spiritual life of the Church, today or at any time, is largely due to the fact that so many fail to realise the truth concerning the person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

One other thing under this heading. I wonder whether you have ever noticed, those of you who are interested in hymns and in hymnology, that in most hymnbooks no section is so weak as the section devoted to the Holy Spirit? Here the hymns are generally weak, sentimental and subjective. For that reason, I have always found myself in great difficulties on Whit Sunday. We are lacking in great doctrinal hymns concerning the Holy Spirit and His work. Indeed, there are those who would say (and I am prepared to agree with them) that in many hymnbooks a vast majority of the hymns under the section of the Holy Spirit—these hymns that beseech Him to come into the Church and to come upon us, and to do

this and that—are thoroughly unscriptural. That is another way of showing you again that this great doctrine has been neglected, that people have fought shy of it, and there is confusion concerning it.

The best way to approach the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is to start [p 7] by noticing the names or the descriptive titles that are given to this blessed person. First of all, there are the many names that relate Him to the Father; let me enumerate some of them: the *Spirit of God* (Gen. 1:2); the *Spirit of the Lord* (Luke 4:18); the *Spirit of our God* (1 Cor. 6:11). Then another is, the *Spirit of the Lord God*, which is in Isaiah 61:1. Our Lord speaks, in Matthew 10:20, of the *Spirit of your Father*, while Paul refers to the *Spirit of the living God* (2 Cor. 3:3). *My Spirit*, says God, in Genesis 6:3, and the psalmist asks, ‘Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?’ (Ps. 139:7). He is referred to as *his Spirit*—God’s Spirit—in Numbers 11:29; and Paul, in Romans 8:11, uses the phrase *the Spirit of him* [God the Father] *that raised up Jesus from the dead*. All these are descriptive titles referring to the Holy Spirit in terms of His relationship to the Father.

In the second group are the titles that relate the Holy Spirit to the Son. First, ‘If any man have not the *Spirit of Christ* he is none of his’ (Rom. 8:9), which is a most important phrase. The word ‘Spirit’ here refers to the Holy Spirit.¹ In Philippians 1:19, Paul speaks about the *Spirit of Jesus Christ*, and in Galatians 4:6 he says, ‘God hath sent forth the *Spirit of his Son*’. Finally He is referred to as the *Spirit of the Lord* (Acts 5:9).

Finally, the third group comprises the direct or personal titles, and first and foremost here, of course, is the name *Holy Spirit* or *Holy Ghost*. Some people are confused by these two terms but they mean exactly the same thing. The English language is a hybrid which has borrowed from other languages, and ‘Ghost’ is an old Anglo-Saxon word while ‘Spirit’ is derived from the Latin *spiritus*.

A second title in this group is the *Spirit of holiness*. Romans 1:4 reads, ‘Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.’ A further title is the *Holy One*: ‘But ye have an unction from the *Holy One*’ (1 John 2:20). In Hebrews 9:14 He is referred to as the *eternal Spirit* and Paul says in Romans 8:2, ‘For the law of the *Spirit of life* in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.’ In John 14:17 He is called the *Spirit of truth*, and in chapters 14, 15 and 16 of John’s Gospel, He is referred to as the *Comforter*.

Those, then, are the main names, or descriptive titles, that are applied to Him. But have you ever thought of asking why He is called [p 8] the *Holy Spirit*? Now if you put that question to people, I think you will find that they will answer, ‘He is described like that because He is holy.’ But that cannot be the true explanation because the purpose of a name is to differentiate someone from others, but God the Father is holy and God the Son is equally holy.

Why, then, is He called holy? Surely, the explanation is that it is His special work to produce holiness and order in all that He does in the application of Christ’s work of salvation. His objective is to produce holiness and He does that in nature and creation, as well as in human beings. But His ultimate work is to make us a holy people, holy as the children of God. It is also probable that He is described as the Holy Spirit in order to differentiate Him from the other spirits—the evil spirits. That is why we are told to test the spirits and to prove them, and to know whether they are of God or not (1 John 4:1).

Then the next great question is the personality or the person of the Spirit. Now this is vital because it is essential that I should put it like this. The person of the Holy Spirit is not only forgotten by those whom we describe as liberals or modernists in their theology (that is always true of them), but we ourselves are often guilty of precisely the same thing. I have heard most orthodox people referring to the Holy Spirit and His work as ‘it’ and ‘its’ influence and so on, as if the Holy Spirit were nothing but an influence or a power. And hymns, too, frequently make the same mistake. There is a confusion about the Holy Spirit and I am sure there is a sense in which many of us find it a little more difficult to conceive of the third person in the blessed Holy Trinity than to conceive of the Father or the Son. Now why is that? Why is there this tendency to think of Him as a force, or an influence, or an emanation?

There are a number of answers to that question. They are not good reasons, but we must consider them. The first is that His work seems to be impersonal, because it is a kind of mystical and secret work.

¹ See the translation in the New International Version and the references in various commentaries. (Ed.)

He produced graces and fruits; He gives us gifts and He gives us various powers. And because of that, we tend to think of Him as if He were some influence. I am sure that this is a great part of the explanation.

But, furthermore, the very name and title tends to produce this idea. What does *Spirit* mean? It means breath or wind or power—it is the same word—and because of that, I think, we tend, almost inevitably and very naturally, unless we safeguard ourselves, to think of Him as just an influence rather than a person.

Then a third reason is that the very symbols that are used in speaking [p 9] of Him and in describing Him tend to encourage us in that direction. He descended upon our Lord, as John baptised Him in the Jordan, in the semblance of a dove (Matt. 3:16). And again, the symbols that are used to describe Him and His work are oil and water and fire. In particular, there is the phrase in the prophecy of Joel, which was quoted by Peter in Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, about the Spirit being poured out (Acts 2:17). That makes us think of liquid, something like water, something that can be handled—certainly not a person. So unless we are very careful and remember that we are dealing with the symbols only, the symbolic language of the Scripture tends to make us think of Him impersonally.

Another reason why it is that we are frequently in difficulties about the personality of the Holy Spirit is that very often, in the preliminary salutations to the various New Testament epistles, reference is made to the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not mentioned. Our Lord in the great high priestly prayer says, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3)—He makes no specific reference to the Holy Spirit. And then John says the same thing in his first epistle: 'And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3). He does not mention the Spirit specifically at that point.

Then also, the word *Spirit* in the Greek language is a neuter word, and, therefore, we tend to think of Him and of His work in this impersonal, neutral sense. And for that reason, the King James Version, I am sorry to say, undoubtedly fell into the trap at this point. In Romans 8:16 we have that great statement which reads, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God.' You notice the word 'itself', not 'Himself'. Again in the same chapter we read, 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit *itself* maketh intercession for us' (Rom. 8:26). At this point the Revised Version is altogether superior since in both instances it gives the correct translation: 'Himself', even though in the Greek the pronoun, as well as the noun, is in the neuter.

And thus we have, it seems to me, these main reasons why people have found it difficult to realise that the Holy Spirit is a person. People have argued—many theologians would argue—that the Scripture itself says the 'Spirit of Christ'. The Holy Spirit, they say, is not a distinct person; He is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Son, or of the [p 10] Father, and thus they deny His personality.

How, then, do we answer all this? What is the scriptural reply to these reasons that are often adduced? Well, first of all, the personal pronoun *is* used of Him. Take John 16:7–8 and 13–15 where the masculine pronoun 'He' is used twelve times with reference to the Holy Spirit. Now that is a very striking thing. Jesus says, 'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth' (v. 13)—and so on. And this, of course, is of particular importance when we remember that the noun itself is a neuter noun, so the pronoun attached to it should be in the neuter. Now this is not always the case but it is in the vast majority of instances. It is most interesting and it shows how important it is to realise that the inspiration of Scripture goes down even to words like pronouns! So that is the first argument, and those who do not believe in the person of the Spirit will have to explain why almost the whole Scripture uses the masculine pronoun.

The second reply to those who query the personality of the Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is identified with the Father and the Son in such a way as to indicate personality.

There are two great arguments here; the first is the baptismal formula: 'baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. 28:19). Here He is associated with the Father and the Son in a way that of necessity points to His personality. And notice, incidentally, that this baptismal

formula does not say, 'baptizing them in the *names*' but 'in the *name*'. It uses the unity of the three Persons—the Three in One—one name, one God, but still Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And so if you do not believe in the person and personality of the Holy Spirit, and think that He is just a power or a breath, you would have to say, 'Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the breath' or of 'the power'. And at once it becomes impossible. The second argument is based on the apostolic benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost ...'—obviously the Holy Spirit is a person in line with the person of the Father and of the Son.

The third reply is that in a most interesting way we can prove the personality of the Spirit by showing that He is identified with us, with Christians, in a way that indicates that He is a person. In Acts 15:28 we read, 'For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.' This was a [p 11] decision arrived at by members of the early Church, and as they were persons, so He must be a person. You cannot say, 'It seemed good to a power and to us,' because the power would be working in us. But here is someone outside us—'It seemed good to *him* and to *us*'.

The fourth reply is that personal qualities are ascribed to Him in the Scriptures. He is said, for example, to have knowledge. Paul argues, 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:11).

But—and this is very important—He has a will also, a sovereign will. Read carefully 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul is writing about spiritual gifts, and the diversity of the gifts. This is what we are told: 'But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will' (v. 11). Now that is a very important statement in the light of all the interest in spiritual healing. People say, 'Why have we not got this gift in the Church, and why has every Christian not got it?' To which the simple answer is that this is not a gift that anybody should *claim*. It is the Spirit who gives and who dispenses these gifts, according to His own will. He is a sovereign Lord, and he decides to whom and when and where and how and how much to give His particular gifts.

Then the next point is that He clearly has a mind. In Romans 8:27 we read, 'And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit'—this is in connection with prayer. He is also one who loves, because we read that 'the fruit of the Spirit is love' (Gal. 5:22); and it is His function to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). And, likewise, we know He is capable of grief, because in Ephesians 4:30, we are warned not to 'grieve' the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and especially this aspect of the doctrine which emphasises His personality, is of supreme importance. The ultimate doctrine about the Spirit, from the practical, experiential standpoint, is that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so that whatever I do, wherever I go, the Holy Spirit is in me. I know nothing which so promotes sanctification and holiness as the realisation of that. If only we realised, always, in anything we do with our bodies, the Holy Spirit is involved! Remember, also, that Paul teaches that in the context of a warning against fornication. He writes, 'Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...?' (1 Cor. 6:19). That is why fornication should be unthinkable in a Christian. God is in us, in the Holy Spirit: not an influence, not a power, [p 12] but a *person* whom we can grieve.

So we are going through all these details not out of an academic interest, nor because I may happen to have a theological type of mind. No, I am concerned about these things, as I am a man trying myself to live the Christian life, and as I am called of God to be a pastor of souls, and feel the responsibility for the souls and the conduct and behaviour of others. God forbid that anybody should regard this matter as remote and theoretical. It is vital, practical doctrine. Wherever you are, wherever you go, if you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit is in you and if you really want to enjoy the blessings of salvation, you do so by knowing that your body is His temple.

2

The Deity of the Holy Spirit

We are considering the reasons why we must regard the Holy Spirit as a person and so far we have seen, first, that personal pronouns are used with respect to Him and, secondly, that He is identified with the Father and the Son in such a way as to indicate personality. Thirdly, He is also linked with Christians in a way that indicates personality; and fourthly, certain personal qualities are ascribed to Him in the Scriptures, qualities such as knowledge, will and sovereignty, mind, love, and grief.

Our fifth reason for insisting upon the person and personality of the Spirit is that actions are ascribed to the Spirit which can only be performed by a person. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 2:10 we are told that ‘the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God’. He *searches*—it is the action of a person. We are also told clearly that He *speaks*. In Revelation 2:7, we read, ‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.’ Then He also *makes intercession* for us. ‘We know not what we should pray for as we ought,’ says Paul in Romans 8:26, ‘but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.’

Then He also *bears testimony*. Our Lord said, ‘He shall testify of me’ (John 15:26). He bears testimony to the Lord: only a person can do that. Then we are told, again by our Lord, ‘He will guide you into all truth’ (John 16:13). Indeed, even in the Old Testament we are told that He teaches and instructs in the truth: ‘Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them’ (Neh. 9:20)—the Spirit spelt with a capital ‘S’.¹ [p 14]

Another personal action of His is found in Acts 16:6–7 where we are told, ‘Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the regions of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.’ Again, this is surely a very significant and relevant statement. All Paul’s companions wanted to go and preach in Asia, but the Spirit prohibited them. Then they wanted to go into Bithynia, and again He would not allow them. That is a definite action by the Holy Spirit Himself, and it is proof positive that He is a person.

The sixth argument is His office, His assigned task—the very office to which He was appointed is personal. He is described as the *Comforter*, ‘another Comforter’, says our Lord in John 14:16 and a comforter is one who stands by our side and helps us. The same word is sometimes translated *advocate*, so our Lord was saying, in effect, ‘As I have been with you during these three years; as I have taught you and guided you, and as I have sent you out on your missions, I will not leave you comfortless. I am going to send you another Comforter. You must not be troubled, you are not going to be left as orphans.’ The Holy Spirit is one who takes the place of our Lord. He is within us to lead us and guide us, and that is why our Lord was even able to say, ‘It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you’ (John 16:7). Obviously it is a personal office.

Then our last big proof, the seventh, of the personality of the Holy Spirit is that, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is susceptible to personal treatment. In other words, we are told that we can do certain things to the Spirit, and that He reacts as only a person can react. First, we are told that the Holy Spirit can be *lied to*. In the terrible case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, notice what Peter said: ‘Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?’ (v. 3). Ananias and Sapphira had declared that they had given everything, but Peter charged them with having lied to the Holy Spirit. Not an influence therefore—not some vague power—but clearly a person.

¹ While this is not so in the King James (Authorised) Version, ‘Spirit’ is upper case in the Revised Version. Cf. also the New International Version. (*Ed.*)

Then we are told that we can *blaspheme* against the Holy Spirit. Our Lord says, 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men ... neither in this world, neither in the world to come' (Matt. 12:31–32).

[p 15] Thirdly, we see that He can be *insulted*. Hebrews 10:29 refers to the man 'who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, *and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.*'

And finally, as we have already seen, He can be *grieved*. Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 4:30, 'And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby he are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

So, the Holy Spirit, we have seen, is a person. Yes, but we must demonstrate not only His personality but His *deity*. This is still a vital part of the doctrine of the Trinity, of course, and, indeed, we cannot emphasise too often that in many ways that doctrine is the first and the great doctrine of the Christian faith. It is only Christians who believe this doctrine; all other religions fail to do so, as do all errors and heresies. The Trinity is the key which unlocks all truth. So we must look at the evidence.

The first is that the Scripture itself specifically asserts the deity of the Spirit. I take you back again to that terrible incident with Ananias and Sapphira. After asking, 'Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?' Peter continued, '... not lied unto men, but unto God' (Acts 5:3–4). 'The terrible thing that you have done,' said Peter in effect, 'is that you have not only been lying to men; you thought that you were just lying to us, the apostles, and to the other Christians, but no, you have been lying to *God.*' And just previously he had said that Ananias had lied to the Holy Spirit. So clearly that is a specific statement that the Holy Spirit is God—God, the Holy Spirit.

But then we also find, as we have already shown, that the Spirit's name is coupled with the name of God, and this not only establishes His personality but His Deity, too. This is seen in the baptismal formula, in the Apostolic benediction, and also, of course, in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul writes, 'Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit ... And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all' (vv. 4, 6). At one point we are told it is the Spirit who does this, and the next moment we are told that it is God—the same God who works all and in all, and He is the Spirit. Therefore the Spirit is God—His deity is proved.

Then in the third place we find that certain definite attributes are ascribed to Him—and this is most important. We are told that He is eternal, and to be eternal is to be God, for God alone is eternal. In Hebrews 9:14, He is referred to as the 'eternal Spirit'. We are told **[p 16]** that He is omnipresent; He is present everywhere. This again is only true of God. The psalmist in Psalm 139:7 cries out, 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?' He is also omnipotent; there is no limit to His power, and again, this is an attribute of deity. When the archangel visited Mary and told her that she was to bear that 'holy thing', the Son of God, he told her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee' (Luke 1:35). Our Lord was 'conceived of the Holy Spirit'. He was the power, this omnipotent power, the power of the Highest, that overshadowed her, and the Lord was born of Mary.

In the same way we are told that He is omniscient; He knows everything. Again we have an example of that in 1 Corinthians 2:10: 'The Spirit searcheth all things.' And not only that. We are told, 'Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God' (v. 11). No man understands a man except the spirit of man that is in him. In the same way, no one understands the things of God, but the Spirit of God. But the Spirit does understand, and therefore His knowledge is equal to the knowledge of God. Or again, take those statements of our Lord about the Comforter: 'He shall teach you all things' (John 14:26)—He knows all things, and therefore He can do this. And furthermore, our Lord says, 'He will guide you into all truth' (John 15:13). There is no limit to His ability to teach us and lead us, because He knows all truth.

And then the fourth piece of evidence is that He does divine works. Certain things are done by the Spirit which we are told in the Scriptures can only be done by God. First of all, creation. In Genesis 1:2 we read, 'The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' There it is at the very beginning. Job says it also, 'The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life' (Job 33:4). This is

the creative work of the Holy Spirit, again, a proof of His deity. And then, of course, we must remember that His is the special operation which we describe as regeneration; the third chapter of John's Gospel establishes that once and for ever: 'Ye must be born again' (v. 7). Yes, and, 'Except a man be born of water *and of the Spirit*' (v. 5). It is the action of the Spirit; He gives the rebirth. Original creation—the new creation; they are both the special work of the Spirit. 'It is the spirit that quickeneth' (John 6:63), says our Lord again.

Then we are also told very clearly that the work of inspiration is the work of the Spirit. 'No prophecy of the scripture is of any private [p 17] interpretation,' says Peter; '... holy men of God spake as they were moved'—carried along, driven; it does not matter which translation you employ—'by the Holy Ghost' (2 Pet. 1:20–21). All the Scriptures were written in that way: the Holy Spirit inspired and controlled the writers in an infallible manner. So we have our doctrine of the infallibility of the Scriptures, and it is proof positive to us that He is God. It is God alone who can give the truth and inspire men in their record of the truth.

And, lastly, the work of the resurrection is also attributed to Him. Very often people are surprised by this. But it is to be found quite clearly in Romans 8:11: 'But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.' And there is a hint of the same teaching in Romans 1:4 where Paul says that Christ was 'declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.'

So we have arrived at this—that the Holy Spirit is a person and that He is a divine person. Obviously, then, the next thing to consider must be this: What is His relationship to the other Persons of the Godhead? In Volume 1 we considered God the Father and God the Son and now here we are face to face with this great statement that the Holy Spirit is also one of these blessed Persons. We have also already considered the doctrine of the Trinity, so I must not go back to it in detail now. But this is what we have to say: the Scriptures tell us two great things, first that there is only one God. We must always assert that. But the Scriptures equally teach that there are three Persons in that Godhead—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God the Father is fully God. God the Son is fully God. God the Holy Spirit is fully God. Do not try to understand that; no one can; it baffles our understanding. We must simply come to the Scripture and bow before it, accepting its authority; but we cannot understand it. Do not be misled by the various illustrations and analogies that people use. None of them is adequate; none of them is complete. The essence of wisdom in this matter is just to confess the plain statements, and to say that there is only one God but there are three Persons in that blessed Godhead; and the three Persons are co-equal and co-eternal.

But let us try to enter, if we can, as far as the Scripture takes us into this question of the relationship of the three Persons. Now we notice at once that there is a difference in what we are told about the Son and the Spirit. We are told that the Son is 'begotten' (John 3:16, 18) [p 18] of the Father but you never read that about the Holy Spirit. The term in the case of the Spirit is that He 'proceedeth from the Father'. We are told in John 15:26 (and this is an important verse), 'But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.' Now that is obviously a very vital difference and one that should engage our attention.

Those of you who are interested in theology will know that the great theologians throughout the centuries have been trying to grapple with the difference between *generation* and *procession*. I shall not attempt to consider it; it seems to me that it should never have been attempted—it is entirely beyond us. The truth is so great and so transcendent that the human mind simply cannot get there, but we must recognise the terms—begetting, generation, procession. The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father,' says our Lord, 'he shall testify of me.'

Then I must remind you of a further point: in John 15:26 our Lord says that 'the Spirit proceedeth *from the Father*,' and He does not say that the Spirit proceeds from Himself also. And yet what is believed and taught by the whole of western Christianity—and when I say western Christianity I mean both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches—is that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son. Now this is a very interesting point in the history of the Church. The first great division in

the Christian Church—I say the first great division, for there had been lesser divisions before that, and if you hear people saying that divisions only originated at the Protestant Reformation, tell them to go and read Church history. There were divisions, there were schisms, in the very earliest days of the Christian Church, but the first major division took place over this very question in the eleventh century.

There was a great discussion in the Church as to whether or not it should be taught that the Spirit proceeded from the Father only, or from the Father and the Son. The whole of western Christianity taught that you must say that He proceeds from the Father and from the Son. But the eastern section of the Church disagreed, so there was a division into what is called the Eastern Church and the Western Church.

Now it is very important that we should know this. You read references in the newspapers to the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church; they are representatives of the Eastern **[p 19]** Church which refuses to say ‘and from the Son’. All that debate took place as far back as AD 589, just before the end of the sixth century; and, indeed, it is still one of the real points of difference between the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church. Both Churches believe in the Virgin Mary in the same way, and even in the ‘assumption’, so-called, of Mary. The Orthodox Church does not believe in the infallibility of the Pope, of course, but it was this question of the Holy Spirit that caused the separation.

Why do we in the Western Church say that He proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father? Why does the Protestant Church at this point agree with the Roman Catholic Church? Well, this is the evidence: all the arguments that we have adduced for His deity force us to say that, as does the fact that He is called the ‘Spirit of Christ’ and the ‘Spirit of the Son’. Indeed, in this very verse (John 15:26) our Lord says that it is He who is going to send the Spirit. He associates Himself with the Father, and He tells us that He Himself will operate through the Spirit, exactly as His Father does. Furthermore, the Scripture shows that wherever the Spirit is, the Father and the Son are there also. In John 14 our Lord says that He will ‘send the Comforter’, and, as the result of that, the Father and He will dwell within us. The three are always working together.

Indeed, it is very interesting to observe that, apart from that one statement in John 15:26, the Scriptures always apply exactly the same terms to the relationship between the Son and the Spirit as they do to that between the Father and the Spirit. That is why John 15:26 is so important from the standpoint of doctrine. I have drawn your attention to this because it does seem to me that anything which has caused such a dramatic incident in the history of the Church is one with which we should be familiar.

However, let me come on to something which is of still greater importance. The Scriptures teach that the Spirit is subordinate to the Father and to the Son. You remember that when we were studying the doctrine of the Son, we saw that the Son subordinates Himself to the Father. He said, ‘The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works’ (John 14:10). The works that He did were not His own. The Father gave Him the works; the Father told Him what to do. Now here we are taught that the Spirit subordinates Himself to both the Father and the Son. That is what is meant in John 16:13. Our Lord says, ‘He shall not speak of himself,’ which means that He does not speak from Himself, **[p 20]** just like the Son, He is given what to speak. And, indeed, His work, we are told, is to glorify Christ (John 16:14). The Spirit does not glorify Himself; He glorifies the Son.

Is this not wonderful? Here is the subordination. Here is the division of the work. The Son says that He has come to glorify the Father, and the Spirit’s work is to glorify the Son. Each one reflects the glory of the other. Thus we look into the mystery of this amazing doctrine of the blessed Trinity: ‘He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you’ (John 16:14). This is, to me, one of the most amazing and remarkable things about the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seems to hide Himself and to conceal Himself. He is always, as it were, putting the focus on the Son, and that is why I believe, and I believe profoundly, that the best test of all as to whether we have received the Spirit is to ask ourselves, what do we think of, and what do we know about, the Son. Is the Son real to us? That is the work of the Spirit. He is glorified indirectly; He is always pointing us to the Son.

And so you see how easily we go astray and become heretical if we concentrate overmuch, and in an unscriptural manner, upon the Spirit Himself. Yes, we must realise that He dwells within us, but His work in dwelling within us is to glorify the Son, and to bring to us that blessed knowledge of the Son and of His

wondrous love to us. It is He who strengthens us with might in the inner man (Eph. 3:16), that we may know this love, this love of Christ.

So let me end by putting it to you in this way: the Scripture teaches us that in this division of labour between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in this subordination for the sake of our redemption, the Father is all the fulness of the Godhead invisible, without form, 'whom no man hath seen, nor can see' (1 Tim. 6:16); that is the Father. The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested visibly, 'For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2:9); that is the Son. And what a tremendous statement that is! And the Spirit is all the fulness of the Godhead acting immediately upon the creature. You see the difference? The fulness of the Godhead—invisible; the fulness of the Godhead—visible; the fulness of the Godhead—acting immediately and directly upon us. So thus we can say that the Spirit by His power makes manifest the Father in the image of the Son.

That is the whole essence of this glorious doctrine. '[God] whom no man hath seen, nor can see' (1 Tim. 6:16). Well, is there any hope for me? Yes, in the Son. He has become visible, and through the Spirit the **[p 21]** Son is made real to me. So I go to the Father with confidence and with assurance. God the Son is the revealed God—God is known. God the Spirit is that divine Person who exercises His energy immediately upon me. Or, you can think of the Spirit as God the giver of life, the Lord.

So, when we face the season of Advent¹ and of Christmas and think about the birth of our Lord and the great gospel that comes out of that tremendous crucial event in history, we know that it will mean nothing to us, and can mean nothing to us, apart from this doctrine of the blessed Holy Spirit. Paul says, '... Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2:8). And yet the astounding thing is that you and I know that God—the eternal Son—was 'made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). We know that this is true. We know that God did come, that the fulness of the Godhead was in Christ, that He died for our sins and blotted them out and bore their punishment, and that in Him we are just before God and clothed with His righteousness. How do I know this? I know it because the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Holy Trinity, dwells within me, enlightens me, gives me understanding, unction and an anointing.

Let us not only think of what He does, let us realise who He is. What an act of humiliation and of humbling took place when the Son was born as a babe in Bethlehem! But it is an equal act of humiliation for this third Person in the blessed Trinity to come and to dwell in you and me. 'Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?' (1 Cor. 6:19). He comes within us and we can grieve Him. Put that by the side of the incarnation and remember the humbling that takes place that you and I might be rescued, might be redeemed, might be raised, and might become the children of God. Blessed be God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit! Amen.

¹ This lecture was given on 11 December, 1953.

[p 22]

3

Creation and Common Grace

We come now to the *work* of the Holy Spirit although in a sense we have touched on it in dealing with His person. The main difficulty here is one of classification or arrangement—no two classifications agree. The best, though not perfect, one, it seems to me, is that which divides His work between *His work in general apart from the application of redemption* and then *His specific work in the application of redemption*.

Yet even before we come to deal with that, we must consider something which often perplexes people and which we can describe as the *dispensational aspect* of the teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. Pentecost clearly seems to be a turning point but in what respect? Now here there are two dangers—the danger of making too much of it and that of making too little of it.

What, then, are the facts? First, there is the Old Testament prophecy about Pentecost found in Joel 2:28 and following, which is quoted by Peter in Acts 2. But there are other prophecies also as, for example, Ezekiel 32:26–27.

Secondly, in the New Testament, we find John the Baptist speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, in Luke 3:16–17; and in John 7:39 we read, ‘For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified’; and there are many statements in John chapters 14–16. Then in Luke 24:49 our Lord, when speaking to His disciples, says, ‘Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.’ And in the same way we read in Acts 1:4 that He ‘commanded them that they should not step out from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.’ Finally, in [p 23] Acts 1:8 He says, ‘But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ...’.

Then, thirdly, there are the facts of the Day of Pentecost itself of which we read in Acts 2.

Now all these statements seem to carry the implication that the Holy Spirit had not yet come, that the Holy Spirit would come, that the Holy Spirit was about to come and that the great day at last arrived when He did come. The statements became more and more urgent. The time seemed to be shorter and shorter until at last Peter got up and said, ‘This is it, it has happened; this is that which was said by the prophet Joel...’. Now here is the problem. Here is the difficulty which has exercised the minds of people in the Church from the Day of Pentecost until now. Here are all these statements which seem to say that the Holy Spirit had not yet come and yet, on the other hand, there are many statements which describe to us the mighty activity of the Holy Spirit before the Day of Pentecost. So let us look at these also.

However, before we begin, let me interject a word about method. And if we do nothing else in these lectures, perhaps we may be of help to some by indicating the method of approach, the way to attack a problem. When you have a great problem like this, the one thing to do first of all is always collect your facts. Before you begin to theorise, before you begin to put up hypotheses and suppositions, gather together your details, get your facts together. We have done one side; we have seen all these statements pointing forward, so we are now going to put the facts on the other side. We are going to remind ourselves of what we are told in the Scriptures about the activity of the Holy Spirit before the Day of Pentecost.

First of all, we start at the very *creation of the world*. The second verse in the Bible, Genesis 1:2, says this: ‘And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ He was operative in the creation of the world. God the Father has made everything, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. The blessed Trinity, as we have often reminded ourselves, is operative in the whole work, always, but the labour is divided up. And, of course, you will remember that the Holy Spirit is very specially involved in connection with the creation of man.

The second is the work of the Holy Spirit in *sustaining, in maintaining the creation*. Now there are many statements about this; I shall simply quote two. In Isaiah 40:7, we read, ‘The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it.’ But, [p 24] still more strikingly, in Psalm 104 you

will find that magnificent description of creation, which is, perhaps, quite unsurpassed anywhere in the Bible. The psalmist makes the point that if the Lord withholds Himself or His power of His Spirit from creation, it all begins to droop and to wane, to perish and to die. He puts His Spirit back again and it all revives. It is the Holy Spirit that sustains creation. Now you will find statements in the Scripture which say that the Son does that and the answer is, of course, that the Son does it through the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit has been active from the commencement in sustaining and maintaining the universe.

And now I come, in the third place, to a most important matter which is so often forgotten. It is the Holy Spirit who is responsible for what is called *common grace*. Let me give you some definitions of what this means. Common grace is the term applied to those general blessings which God imparts to all men and women indiscriminately as He pleases, not only to His own people, but to all men and women, according to His own will. Or, again, common grace means those general operations of the Holy Spirit in which, without renewing the heart, He exercises a moral influence whereby sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted. That is the general definition. The Holy Spirit has been operative in this world from the very beginning and He has had His influence and His effect upon men and women who are not saved and who have gone to perdition. While they were in this life and world they came under these general, non-saving operations of the Holy Spirit. That is what we mean by common grace.

Now, how does the Holy Spirit do this? Well, there are various answers to that question. You will remember that we are told in the prologue of John's Gospel about '*the true light which lighteth every man*' (John 1:9). It does not matter how you translate that verse—'the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world' says the Authorised Version; 'the Light that lighteth every man was coming into the world,' says another. We are not concerned about that. We are interested in the phrase 'the light which lighteth every man'. And there is such a light. It is a kind of natural light, as we call it, natural understanding. It is the light that is in *conscience* and there is that light of conscience in every person born into this world. Now that is one of the operations of the Holy Spirit in what is called common grace. It is a light that comes from Christ, because He is the Head of the human race, but it is the Holy Spirit who puts [p 25] that light into everyone who is born.

Then this same general light also manifests itself in *governments*, and in *laws*, and in the various 'powers that be' as Paul calls them in Romans 13:1. You see, it is not man who decided to set up governments and states; 'the powers that be are ordained of God,' says Paul. God divided up the bounds of the nations. He decided that there must be rulers, governors and magistrates and that they should not bear the sword in vain (Rom. 13:4). This is God's work, and He has done all this and keeps it going by means of the Holy Spirit.

Now I think you see at once, without my emphasising it, that many Christian people are in grave error with regard to this matter. They seem to have the idea that God has nothing to do with the unsaved world. But that is not scriptural. Even those who are unsaved are under this influence of the Holy Spirit. It is not a saving influence, nor is it a redemptive influence, but it is a part of God's purpose.

Another way in which common grace manifests itself is by what may be called *public opinion*. There is such a thing as a general public opinion, a general consensus of opinion about moral subjects. People who are not Christian at all believe that certain things are wrong and should be prohibited, that other things are right and should be encouraged. There is a sense of right and wrong in humanity. Now that is nothing but a manifestation of common grace. If the Holy Spirit were not operative in men and women in this general way, human beings, as the result of the Fall and of sin, would have festered away into oblivion long ago.

Next to that is what is generally described as *culture*. By that I mean arts and science, an interest in the things of the mind, literature, architecture, sculpture, painting and music. Now, there can be no question at all but that cultivation of the arts is good. It is not redemptive, but it improves people, it makes them live better lives. Now, where do all these things come from? How do you explain men like Shakespeare or Michelangelo? The answer from the Scripture is that all these people had their gifts and were able to exercise them as the result of the operation of common grace, this general influence of the Holy Spirit.

So you see once more that not only sinners and those who do not believe in God deny common grace, but that often even those of us who are Christians do the same. People tend to glory in Shakespeare, as if he were responsible for his powers, but he was not. He had only what he had received. All these gifts that man and women have come [p 26] from God. And that is why true Christians, as they look out, not only upon creation, but even at culture, discover a reason for glorifying and for praising God.

You see, what is wrong with culture is not the thing itself, it is rather that people give their worship, their praise and their adoration to those men and women who have produced the works rather than to the God who enabled them to do it. But if you look at these things under the heading of common grace, you will see that they all bring glory to God because it is through the Spirit that He dispenses these general gifts to humanity. We shall be reminded later of how our Lord Himself tells us that God sends His rain upon the evil and the good and causes His sun to rise on the just and the unjust—it is the same thing. The God who sends rain and sunshine and gives crops to the evil farmer as well as to the Christian farmer, dispenses artistic and scientific gifts in exactly the same way, indiscriminately, to bad and good, saved and unsaved. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Then another way in which common grace manifests itself is this. We read in Isaiah 45: 'I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil.' What does this mean? Not that God is the creator of sin, nor that He is the author of evil—as such—but that He is the author of the evil consequences that follow certain actions. He controls everything. In that sense He makes peace and creates evil. In other words, it is the Holy Spirit who sees to it that certain actions lead to certain painful and evil consequences. Those, then, are some of the ways in which common grace manifests itself.

But let us look now at the effects of all this. The first is that *the execution of the sentence of judgment upon man and woman in sin was delayed*. Have you not sometimes asked yourself the question: Why was it that God did not immediately punish sin by bringing the world to an end in the Garden of Eden? the answer is that God decided, in His own inscrutable and eternal will, not to do so.

But the further question is: How can the world go on existing at all in sin? The answer is that it is kept in existence by this power that the Spirit puts into it. It is the Spirit who keeps the world going. Human life is prolonged both in general and in particular. 'The goodness of God,' says Paul in Romans 2:4, 'leadeth thee to repentance.' Peter says the same thing in his second epistle: 'The Lord ... is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:9). God is patient and long-suffering; to Him a thousand years are as one day and one day as a thousand years. [p 27] He keeps the world going by the Holy Spirit instead of pronouncing final judgment.

The second effect of common grace is that *the Holy Spirit strives with men and women*. Take that statement in Genesis 6:3: 'My spirit shall not always strive with man.' It does not exhaust the meaning of those words, but it does, at any rate, mean that a time was coming when instead of keeping men and women alive, in spite of their sin, God would stop and the flood would come and they would all be destroyed. The striving, in other words, has two meanings. It means 'keeping in existence, keeping going', and it also means that God was there, as it were, pleading through His Spirit, trying to get men and women to see the enormity of their sins and of their actions before it was too late. You find the same idea in Stephen's sermon recorded in the seventh chapter of Acts. He says, 'Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost' (Acts 7:51). The Holy Ghost is there, with this general work of conviction, but people resist it instead of yielding to it.

And, again, in Romans 1, we see the same thing. Paul there teaches that 'God gave them over to a reprobate mind' (Rom. 1:28). Read again in the second half of that chapter the terrible description of the moral iniquity, the horrible, foul perversions, of the world at the time when Paul was writing. Why was this? Paul's answer is, 'God gave them up unto vile affections' (v. 26). Now up to a point He did not do that. Up to a point, God, by the Holy Spirit, restrained men and women from these vile affections and that is why the world is not always as bad as it might be. God, through the Holy Spirit, restrains the foulest manifestations of sin, but there are times when He gives people up to them. Are we, I wonder, living in such an age? Compare the twentieth century with the nineteenth. It is obvious that the moral level is very much lower today. That does not mean that everybody was a Christian in the Victorian era, but it does

mean that even people who were not Christians were better men and women, speaking generally, than people now. Why? It was because of the general influence of the Holy Spirit. But it does look as if again, today, God is giving humanity over ‘unto vile affections’ as Paul outlines in Romans 1.

Therefore I deduce that one of the results of the operation of the Holy Spirit in common grace is that God does *restrain* men and women. He does specifically restrain sin. That is why God has appointed governments, authorities, magistrates and powers: it is to keep sin within bounds. Though God knows that there are certain people in the world who will never be saved, He does not allow them **[p 28]** to live just as they please and to give fuller manifestation to sin; He restrains it in them.

In others words, there is a general sense of morality and right and even of religion in the world, apart from a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We all know many people, do we not, who are religious but who are not Christian. There are many people who would say that they believe in God and who are concerned about practising religion, and some of them make great sacrifices for their religion. They do not believe that they are so sinful that nothing but the death of Christ can save them. They are not Christian in our sense of the term, but you have got to grant that they are religious. What is it that makes a person religious? It is nothing but the operation of common grace. It is one of God’s ways of restraining sin, of keeping it within bounds. So every sense of morality and rightness and religion, the belief in goodness, beauty and truth, such as you have in the Greek philosophers—it is all the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. Paul puts it clearly in Romans 2:14, ‘For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.’ That is the basis and the authority for saying all that.

And then lastly, under common grace, we have, as I have already mentioned, those common blessings which God gives—the sun and the rain. Our Lord spoke about it in the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 5:44–5. Paul spoke about exactly the same thing at Lystra, where he healed a man who was lame and then made this remarkable statement:

Sirs ... we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities [these gods] unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Acts 14:15–17

And, lastly, we have that statement of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 4:10 where he talks about Christ as ‘the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe’. That phrase, ‘the Saviour of all men’, does not mean salvation in the sense of the soul being saved but that He is the sustainer, the one who is kind and good to men and women.

[p 29] Let me, then, remind you of what we have been doing. We are facing this great problem as to what happened exactly on the Day of Pentecost. It is a turning point. You read your Bible and you think at first that everything says that the Holy Spirit had not yet come, that He was going to come. But you go back again and you find that the Holy Spirit had been active and that He had already been operating in the world. So then, having looked at the two bits of evidence, we shall attempt to give what we regard as the biblical explanation of what exactly happened on that important and vital occasion recorded for us in Acts chapter 2.

[p 30]

4

The Significance of Pentecost

We are still considering, you remember, the apparent conflict in the Bible over the coming of the Holy Spirit, and we are looking now at the biblical evidence for the fact that He had been at work in the world before the Day of Pentecost. We have seen three aspects of His working: that He was operative at creation, that He sustains the universe and that the work of common grace is His.

Let me give you further evidence. The fourth is this: there is plain scriptural teaching to the effect that the Holy Spirit has given special gifts to certain men. Take, for instance, Samson. He was a man of unusual strength and physical vigour and power. Now that strength, we are told, was given to Samson by the Holy Spirit (Judg. 13:25) and it was because he had not realised that the Lord, or the Spirit, had left him after his hair had been shaved that he was finally captured and overpowered by his enemies the Philistines (Judg. 16:20). Then there is a very interesting incident in the life of Moses when he complained that the work was too much for him, and we are told in Numbers 11:17 that God said to him, 'I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them,' namely, the seventy elders who were going to share the work with Moses. Now that is very striking. It was the Spirit who had enabled Moses to do the work and some of that Spirit was now taken and put upon the seventy elders in order that they might assist Moses in the carrying out of this work.

Then there was a man called Bezaleel who had certain abilities in connection with the building and furnishing of the tabernacle. You will read about him in Exodus 31:2-5. It was the Holy Spirit who gave him the skill to do that work. And the same thing, of course, is true of Joshua. Joshua's military strategy and ability was the result of [p 31] the operation of the Holy Spirit upon him. Now I simply take those examples at random to illustrate the point that, away back there in the old dispensation, the Holy Spirit came upon these men and gave them these particular powers.

Then, fifthly, we have to deal with the whole gift of prophecy; it is the teaching of Scripture everywhere that prophecy is made possible by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The first instance of this is the case of two men called Eldad and Medad. These two men began to prophesy, causing some of the people to become rather jealous for Moses' reputation, and this led Moses to make one of the greatest statements he ever made. He recognised that Eldad and Medad were able to prophesy because God had put His Spirit upon them and he said to his supporters, Don't be jealous for my sake—'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!' (Num. 11:29).

The same thing is true, of course, even of a hireling prophet like Balaam. Balaam was enabled to say, and had to say, what he said because the Spirit of God was upon him (Num. 22-24). Furthermore, we read about Saul—the first king of Israel—that the Spirit came upon him and people said, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' (1 Sam. 10:12). That was because Saul, under the influence and the power of the Holy Spirit, had been prophesying. And this is obviously true of all the prophets whose works are recorded in the Old Testament canon. Indeed, when we were dealing with the doctrine of Scripture we went further. We said then that all the writers of the Scriptures, both of the Old Testament and the New, were under the influence and the power of the Holy Spirit. These 'holy men of God'—that refers especially to the prophets—'spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Pet. 1:21); but 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim. 3:16)—*all scripture*. So it is good to include that under this particular heading of prophecy and it is, therefore, another very powerful argument for showing that long before the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit had been coming upon these men and enabling them to act as they did.

But for the sixth piece of evidence, I refer you to something that seems to take us even further. In Psalm 31:11, David says, 'Take not thy holy spirit from me.' Now here was a man under the Old Testament dispensation, a man before Pentecost, and he prayed that God would not take His Spirit from him. And what was true of David was, of course, equally true of all the Old Testament believers such as [p 32] Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All these Old Testament saints were believers and citizens of the kingdom of

God, and obviously you cannot be either of these things without the Holy Spirit. But David's striking statement focuses attention upon this matter: 'Take not thy holy spirit from me.'

But now, coming on to the New Testament—I am taking this, as you can see, in a chronological order—we come to John the Baptist. And the statement that the angel made to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist is this: 'And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb' (Luke 1:15). Now that is a very important statement but there is also another which says, 'Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' (Matt. 11:11). Yet we are told of John that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

Then it is said about John's mother Elisabeth: 'And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost' (Luke 1:41). Now this was all before Pentecost, remember, so we must test any theory we may have about the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost by a statement like that. And we are told the same thing about Zacharias in Luke 1:67: 'And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying ...'; and then follows the account of what he said. Furthermore, we have a similar statement about Simeon, the old man who held the infant Lord Jesus in his arms. In Luke 2:25 we read, 'And the Holy Ghost was upon him,' and in verse 26 we are told, 'It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost...'. Then, verse 27 reads, 'And he came by the Spirit into the temple'.

And as you read in the Gospels about the disciples sent out by the Lord to preach and to cast out devils, you realise that they were enabled to do all that they did by means of the Holy Spirit. Their ability to preach and the power to exorcise devils was given to them by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. So that everything they did was by, and in, and through the power of the Spirit.

But there is the final statement in John 20:22, which is so important as one considers this doctrine of Pentecost. After His resurrection our Lord appeared to the disciples in the upper room. The doors were all shut, but suddenly He appeared among them, and eventually we are told this: 'And, when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.'

There, then, is the evidence. Now the previous evidence was all to **[p 33]** the effect that the Day of Pentecost had not yet come, that 'the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified' (John 7:39). Our Lord also said, 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you' (John 16:7), and He gave them this injunction: 'Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high' (Luke 24:49). In Acts 1 Luke writes, '[He] commanded that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me' (v. 4). So that is the problem which seems to confront us—statements which imply that the Holy Spirit had not come and statements which teach plainly that He was active and operative and that mighty things were happening in Him and through Him.

So how do we reconcile these things? Obviously there cannot be a contradiction and there must be some way of understanding these two groups of statements. Let us try to approach the solution by putting it like this. There are certain things which are abundantly plain and clear. First: The coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into the world made a vital difference in this whole question of the work and the operation of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we must go further, and say that His death, and especially His resurrection and His ascension, made a still more vital difference. The moment you turn to the New Testament, the moment the coming of the Lord begins to be talked about, there seems to be something new, something special and additional. As we have seen, He Himself often says, 'Yes, but there is going to be more,' and there is the prophecy of John: 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire' (Matt. 3:11).

The second thing we notice is that in chapter 2 of the prophecy of Joel, which was quoted by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, the emphasis is placed upon the word *pour out*: 'It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh' (Acts 2:17). Now that is surely significant. The emphasis is upon the extent, the giving of the Holy Spirit is going to be more general. Also there is an emphasis upon the fact that it is going to be upon all types and kinds: '... your sons and your

daughters... your young men... your old men... and on my servants and on my handmaidens, [on all these] I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy' (Acts 2:17–18). Now in the Old Testament the giving of the Spirit is something unusual, and these people on whom the Spirit came were exceptional persons. But the emphasis here is [p 34] upon the generality; upon this whole idea of pouring out, the largeness, and the freeness, and the fulness of the gift. Not only that, there is an emphasis upon a further fact, which is that it is no longer going to be confined to the Jews. You will actually find that in the prophecy of Joel, at the end of that chapter. And, of course, you will find it worked out still more fully in the book of Acts. The gift of the Spirit is no longer confined to the Jews but is for all nations. There is this largeness and this freeness—He will pour out His Spirit upon all people. There is an all-inclusiveness which we must note.

So we notice those bits of evidence which are perfectly clear. But there is one other to which I must refer, and that is a word spoken by our Lord Himself. You will find it in John 14:17. Referring to the Holy Spirit, He says, 'He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.' Now a distinction is made there by our Lord which obviously must be of vital importance. 'He dwelleth with you,' He says, and there has been proof of that, of course, in the works that the disciples have been enabled to do. But He says, 'He dwelleth with you, *and shall be in you.*' He makes this prophecy with regard to what will happen after the Day of Pentecost.

In order to make our evidence still more complete and that we may now come to a suggested synthesis of these two groups of statements, I must call your attention to three incidents. One took place in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), another in Samaria (Acts 8), and the third in Ephesus (Acts 19). Now I shall take chapters 8 and 19 together; chapter 10 I put in a category on its own. But first I would like to look at the three together because there is one factor which is common to them all, and that is the element of unity which is emphasised in all three in exactly the same way as it is emphasised in the events of the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2.

Unity is the big thing in Acts 2, is it not? There were these different people up at the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. They were 'Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians (vv. 9–11). There were all these different nationalities, these different tongues and languages, but they all said, 'We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God' (v. 11). That obviously stands out, that amazing oneness, that extraordinary unity. And of course the same unity was displayed in the apostles themselves. There was a coming [p 35] together, a drawing together. And you find the same unity in Samaria, among the Gentiles in the household of Cornelius, and among the believers who were in Ephesus.

Now surely it is there that we find the key to the solution of this problem. When the Holy Ghost descended on the Day of Pentecost, when the Lord Jesus Christ baptised with the Holy Spirit, as He had said He would do, what was happening was the formation of the Church as the body of Christ. Now, before this there were believers. The apostles were obviously believers before the Day of Pentecost; you must not regard them as unbelievers before then. We know perfectly well that though they were imperfect and unclear in many respects, nevertheless they did believe in our Lord, and when He appeared to them, you remember on the day he rose from the dead, He breathed upon them and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' So if you do not believe that they were believers before that, they must have been believers then. But that was before the Day of Pentecost.

So, then, what was it that happened on the Day of Pentecost? Well, I would suggest that the believers were welded together as members of the one body of Christ. Before that they were separate believers, even as the believers in the Old Testament were believers and were citizens of the kingdom—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and David and the patriarchs and so on—but they were not members of the body of Christ. On the Day of Pentecost the primary event was that all these became one. This is something which we can understand if we see that it could only happen after our Lord's ascension. While He was here in the flesh and teaching his followers, the Church as His body had not yet been formed. In the book of Acts, we read a statement, do we not, that He has 'purchased [the Church] with his own blood' (Acts 20:28). Thus the Church in that sense could not have existed before our Lord had completed the work which He had come to do. And He only completed that work as He ascended into the presence of the Father, but the

moment He did that, He completed the work which was necessary for the purchase of the Church. He was made the head of the Church and as the head of the Church, the Holy Spirit was given to Him that He might give it to the Church which is His body.

So the point I am emphasising is that all that could not have happened before the ascension, but you would expect it to happen after it. And that is precisely what happened—ten days after the ascension, our Lord, now the head of the body which is the Church, sent His Spirit into and upon the body, to fill it. It was the gift that He [p 36] gave, the promise of the Father was sent by the Son who had completed the work that was necessary in order that it might happen. So on the Day of Pentecost the Church was established as one unity, as the body of Christ.

Now, let me give you a verse which will explain all this: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:13). Now, there it is, '*by one Spirit*'—the Holy Spirit—we are all 'baptized into one body'. And it was on the Day of Pentecost that all these believers were baptized into one body, all the apostles together with the three thousand other people from different parts of the world, who believed their preaching. Later, in the house of Cornelius, and again, in Samaria and Ephesus, all people, Jew and Gentile, were baptised into one body. The Church is one and there is only one Church, this invisible Church, the mystical body of Christ—that is where the division between the visible and the invisible Church becomes important—but what I am emphasising here is that there is a unity in the Church and that unity was brought into being when all these people were baptised into the one body on the Day of Pentecost.

Let me put it in different language. You can say that the Day of Pentecost was the day of the public inauguration of the Church as the body of Christ. There was something new there which had never been before. There is a sense in which you can speak of the Church in the Old Testament, yes, but it is not the same as the Church was subsequent to the Day of Pentecost. The unity was established. Then you see the significance of what happened in the house of Cornelius, and how important that was. Peter, of course, as a Jew would obviously have found it very difficult to believe that Gentiles could really come into this unity. That was why the vision was given to him as he was there on the top of the house. As he was praying he saw a great sheet coming down with clean and unclean animals and birds upon it and he heard God's voice telling him to kill and eat. God said, 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common' (Acts 10:15). But is there not a further suggestion that even that vision was not enough? Certainly it was enough to take Peter to the house of Cornelius and to preach as he did. But you will notice that, even while Peter was yet preaching, the Holy Spirit descended upon Cornelius and his household. And Peter and the Jews, especially, were amazed at this. They could not quite understand it but they had to face the facts as they [p 37] heard these other people speak with tongues and magnify God. 'They of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost' (Acts 10:45).

Not only that, the next chapter tells us that when all this was reported in Jerusalem, the believers there were a little troubled about it, so when Peter went up he was cross-examined. 'When Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him'—'they of the circumcision', remember, means the Jewish Christians—'saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them ...' (Acts 2:2-4). But the thing that Peter emphasised was that while he was speaking the Holy Spirit had descended upon them:

As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Now you see what was happening. God was declaring that they were to be baptised into this same body, that the Church was to consist of Jews and Gentiles. That is the great theme of Paul, is it not, in Ephesians? The mystery that had been hidden from the previous generations was that the Gentiles were to be made fellow heirs, that they were to be brought into the kingdom, that they were to be welded, baptised into the body, and that, therefore, as one body, they would be there for Him to function through them in this world of time.

But for me to complete my evidence, let me give you one further most significant scriptural quotation and this time it is from Hebrews 11:39–40. You remember the great list and gallery of the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament that appears in that chapter? Then this is what the writer says: ‘These all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.’ Oh yes, he says in effect, they were believers but everything was not **[p 38]** given to them; they were held back, as it were, until this should happen, so that they and we together should be made perfect. They were believers but they had not been baptised into the body of Christ. The Church had not yet come into being in this sense, because Christ had not yet ascended, He had not done the work, He had not returned to the Father. But they were believers, they were being reserved, they were being held, they were being kept, so that when our Lord did ascend, then they were welded, baptised into the body; and the Church is one and has remained one ever since. Now that, I suggest to you, is the real meaning and significance of what happened on the Day of Pentecost, and what happened in the household of Cornelius is comparable to it. It is really the same thing, as Peter argues in that eleventh chapter of Acts. And indeed you will find that he had to bring out the same argument in the fifteenth chapter, at a great council of the Church in Jerusalem.

Then, finally, what about the events recorded in Acts 8 and 19? You notice that I separate them from Acts 10, and it is for this reason: in the household of Cornelius, just as Peter began to preach the Holy Spirit was poured out. But that is not what happened in Samaria and Ephesus. In Samaria Philip went down and preached and evangelised and a number of people believed and were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But Peter and John had to go down and pray for them and lay their hands upon them before they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. When Paul visited Ephesus, he asked the people the question which in the Authorised Version reads: ‘Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?’ In the Revised version it is: ‘Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?’ It does not really make any difference; they mean the same thing. And these men said, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost’ (Acts 19:2). In other words, they had received John’s baptism only. And there Paul preached to them and baptised them in the name of Christ. He placed his hands upon them and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now you see that we must put these events in a different category because the Holy Spirit was received by these people in a different way. The question is often asked: ‘Why did it happen like that in Samaria and Ephesus? What is the difference between those two groups and Cornelius and his household?’ Well, I suggest to you, it is this: Cornelius and his household were Gentiles; they were not actually proselytes, but they were Godfearing and they were seeking. The people in Acts 8 were Samaritans. You will find the history of the **[p 39]** founding of the Samaritan country in the Old Testament. They were, in a sense, neither Jews nor Gentiles. They had the five books of Moses but none of the remainder of the Old Testament. But they regarded themselves, you see, as being equal to the Jews. The woman of Samaria said to our Lord, ‘Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship’ (John 4:20). There was a great feud between the Jews and the Samaritans for that reason. The Samaritans felt they had a perfect religion, but the Jews knew that it was imperfect. Now it seems to me that is the key to the understanding of what happened.

The Holy Spirit did not fall upon the Samaritans as Philip preached; envoys, emissaries, had to be sent down from the church—the headquarters at Jerusalem—to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Why? Well, surely, to establish the fact that the Samaritans must recognise their allegiance to the church at Jerusalem. The church at Jerusalem was the logical sequence and outcome of the Old Testament faith in its completeness, in its fulness. The Samaritans had to recognise that their religion was incomplete and that the Christian Church had come out, as it were, of the Jewish Church, the Church in the Old Testament. They

had to realise that there is a continuity in God's way of salvation, that you have to accept the whole of the teaching of the Old Testament if you are to be truly Christian. You cannot suddenly come in into the New Testament, as it were; you cannot come in by some other way into the kingdom. No, *this* is God's way. So the Samaritans had to submit themselves to all of this teaching and to the church at Jerusalem which was first of all a Jewish church—to the Jew first, then to the Gentiles. They had to recognise and submit to all that and then they were given the gift of the Spirit.

In the same way, the people at Ephesus, in Acts 19, had a religion which was all right as far as it went. They were disciples of John and had been baptised into the name of John, but they were not clear about the gospel. So in their case again, this had to be made clear, it had to be put straight. In the case of Gentiles, like Cornelius, there was no error to correct—they had nothing—so as Peter preached the Holy Spirit descended, but in these other cases there was an incomplete religion, an imperfect understanding. That had to be put right before the gift of the Holy Spirit was given, and that is a very important distinction. In the case of Cornelius and his household God was simply making this great demonstration to the effect that the Gentiles had to come in and to be baptised into the body. In these [p 40] other cases what was necessary was that they should believe the truth clearly and get rid of certain prejudices and false ideas.

We sum it up by saying that the great purpose of Pentecost is to give the final proof of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. That is declared. The second thing is the great inauguration of the Church as His body, and thirdly it is a proof of the fact that these various people who are added to the Church are members of the body. In addition, there are various other things which we shall have to come to later but the main one is this: in the Old Testament we are told that the Holy Spirit was with the men, or that He came upon them. He worked upon them from without, as it were, and what David even said, you remember, was, 'Take not thy holy spirit from me' (Ps. 51:11), as if the Holy Spirit was *with* him—that is the Old Testament terminology. The New Testament terminology is *in, within*; He works from within, and He abides. In the Old Testament He came upon men and left them. He comes, in the New Testament, because we are members of the body of Christ and because the Spirit is in Him in His fulness and comes from Him through the whole body. Because we are members of the body, the Spirit abides in us—perfectly; and that, it seems to me, is the essence of the teaching with regard to this matter.

Confusion has often arisen because, in addition to all this, on the Day of Pentecost the disciples in the upper room were at the same time filled with the Spirit, and as the result of the filling with the Spirit, they were able to witness, but you notice that that was repeated several times. I hope to come back to the teaching concerning the filling with the Holy Spirit at a later point—it must obviously come after justification and sanctification—I just mention it at this point. There is often confusion because of the term *filling*. They were filled with the Spirit, but they were repeatedly filled with the Spirit, and, because of that, were enabled to witness with boldness.

But on the Day of Pentecost the rushing mighty wind and the cloven tongues as of fire specially emphasised, not the filling with the Spirit, but the baptising into the unity of the body, the inauguration of the Church—that is why you have the special phenomena. The cloven tongues of fire were never repeated again. The walls were shaken on another occasion, but this particular sound, this noise, the gathering together of the special phenomena, places a uniqueness upon the event on the Day of Pentecost which was never repeated. It was never necessary to repeat it because it was something once and for all. The [p 41] filling with the Spirit is something which can be, and often is, repeated, but that is not the vital thing which happened at Pentecost. As we have said, what happened there was something that could only happen when our Lord had finished the work for His people and risen and become the Head of the Church. The Church became His body and the Spirit was given to fill the body—that is what is emphasised at Pentecost. And so, having dealt with that, we shall now be in a position to go on to consider in detail the work of the Holy Spirit as He comes to deal with and to apply the work of redemption completed by our Lord and Saviour.

5

The Work of the Holy Spirit in General

Having looked at the work of the Holy Spirit in general and having considered what happened on the Day of Pentecost, it is important and interesting for us, before we move on to look at the great work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption, also to consider briefly His work in connection with our Lord Himself.

First with regard to His birth, we read how the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said to him, 'Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. 1:20). Then Luke, in his Gospel, tells us that when speaking to Mary, the angel Gabriel told her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God' (Luke 1:35).

Then, secondly, when Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, he told the people about the ministry of our Lord which, '... began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power' (Acts 10:37-38); and we are told in John 3:34 that 'God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him'. We know, too, that after 'the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him' (Luke 3:22) at His baptism, He was then 'led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil' (Matt. 4:1).

And more than that, thirdly, He was crucified in the power of the Spirit. 'Who, through the eternal Spirit', says the writer to the Hebrews, 'offered himself without spot to God' (Heb. 9:14); and then He was raised by the power of the Spirit as Paul tells us in Romans 1:4. [p 43]

Finally we learn that He gave commandments to the apostles, 'through the Holy Ghost' (Acts 1:2).

And now, let us move on to what, after all, is the main work and function of the Holy Spirit—His work in connection with the application of the redemption that has been achieved and worked out by the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Notice the importance of proceeding with these doctrines in a logical manner. We obviously had to take the person and work of our Lord first; there we have seen what He has done. The whole question now is *how* that work is applied to men and women like ourselves.

In this series of discourses, we have often had to refer to that great meeting that was held in eternity, when God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit met in council, and the work of salvation was divided up between them. The Son volunteered to take unto Himself human nature, to give a perfect obedience to the law, and to die for the guilt and punishment of the sins of men and women. And the Holy Spirit volunteered to take upon Himself the work of applying that redemption. That is His special work, and we must now pay attention to it.

Here again we must divide the subject into two main headings: the Holy Spirit's work in general, and His work in particular. There is a work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the application of redemption to all people, and He has a special work in the application of redemption only to those who are redeemed experientially. I am not dealing with the latter yet, but with the work that the Holy Spirit does in connection with Christ's redeeming work before that and apart from that.

First, I would suggest that His very coming and presence in the Church and in the world is, in itself, a part of this work; and in this connection I want to call your attention to John 16:8-11: Our Lord says, 'And when he is come [referring to the Spirit], he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.'

Those are most important verses, and it is vital that we should interpret them correctly, because frequently they are wrongly interpreted. So often they are interpreted as if they were a description of the work that the Holy Spirit does in the souls of individuals in order to bring them to salvation. They may

have some indirect reference to [p 44] that, but I want to try to show you that that is not their primary reference, that is not what they are really describing. You notice that the Authorised Version reads like this: 'When he is come, he will *reprove* the world ...'; in the Revised Version, there is a better translation: 'When he is come, he will *convict* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment,' and that is correct. It is not *convince*, as it is translated in the Revised Standard Version, but *convict*, and I need not stress the difference between convicting and convincing. It is possible to convict a person without convincing him. To convince means that you have persuaded that person. In other words, the Revised Standard Version supports the false interpretation, which is that these verses are describing the way in which the Holy Spirit brings a soul to salvation. Now there is a sense, of course, in which every soul brought into salvation does come along that way, but that is not the meaning of this statement.

Let me try to substantiate this. I maintain that John 16:8–11 is a general statement with regard to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and with regard to the effect of His coming. You notice that our Lord is very careful to say that when the Holy Spirit has come He will convict not individuals, not believers, but the *world*. Now the world includes everybody, those who become believers and those who do not, but our Lord is careful to say that the convicting work is something that the Holy Spirit does to the world. And I think it is because expositors have so often forgotten this that they have gone so sadly astray in their expositions.

Another point to notice is this: I wonder whether you have ever been puzzled as to what these verses mean? For instance, our Lord says that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, and then He expounds that—'of sin, because they believe not on me'. He does not say that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin by teaching it the whole truth about in. No! He only specifies one particular thing—'because they believe not on me'. That, again, is very significant. The law that God gave through Moses convicts of sin in that more general sense and there was no need for the Holy Spirit to come to do that. But the Holy Spirit does this special work. And, in the same way, when our Lord expounds 'righteousness' and 'judgment', He pins it down to something very particular. In other words, our Lord's teaching here is with respect to the effect that the actual coming of the Spirit has upon the world, and He says that the very presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church convicts it of sin, and righteousness, and judgement.

[p 45] Now there is a parallel statement in Acts 5:29–32. Peter and the other Apostles are brought before the Court, before the Sanhedrin, where Peter makes his defence, and this is what we read:

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins—then notice—And we are his witnesses of these things; *and so is also the Holy Ghost*, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

'We,' says Peter, 'are witnesses of these things, and the Holy Spirit is a witness of these things that we are telling you.' The coming of the Holy Spirit into the world witnesses concerning certain things, and, as He bears this witness, He convicts the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

How does He do that? Well, let us follow our Lord's own exposition. But in passing we must observe a general point because it is a vital part of the whole doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is this: in all three cases, the Holy Spirit is pointing to the Lord. He does not stop at sin. He does not teach about Himself or call attention to Himself or glorify Himself. He is all along calling attention to the Lord, and that is the characteristic of the whole of the work of the Holy Spirit. His one function and business, as our Lord Himself teaches here so clearly, is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole of our redemption comes out of Christ, every blessing, every experience—*everything*. John has already said that at the very beginning of his Gospel. In John 1:16 he says, 'Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.' The Holy Spirit can give us nothing whatsoever except it come from Christ. He does not give us anything Himself, but passes on to us, mediates to us, reproduces in us, brings to pass in us that fulness which is in Christ and His redemption. So you notice that as our Lord interprets these three things He does so entirely in terms of what the Holy Spirit will do with respect to Him.

The first thing is that He will convict the world 'Of sin, because they believe not on me'. I have already pointed out that He does not say that He will just convict the world of sin in general. He does not say that

He is going to show the foulness of sin, or the evil or the ugliness or the depravity of sin; he will not show how sin is lawlessness or 'missing the mark', or any one of these other things. Our Lord does [p 46] not mention them at all. It is only one thing and this one thing is 'because they believe not on me'. Now what does He mean by this? Well, surely, there is only one adequate explanation, and it must be that the very coming of the Holy Spirit into the Church on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem, with the signs that followed, and the way in which He used the Apostles, all that in itself convicted the world of its complete error when it had denied Jesus of Nazareth and cried, 'Away with Him! Crucify Him!' The coming of the Holy Spirit is proof positive and final that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

How does the Holy Spirit do this? Well, while He was here in this world our Lord had said that He was going to send 'the promise of the Father'. This was something that the Jews had been looking forward to for centuries. They had these prophecies of Joel and others, and they knew that the Messiah was the One who was going to send that promise. Then Jesus of Nazareth appeared before them; He claimed to be the Messiah; and they disputed His claim and denied it. They would not believe on Him and they finally rejected Him and crucified Him. But here is the Holy Spirit sent upon the Church, according to prophecy! What, then, is the effect of that? It proves that He is the Messiah, and, therefore, the world which rejected Him is convicted of its sin—the sin of failing to recognise Him, the sin of rejecting Him and of crucifying Him. That is why He says that the Holy Spirit in particular convicts the world of sin 'because they believe not on me'.

I trust I am making this clear: it was the very coming of the Spirit that did that, it was not the result of a work that He does in the depths of the soul. I shall be dealing with that later, when we come to the question of how redemption is applied to those who are redeemed. But now we are dealing with the way in which the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin. When He fell upon the Church, when there was the sound of the rushing mighty wind and the cloven tongues, as of fire, came upon those disciples and they spoke with other tongues, that alone convicted the world of sin, the sin of unbelief. That is why I put this under the heading of 'general'.

But come to the second indictment—'... of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more.' Have you ever been troubled as you have tried to expound that? It is very interesting to read the commentators and the various sermons on this subject because, forgetting that our Lord is talking about the world, they tend to misinterpret it. [p 47] Some say that by 'righteousness' Jesus meant that God was showing His own righteousness and justifying Himself. They say that the charge against God was that this One who had claimed to be His Son had been forsaken by Him. God had allowed Him to be crucified and God was, therefore, not righteous. Very well, say these commentators, by sending the Holy Spirit God established His own righteousness. He raised Christ again from the dead, and after Christ had ascended to heaven, God sent down the Holy Spirit, in this way establishing the fact that God had not been unrighteous after all, and had been taking care of His Son through everything that happened.

Others say that what is meant by 'righteousness' here is the establishing of the righteousness of Christ the Son. When He was crucified in weakness, men said that He was not the Son of God, and that He was not righteous; that what He claimed was not true, and because it was a lie, He was, therefore, not a righteous person. The sending of the Holy Spirit is therefore said to prove that He is what He said He was, and therefore it establishes His righteousness. But that point has already been dealt with under the previous category, and if it means that, it would be a kind of tautology, a mere repetition of something that has already been established. So it does not mean either of these things.

Now our Lord puts this in a very interesting way. He says, '... of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more.' So how does it work out? Well, the fact that our Lord rose again from the dead is proof positive that He has been accepted by the Father. The Father has not only accepted Him, but He has also accepted His perfect work. The Apostle Paul, I think, gives us the key to the elucidation of this problem. In Romans 4:25 he says, 'Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.' It is in the rising again that we see Christ as our justification. The fact that God raised Him from the dead, with His perfect, spotless life of obedience, with His passive obedience in His death upon the cross, as He bore the guilt and the punishment of all the sins of men and women. In the resurrection God is declaring, 'I am satisfied, the law is satisfied. There is nobody who can bring any accusation.'

But the ultimate proof of God's acceptance of Christ as our justification is the sending of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is so important that we should always bear in mind the fact that what happened on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem must always be included in the great series of events, the historic events, that establish salvation. This [p 48] is the last and the ultimate proof that Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, for as we have seen it was only to the One who established His righteousness that God gave the gift of His Spirit for His people who are His body, the Church.

And, therefore, the very coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost made the pronouncement that there is only one way of righteousness, and it is that which is in Christ Jesus. You cannot establish a righteousness of your own by means of the law; you cannot establish it by means of your own moral effort or striving. He is our righteousness; He is our peace; He is God's way of righteousness; and the righteousness that God gives us is the righteousness of His own Son. The Holy Spirit proclaims that. When God sent the Holy Spirit He was convicting the world of righteousness; He was telling them, pronouncing to them, that in Christ and in Him alone can we be made righteous. That is the great theme in the book of Acts and in all the New Testament epistles. It is that Christ 'is made unto us ... righteousness' (1 Cor. 1:30). And nothing proclaims that so powerfully as the descent of the Holy Spirit sent by Christ upon the Church on the Day of Pentecost.

And then it is exactly the same with the third statement—'... of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.' Here again there is much confusion as to why our Lord put it in this way. He says that the coming of the Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment because the prince of this world is, or has been, judged as the result of His work. Now what does this mean? Well here again I put it like this: the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the final proof of the defeat of Satan and the judgment that is pronounced upon him. I regard this as a most important doctrine at this point. Talking about His death, just before this, our Lord said, 'Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out' (John 12:31). He was referring to what He was going to do in His death: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die' (vv. 32-33).

Then there is the statement of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:15, where he says that in dying upon the cross our Lord was putting principalities to an open shame, 'triumphing over them in it'. The statement in John 12:31, therefore, means that our Lord in His death upon the cross was judging and defeating Satan. It was a prophecy that the prince of this world was to be cast out by that event. Paul says it has happened. And I suggest that our Lord says the same thing here in [p 49] John 16. The death of our Lord upon the cross, His resurrection and ascension, and His sending of the Holy Spirit, was the proclamation of the defeat of Satan. Satan is now cast out, as our Lord had prophesied and predicted that he would be. And, of course, it was the coming of the Holy Spirit that finally proclaimed this. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that proved, as I have been repeating, that our Lord is indeed the Son of God, that His work was accepted, and that He had thus done the great deed of redemption which would save men and women out of the dominion of Satan. It is therefore a conviction or judgment, especially because the prince of this world, Satan, is judged.

I wonder whether you have always realised the significance of this statement? Do you not see that it means that Satan has already been judged? He was judged by the work done on the cross; it was proclaimed by the sending of the Holy Spirit. And it is a fact. Our Lord's last great commission to His followers was, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. 28:18-19). He *has* this power. The apostle Paul puts it like this: 'He must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor. 15:25). The Day of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, therefore, was a great proclamation to this effect—that the world will never be the same again as the result of what our Lord has done upon the cross.

Now before the coming of our Lord, Satan had held all the nations of the earth, apart from the Jews, in bondage. They were all pagans. They believed in their various gods, and the knowledge of the true and living God was confined to the one nation of Israel, the Jews. But as the result of our Lord's work upon the cross, and the sending of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, that is no longer the case; Satan, in that sense, has not been deceiving the nations ever since then. Christ has been preached, and there are

believers in Him in all nations under the heavens. He said, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men unto me' (John 12:32)—like those who had come to Andrew, and others. So in that sense Satan is no longer controlling the world. Christ is controlling it, He is reigning. He is seated at the right hand of God's power. All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and He is going on to disciple all the nations, by the Holy Spirit, through His workers, through His followers. So the very descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, as our Lord here [p 50] predicts, convicted the world of judgment.

I am afraid we do not realise this. I confess that I myself had not realised it as I should. I see it most clearly in this way: what was happening when the Holy Spirit descended? Well, among other things, it was a proclamation to the world that the spell of Satan on the world had finished, had been broken. He was cast out, as our Lord prophesied he would be. It does not mean that he is not able to exercise certain powers, but they are all within limits, he is not exercising them as he once did. The kingdoms of this world, in one sense, have already become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

And all that is proclaimed by the descent of the Holy Spirit. 'When he is come, he will convict the world ... of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.' And he has been judged. What the Holy Spirit proclaims further is that all who belong to Satan will likewise be judged and condemned with him and cast into the lake of fire. Here, then, is a great work that is done by the Holy Spirit, immediately, by His mere presence in the Church, in connection with our Lord's completed work of redemption.

One other thing I want to mention at this point, in order that we may be free to go on to consider the work in the redeemed, is this: He also does a certain preparatory work in all and sundry—both the redeemed and the unredeemed. This has sometime been called the 'external' call of the gospel. It means that, since the coming of the Holy Spirit, a general call of the gospel has been made to all people. Let me emphasise this: it is made to those who remain unbelievers, as well as to those who become believers.

Perhaps the simplest way of putting that is to ask a question. If you were asked to define the difference between a Calvinist and a hyper-Calvinist, how would you do it? It is a question that is worth asking for this reason: I know large numbers of people who, when they use the term 'hyper'-Calvinist, generally mean Calvinist. In other words, they do not know what a hyper-Calvinist is. A hyper-Calvinist is one who says that the offer of salvation is only made to the redeemed, and that no preacher of the gospel should preach Christ and offer salvation to all and sundry. A hyper-Calvinist regards anyone who offers, or who proclaims, salvation to all as a dangerous person. For what it is worth, there is a society in London at the moment that has described me as a dangerous Arminian because I preach Christ and offer salvation to all!

I have called your attention to hyper-Calvinism in order that we [p 51] may realise that the Bible teaches that Christ is to be preached to *all*. Let me give you my evidence for saying that. Take the great commission to which I have already referred: 'Go ye,' says our Lord, 'and preach the gospel to all nations.' Take also the statement of the apostle Paul in Acts 17:30: God 'commandeth *all* men every where to repent.' It is a universal command. And take the statement made by Paul about himself and his own ministry in his address to the elders at Ephesus in which he says that they must bear him record that he has testified both to the Jews and to the Greeks—that is to say, to everybody—'repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21). The gospel is a universal proclamation.

Another way I can prove it is this: our Lord Himself, in His parable about the wedding feast, tells us that some people were invited who did not come (Matt. 22:2-14). He recognises that the gospel will be preached to some who will reject it. That proves that it should be presented to all. And you will find the same teaching in Luke 14 in the parallel parable, about another wedding feast. Indeed, the Scriptures tell us quite specifically that certain people do, and will, reject the gospel. Paul at Antioch in Pisidia said that he had been preaching the gospel to the Jews but they had rejected it. So he was going to turn from them and was henceforth going to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

This proclamation of the gospel is to be made through the word of God. There is a great statement with respect to this in 1 Peter 1:12:

Unto whom [the prophets] it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

The Holy Spirit always works through the word of God. Now there are many people who claim that He works directly. That was what caused the Quakers to wander off from the main party of the Puritans. They said that the word was not necessary, that the Holy Spirit spoke directly to each person, in some secret mystical manner, by some 'inner light'. Not at all! The Holy Spirit always uses the word: 'This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you,' says Peter (1 Pet. 1:25). 'Being born again,' says Peter, 'not by corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever' (1 Pet. 1:23).

In order to do His work, the Spirit uses the word of God. And what **[p 52]** does He do? Let me give you the headings: first, He reveals, through the word, the great love of God to sinners in general: 'God ... for his great love wherewith he loved us ...' (Eph. 2:4) and so on. Secondly, He presents and offers salvation in Christ; through His people, He states the facts about Christ. That is the business of preachers of the gospel. It is to give the record of the life, the death, the resurrection and the resurrection appearances of our Lord. What is preaching? It is proclaiming these facts about Christ. Not only that. It is an explanation of the facts, the meaning of the facts, how these facts constitute salvation and are the cause, the means, of salvation. So in the preaching of the word in the power of the Holy Spirit, these facts and their interpretation are presented.

Then, as I have already reminded you, the Holy Spirit calls us to repentance. He calls everyone to repentance, all men and women everywhere, because of these facts, because of 'that man whom he hath appointed', by whom the whole world is going to be judged in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

And finally the Holy Spirit calls us to faith in Christ. Take again those words of Paul in his farewell message to the church at Ephesus, what did Paul testify? What did he preach? It was 'Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21). He called men and women to faith in Christ in order that they might obtain forgiveness of sins and inherit eternal life. That was the way in which our Lord commissioned Paul on the road to Damascus. He said that He was going to send him to the people and to the Gentiles, '... to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me' (Acts 26:18).

That, then, is the work of the Holy Spirit in general, in connection with our Lord's work of redemption. And having dealt with that, we are now in a position to go on to consider in detail what it is that the Holy Spirit does to those who become believers, and only to them, in order to apply the work of redemption.

6

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption

I cannot imagine a better text to bear in mind, as we come to consider the subject that is to engage us now, than verses 6 and 7 of 1 Corinthians 2, where the apostle Paul says, 'Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.' Now I am acting on the assumption that we are people whom the Apostle describes in that language, for we are certainly going to look into the wisdom of God. The Apostle said that he could not preach in this way to the Corinthians when he was with them because they were still 'babes' and 'carnal' (1 Cor. 3:1), but, he says, 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.' It was not the sort of wisdom that the Greeks had been interested in; it was the wisdom of God in a mystery. We are now going to try to look at this great hidden wisdom of God in which we find things relevant to our salvation and to our eternal destiny.

Now we are considering the work of the Holy Spirit and we have looked at the very general work of the Spirit, and then, in the last lecture, we considered together our Lord's statements about His work which we find recorded in John 16, where He said, 'When he [the Holy Spirit] is come he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.' And we have expounded those statements as meaning that that is not a description primarily of the work He does within the soul, but is the work that the Holy Spirit does by His very presence in the world. As I was entering my room from this pulpit last [p 54] Friday something occurred to me which I apparently had not seen before, but I put it to you as an additional word for your consideration. Jesus said, '... of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.' Now, we have seen those three things point to the Lord Jesus Christ, but it did not occur to me, until I was walking into my room, that what our Lord was really saying was that the Holy Spirit in His coming would be the final proof and demonstration that He, Christ, is indeed the one who comes from God to teach us, the very Son of God who is the Prophet and the Teachers and the Revealer of God. Yes, and the Priest also, the one who deals with righteousness, the one who offers us righteousness in the only way possible, by making expiation for sin. And, finally, the King, who rules over all, who has defeated Satan, the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, and who is now seated and ruling at the right hand of God and who will rule; all power is given unto Him. So the presence of the Holy Spirit is the final demonstration of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King.

We have seen also that the Holy Spirit is concerned about giving the general call of the gospel, and we emphasised that it is a call that is given to all, to those who remain unbelievers and to those who become believers. The Holy Spirit sees to it that that message is delivered and that that proclamation is made, that general, external call.

But at once, of course, we come up against a problem. That call, that offer of the gospel, is made to all, but we realise that it causes a division. We see that in the second chapter of Acts: some believed and some did not. Indeed, our Lord had prophesied that that would be the case when He said, 'For many are called, but few are chosen' (Matt. 22:14). A congregation sits in church and listens to the gospel: some are saved by it, some are not. Now that is a fact which is recorded in the Scriptures, which our Lord predicted, and which has been abundantly demonstrated in the history of the Christian Church from the very beginning right until today. Children of the same parents are brought up in the same home, in the same circumstances, attend the same place of worship, yet one is saved and one is not.

So the question at once arises: Why this difference? And in dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit, of necessity we have to face that problem. It is one of the most mysterious problems in connection [p 55] with the Christian life, the Christian faith, but that is no reason for avoiding it. It is a very real problem, but it is a fact and it is our business to examine it—as long as we do so, of course, carefully; as long as we do so with wisdom; and as long as we do so with a desire to know the truth, and not in order to confirm our own

prejudices. Many answers have been given to this question, many solutions have been put forward to explain the astounding fact that though the same general call is made to all, there is nevertheless this division in the response.

Now it seems to me that it is of value to us to look at some of the historical answers that have been given to this question. There is an answer which generally goes by the name of the *Pelagian* answer. Pelagius happened to be a man who was brought up in Britain. I do not say that because I am proud of him, but as a fact! He was the man with whom the great St Augustine dealt so effectively. The only reason I personally have for being grateful to Pelagius is that he caused Augustine to write much in correction of his erroneous teaching!

For Pelagius's teaching was that there is no such thing as original sin. The Pelagian view holds that men and women are born and live in a kind of neutral state, that every person has a perfect free will, and is able to choose good or evil, and can believe God's word or reject it. The Holy Spirit does nothing within the person at all. The only work of the Holy Spirit, according to that view, is that He did produce the Scriptures by using men, but having done that, He does nothing further: so anyone reading the Scriptures may decide to agree with it or to reject it. That is the view of Pelagius, and he has many followers even at this present time, in the Church, alas, as well as outside.

Then there were others who were sometimes called *semi-Pelagians*, because they were not as extreme as that. They said that the Holy Spirit helps men and women, but the love originates in the people themselves. People desire to know God, they want to know truth, and because of that, the Holy Spirit comes to them and helps them. On this view, Pelagius went too far. Men and women cannot do it all by themselves, they do need assistance; and if they show this desire, then the Holy Spirit will assist them. That is called semi-Pelagianism, and you see the reason for giving it that designation—it teaches a kind of co-operative grace. All the Holy Spirit does is co-operate with us, and graciously help us to arrive at a knowledge of truth and salvation.

[p 56] Then next—I am taking the theories in the order in which they appear in history, with slight variation, perhaps, at this point—there is what is generally known as *Arminianism*. It originated with a man called Arminius, who was a Dutchman living at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Arminius taught, as did one of his great followers, John Wesley, that human beings are totally depraved, and therefore are quite hopeless when left to themselves. But what Arminians then go on to teach is that the Holy Spirit gives a sufficient measure of grace to everybody born into this life to accept and to believe the gospel. Therefore, of course, what people have to do is to co-operate with that.

'Well then,' someone may say, 'if it is given to all, why is it that only some believe and others do not?'

'Ah,' is the reply, 'the explanation is that the ability to believe is given to all by the Holy Spirit, but it is only some who choose to use it, while the others do not.'

That is the Arminian teaching and again, you see, there is a kind of co-operation, but put rather differently. The semi-Pelagian says that it is man who desires it first and the Holy Spirit comes and helps him. But this Arminian view says that man desires nothing, he is dead in trespasses and sins, totally depraved, but the grace of God comes, in the Spirit, and gives the ability to all to desire, to believe and to accept. But it all depends upon whether or not men and women co-operate with the Spirit. If they do, they will be saved; if they do not, they will be lost. And that is virtually the view that was taught by John Wesley and by all who have followed him ever since.

Now the *Lutheran* view is different, and I put it here because, though it came before the Arminian teaching, it approximates more closely to what is commonly called the *Reformed* view. The Lutheran view is, again, that men and women are totally depraved, that they are dead in trespasses and in sins, that in and of themselves they can do nothing at all, but that grace is again operating in all men and women in the early stages of regeneration. Why, then, are some saved and some lost? Well, for this reason, say the Lutherans—that men and women have the capacity to resist the operation of God's grace. If they resist it they remain unbelievers and stand condemned. If they do not resist it, they will be saved by it. You see the difference between that and Arminianism? Arminianism says that people must co-operate. The Lutheran

does not say that; he says that they are incapable [p 57] of co-operating positively, but they are capable of resisting negatively. That is the historic Lutheran teaching with regard to this matter, and it is what is taught by Lutherans in all parts of the world to the extent that they are indeed orthodox Lutherans.

So there we have four views that have been put forward in history. The fifth and last is what is called the *Reformed* view and that is the view of this matter which is taught in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Let us be careful to note that. It is taught plainly and explicitly in the Thirty-nine Articles, in the Westminster Confession of Faith and in the great historic Reformed Confessions of the continental churches, such as the Heidelberg Confession, the Dutch or Belgic, and the other classic statements of Reformed doctrine. Again, the teaching here is that men and women are totally depraved, utterly helpless and incapable. How is it, then, that one is saved and the other is not? The answer is that it is due to the special work of the Holy Spirit in the saving. This view says that the Holy Spirit of God does a work in those who are saved which He does not do in those who are not saved. It talks about *prevenient grace*: a grace that goes before and does its work in men and women, enabling them to believe. In other words, it amounts, ultimately, to the doctrine of the absolute necessity of regeneration before anything else can happen at all.

There, then, are some of the classic attempts which have been made to deal with this problem with which we are all familiar. 'Many are called, few are chosen.' The only comment I would make is that the theory we espouse, and are prepared to contend for, will be determined by our view of what happened to humanity in the fall, and by our view of the condition of men and women in sin, as the result of the fall. Now when we dealt with those doctrines,¹ of necessity I committed myself to the Reformed view.

I would add that here, more perhaps than anywhere else in the consideration of doctrines, it is vital that we should all realise that there is a limit to our understanding, and that we must come to the Scriptures with open minds and not be led over much by our own ideas and by our own philosophy. We must come to the word of God and we must ask certain questions: Why do I believe this? Would man ever have invented such a doctrine? Is it or is it not taught in the Scripture? Fortunately we are not saved by our understanding of these things. I [p 58] thank God for that, because I am quite sure that there will be Pelagians in heaven and I am quite sure there will be Arminians and Lutherans as well. By the grace of God, men and women, who may be muddled in their thinking and in their understanding of the mechanism of salvation, can still be saved. What a wonderful thing that is! If we were saved by our understanding, some people would have an advantage over others because they have greater intellect, greater ability. We are not saved by that.

'Well then,' says someone, 'if we are not saved by our understanding of these matters, why bother with them?'

Ah! Now that, I think, is a foolish question. We 'bother', to use the term, because the Scripture has a great deal to say on the subject. Not only that. All children of God should be anxious to understand as far as they can. I will go even further. If I were to give my own experience, I should have to put it like this: I know of nothing that is so strengthening to faith, nothing which so builds up my assurance, nothing which gives me such certainty about the blessed hope for which I am destined, as the understanding of Christian doctrine, the understanding of the way, yes, the mechanism of salvation. And that is why I personally 'bother' with it. It is not an intellectual interest, although it is entrancingly interesting from the standpoint of intellect, but I confess frankly that I am concerned about it primarily for a most practical reason: it is so comforting, so strengthening, so upbuilding.

In other words, you will find, as I have indicated many times before, that the people who are 'carried about with every wind of doctrine' (Eph. 4:14), are the people who have been too lazy to study doctrine. They say, 'I am not interested in doctrine,' and that is precisely why they believe a wrong doctrine. They have no method of discriminating; they have no tests by which they can evaluate teachings. 'The only thing that matters,' they say, 'is that I am saved,' and then you will find them running after the latest cult or

¹ See Volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*, chapters 16–18.

heresy. So we consider these things, though they are not essential to salvation, because in the actual living and practical details of the Christian life they are of very great importance indeed.

Having said that, then, let me announce that my conclusion, therefore, at this point is that the Holy Spirit does a special work in those who are going to be saved which He does not do in those who will remain lost.

Then, I come to another question, which in a sense is still more [p 59] baffling and perplexing. That was why I told you at the beginning that I could quote to you the words of Paul: 'Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect'; that is my assessment of your standing and of your ability, and of your desire to know the truth. I do not know whether you realise it, but I am paying you a great compliment! The next question, therefore, which we go on to consider is this: If there is this special work which is done in the souls of those who are to be saved, in what order does the Holy Spirit do that?

Have you ever thought of that? Now the great authorities, the great doctors of the Church, the great theologians of the centuries, those saintly men of God, have written volumes on this and they have disputed about what they called the *ordo salutis* — *the order of salvation*. I confess frankly again that I find it a most entrancing theme, and I have spent a great deal of my time in preparing this lecture, in considering this great question. I find it difficult to understand people who have to resort to crossword puzzles and things like that in order to find a fascinating matter of arrangement! Think of this: What are the steps and the stages? How does the Holy Spirit proceed to do this work? And the answers that have been given have been almost endless.

Now the Scripture itself does not give us any precise order. In a way, the nearest approach is Romans 8:28–30, where we read: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose'—notice—'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate'—Paul is going on with it now—'them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.'

That is the order, is it not? Predestined, called, justified and glorified, too. Yes, it is an order but, unfortunately, it is not a complete list. The Apostle was not interested there in giving us a complete list, he had a special object in view. He was interested in this glorification and wanted to guarantee that, so he just put in the essential steps. You notice he does not mention sanctification at all.

That is one passage; there is one other, and the Lutherans are very fond of using this. In Acts 26 you will find a suggested order in the commission that was given by the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus: 'Delivering thee from the [p 60] people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee'—what for?—'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me' (Acts 26:17–18). But, again, that is obviously not a complete and a perfect list. It does not deal with it sufficiently *in extenso*. There is a suggested order, but it does not go far enough.

Now as I have suggested, it is almost impossible to find two people who agree about this question of the order of salvation. What is very interesting is that even people who belong to the five different schools I mentioned earlier do not agree among themselves. You can consult the Reformed authorities and you will find that scarcely two of them will put all these items in precisely the same order. So here again, we cannot arrive at precision. Why not? What is the difficulty? Well, of course, the difficulty is due to the fact that it depends entirely upon how you approach the question.

Now there are, at any rate, two main ways in which you can approach it. You can think of this order of salvation in the mind of God: God in His holiness looking down upon men and women in sin as the result of the fall, and thinking out the plan of salvation. There must have been an order. You can think of that, if you like as the kind of logical order in the mind of the Eternal. Then another obvious approach, and it is almost the exact opposite, is to think of these things in a temporal manner, in the way in which they happen in time and in experience.

Or you can think of this order in a purely objective way. Instead of thinking of what is happening to you experientially, you can say, 'Now what are the things that must happen to men or women before they can be saved, and in what order are they likely to take place?' That is an objective view. And then you can take the subjective view, and say, 'All I know is that in practice this is the way in which it happens.' Now our view of this matter will, once more, depend upon our view of the fall, and the condition of men and women in sin as the result of the fall. And I would suggest that it would be an interesting exercise for you to work out your order of salvation according to that doctrine. It would be very interesting to see the result!

Once more I say that this is not something which is essential to salvation. None of us will be saved because we put these things in the **[p 61]** right order, in the correct sequence. But, again, though it is not essential to salvation, it is indeed something which is of great profit and value, and a wonderful spiritual exercise.

Now let me, therefore, suggest to you certain possible orders. I shall not keep of necessity to any one of them, but if you look at it from the logical and objective standpoint you might very well take them like this. You might say that the first and the fundamental thing is union with Christ, that we are ultimately saved by union with Christ, so you start with that. Then, because of that, you put justification next, and then, because of that, you follow with regeneration. Out of that comes faith, and out of that adoption. Then you can put conversion, which includes repentance and a turning away, and a believing, then sanctification, and then perseverance.

If, on the other hand, you are more anxious to stress the subjective element and still try to keep some theological order, you might put it like this: You might start with what is called 'effectual calling', that which makes the offer, the call, effectual in men and women. That is the first thing. Then you could go on to regeneration, and then to faith, followed by justification, then union with Christ, then repentance and conversion, then adoption, then sanctification, and then perseverance.

But if you were anxious to take it in a purely subjective and experiential manner, you might very well put it like this: conviction, conversion, faith, justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, union and perseverance. However, though I suggest that those would be the three main classifications, you can vary the positions of individual items almost endlessly. And I repeat that it is of great value as a spiritual exercise.

But let me end by saying this: the danger in doing all this is to become too chronological. The danger is to bring in the time element with too great a prominence and to say that each one of these must follow the other in a very rigid, mechanical time sequence. Now that is the danger, indeed, it is the thing that always leads to error, because ultimately God's action is outside time, and that is where our difficulty comes in. We tend to think of everything as it occurs to us, as we experience it in time. But the fact that we experience things in time, in a given order, does not of necessity mean that that is the order in which they have happened.

Let me give you an illustration. The first evidence we have of the fact that a child is born, is that it may cry or scream, but we do not **[p 62]** say that, because of that, screaming comes first. Not at all. Birth is essential before the child can scream. In other words, we tend to pay attention to the *evidence* of life, and to say that that comes before life, but obviously it does not. There is very little doubt in my mind that some of these things happen to us at exactly the same time, and that, therefore, from the standpoint of time, you must not say that one is prior to the other. And yet obviously you cannot speak about these things without giving them a certain order.

I have been making a number of confessions in this lecture; let me make still another! I was a bit concerned as to whether or not I should say everything I have said tonight. I tested this idea on my wife and she said to me, 'You know, if you do that you will cause confusion. It is difficult. It is a mystery.' I confess it was a late hour of the night and she confessed to being confused by it herself!

My reply is this: I agree that it is difficult, but, you see, the only alternative was that instead of taking you through all we have been considering, I should begin lecturing on the work of the Holy Spirit in the

saved, and start by saying that first of all we consider this, and then we go on to that, and so on, without giving you my reasons.

But then, I imagine, somebody would have said, 'Surely the first thing is conviction, and surely you do not put regeneration before faith!' And that person would have become perplexed and would have said, 'Now, why did he start with that? Why did he put that second and the other third?'

So I have taken you through this consideration, this brief consideration of the order of salvation, in order to try to give you some justification for what I am doing. It seems to me to be very wrong that any man should just stand in a pulpit and speak to others and not explain as far as he can what he is doing and why he is going it. In other words, I am not a pope. I do not believe in popes, and I do not believe in making *ex cathedra* statements. It is the business of any man who tries to expound biblical truth and doctrine to justify what he is doing, and that is why I say it is important for us to consider this question of the order. And as we go on now to consider the various details in the order, I think you will realise that you have not been wasting your time, but that we are basing the order upon our understanding of what happened when man fell, the result of original sin, the condition of man in a fallen and lost condition. We cannot claim that one order is of necessity perfect rather than another, but, all the **[p 63]** same, I think it is our business and our duty to see that our order of taking these things, as we come to consider them and to grasp them, conforms to the teaching of the Scriptures.

[p 64]

7

Effectual Calling

As we now proceed to consider in detail what exactly it is the Holy Spirit does to us in the application of redemption, I would remind you that I am not insisting that the order which I shall follow is of necessity the right one, and certainly not of necessity the chronological one.

‘So how do you arrive at your order?’ asks someone. My answer is that I mainly try to conceive of this work going on within us from the standpoint of God in eternity looking down upon men and women in sin. That is the way that appeals to me most of all; it is the way that I find most helpful. That is not to detract in any way from experience or the experiential standpoint. Some would emphasise that and would have their order according to experience, but I happen to be one of those people who is not content merely with experience. I want to know something about that experience; I want to know what I am experiencing and I want to know why I am experiencing it and how it has come about. It is the child who is content merely with enjoying the experience. If we are to grow in grace and to go forward and exercise our senses, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it (Heb. 5:14), then we must of necessity ask certain questions and be anxious to know how the things that have happened to us really have come to take place.

My approach therefore is this: there is the truth of the gospel, and we have seen already that it is a part of the work of the Holy Spirit to see that that truth is proclaimed to all and sundry. That is what we called the *general call*—a kind of universal offer of the gospel. Then we saw that though the external or general call comes to all, to those who will remain unsaved as well as to those who are saved, obviously some new distinction comes in, because some are saved by it. So the [p 65] question we must now consider is: What is it that establishes the difference between the two groups?

And the way to answer that question, it seems to me, is to say that the call of the gospel, which has been given to all, is *effectual* only in some. Now there is a portion of Scripture which is a perfect illustration of this. The followers of Christ who were even described as ‘disciples’ were divided up into two groups. One group decided that they would never listen to Him again. They left Him and went home. And when He turned to the others and said, ‘Will ye also go away?’ Peter said, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the word of eternal life’ (John 6:67–68). The one group disbelieved and went home, the others, who had heard exactly the same things, stayed with Him, wanted to hear more, and rejoiced in it. What makes the difference? It is that the word was effectual in the case of the saved in a way that it was not effectual in the case of the unsaved who refused it.

This, then, is something that is quite obvious. We can say that in addition to the external call there is this effectual call, and that what makes anybody a saved person and a true Christian is that the call of the gospel has come effectually. Let me give you some scriptures that establish that. The first, Romans 8:28–39, is a great statement of this very thing. ‘We know,’ says Paul, ‘that all things work together for good to them that love God ...’ Not to everybody but ‘*to them that love God*’. Who are they? ‘To them who are called according to his purpose,’ and Paul goes on: ‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.’ The saved are described as those who are *called*. And they have been called in a way that the others have not. That is, therefore, a scriptural statement of this effectual call.

Then, another one is to be found in 1 Corinthians 1:2. It is a statement that you will find in other places as well: ‘Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...’. It is not simply that they are called saints, they are *called to be* saints. And then, in that same chapter, the Apostle repeats it. He says, ‘We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness’—then notice—‘but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:23–24). Now there [p 66] are people to whom the preaching of Christ is foolishness; they are the unsaved. But the saved he again describes as those who are *called*.

And let me give you one other example. Take that great statement made by the apostle Peter: ‘But ye,’ he says, referring to Christian believers, ‘are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9–10). God has called them out, and because they are the saved, He has called them effectually. The call of the gospel has gone to many others but they are not the people Peter is talking about. He is talking about these people who correspond to Israel after the flesh in the Old Testament. He applies to them the very terminology that was applied to the Children of Israel, just as the Ten Commandments and the moral law were given to them. Peter uses the same words—they are the called, the ‘Israel of God’, called to show forth His praises. Now it is obvious therefore that in these people the call has been effectual; that is the teaching of these scriptures.

But there is another argument which states this perfectly. What is the meaning of the term *church*? We are members of the Christian Church. But what is it—what does it mean? What is the connotation of the term? Well, the word church translates the Greek word, *ecclesia*; and the *ecclesia* means the ‘called forth ones’. A church is a gathering of people who have been called forth, called out, separated out as the result of this call. As Peter puts it: ‘Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’. That is the meaning of this term *church*. And therefore that very word in and of itself is sufficient to establish the statement that there obviously is such a thing as an effectual call, because the same message has gone to others but they have been called from the world into the Church.

What, then, is the difference between the external call and this call which has become effectual? And the answer must be that this call is an internal, a spiritual call. It is not merely something that comes to a person from the outside—it does that, of course, but in addition to that external call which comes to all, there is an internal call which comes to those who are going to be Christians, and it is an effectual call. The contrast, therefore, is between external, and internal and spiritual.

Now I want to go even further and again give you scriptural proofs of the fact that there is such an internal and spiritual call. We have only looked at it in general in the scriptures that I have given you so [p 67] far, they are simply designations, descriptions. So I want to give you scriptures which specifically state that this is something that happens within; and first of all I go to the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel. Incidentally, this particular doctrine is taught much more clearly, if I may use such a comparison, by John than it is by the apostle Paul. People sometimes tend to think that this is a doctrine conjured up only in Paul’s mind, but it is much more evident in John’s Gospel and particularly in this great sixth chapter.

Here, in verse 45, is one statement of it: ‘It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.’ That is it; God gave the prophet this information and he recorded it. There will be certain people who shall be taught by God Himself, not taught by men only but in addition to that taught by God, taught by the Spirit. Some internal work is going to take place. ‘Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me’ (v. 45). You see the people who come to Christ are those who have been taught of God, who have learned of the Father by the Spirit, and they alone. Now that is a crucial statement. But our Lord repeats it later on in verses 63–65. His listeners have stumbled at His words and He says to them, ‘It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life. But,’ He says, ‘there are some of you that believe not.’ And John adds, ‘For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.’ They had responded to the external call and thought that they were Christians. Here it becomes evident that they were not; they had never been taught of God. They had held on to the shell, the external word, and they had not got the Spirit. John continues, ‘And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.’ And the Father had not given it to these people so they did not come and they went home. But He had given it to the others, so they remained and they rejoiced in it. That is a proof that there is this spiritual, this internal call. And that is what makes the call effectual.

Or take another statement. It is from Ephesians 1:17. Paul prays for the Ephesians, ‘That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.’ In other words, we cannot have knowledge of Him unless He gives us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation—they are absolutely essential. And that was why Paul prayed that they might have the Spirit, it was in order that they might grow increasingly in [p 68] this knowledge of God. Without

this work of the Spirit we cannot attain unto such knowledge. Or again, in Ephesians 2:8, we read, 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' And then, of course, there is Philippians 2:12–13, where Paul says the same thing: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do...' God does an internal work and it is as the result of that that we are enabled 'to will and to do of his good pleasure'.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul makes a most important statement in this connection: 'For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' Now if you read that epistle, especially the first two chapters, you will find that the Apostle goes on repeating that statement in different ways. He says that they received the word that came to them 'not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God' (1 Thess. 2:13). But what did he mean when he said 'For our gospel came not unto you in word only'? It did come in words, of course, the Apostle was speaking, but that was not the thing that had turned those idolatrous Thessalonians into saints. What was it, then? It was that it had come 'in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance'. It is this internal work that turns people from sinners into saints; this is preaching in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

And, indeed, the Apostle makes a very similar statement in 2 Timothy 2:25. Here he is telling the young Timothy how to handle certain people who were opposing him. 'In meekness,' he says, 'instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' Timothy, says Paul, I want you to instruct these people who are opposing you and my reason for doing so is this: it is not to suggest to you that you by your arguments or logic can convince them. If God does not do this work in them, they will never acknowledge the truth, but if God does work, they will acknowledge it. Indeed there is a statement that we can find more than once in the Gospels and which we have already quoted, which really says it all in one phrase: 'Many are called, but few are chosen' (Matt. 22:14). Take that especially in its context of the wedding feast. 'Many are called'—that is the external call—'but few are chosen'—that is the effectual call.

So then, the next step which we take is this: we have seen that the Scripture teaches that the saved are the effectually called and that they are effectually called because of the work that goes on within them. **[p 69]** 'But,' someone may say, 'why all this?' And the answer is that this is absolutely essential. Without this work within, no one would ever become a Christian; it is an utter necessity. Let me give you my proof for that. 'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit' (Rom. 8:5). Now the Revised Standard Version puts it like this: 'They that are after the flesh are interested in the things of the flesh and they that are after the Spirit, or in the Spirit, are interested in the things of the Spirit.' But the natural man or woman—those 'after the flesh'—are not interested in the things of the Spirit at all. They find them dull and boring and uninteresting. They regard them as a waste of time and they hate them. But they that are after the Spirit are interested in the things of the Spirit: 'For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because'—and this is the final argument—'the carnal mind is enmity against God' (vv. 6–7).

Now that is a very strong statement but it is true. Men and women, as they are by nature as the result of the fall, are at enmity against God. 'The carnal mind...is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God' (vv. 7–8). To me that is a final statement. Men and women by nature are opposed to God; they hate God and they are not interested in Him, neither are they interested in the things of God. From that statement of the Apostle I deduce that the internal work of the Spirit is an absolute necessity before anyone can possibly believe in the gospel of God and accept it and rejoice in it.

However, let us go on and consider other statements to the same effect. Take the famous statement in 1 Corinthians 2:14: 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' That is a categorical statement, but do not suddenly become a philosopher and say, 'Well, if that is true I do not understand this and that.' No, let us face the statements of Scripture. We are dealing with things beyond our understanding. We are dealing with the inscrutable purposes of God, and if we are going to be foolish enough to put up our understandings or our philosophy against these categorical statements, then we deserve to remain in darkness. We must not approach the Scripture with such a conceit of ourselves that

we think we can understand everything—we cannot. ‘Great is the mystery of godliness’ (1 Tim. 3:16), and especially in this matter. But here is the statement that the natural man or woman not [p 70] only does not receive it, but *cannot* receive it because these things are spiritually understood, judged and discerned.

Then there is the statement in 2 Corinthians 4:3–4: ‘If our gospel be hid,’ says Paul, and it is quite clear that the gospel is hid to certain people; they hear it like everybody else but they see nothing in it, they do not want it, they blaspheme it, they treat it with scorn. ‘If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.’ And who are they? They are the people, ‘In whom the god of this world’—the devil—‘hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,’ lest they believe this glorious gospel. Could anything be plainer? They cannot believe because Satan has blinded their minds ‘lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them’ (2 Cor. 4:4).

And then, finally, we find the statement in Ephesians 2:1: ‘And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins’—dead! You cannot have anything stronger than that; that is their position spiritually. All these are statements to prove the absolute necessity of this internal work of the Spirit before the call—the external, general call of the gospel—can possibly be effectual.

So, then, what is this effectual, internal call that we are speaking about? Well, the most we can say about it is—and this must of necessity be true in the light of these scriptures—that it is the exercise of the power of the Holy Spirit in the soul. It is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit within us. It is immediate, it is spiritual, it is supernatural, miraculous. And what it does is to make a new mode of spiritual activity possible within us. Without this operation we are incapable of any true spiritual activity but as the result of this operation of the Holy Spirit upon us, we are rendered capable, for the first time, of spiritual activity and that is how this call now becomes effectual, that is what enables us to receive it.

Now this is very important and I want to emphasise the immediacy, the direct action. You see, what happens when the call comes to men and women effectually is not simply that the moral influence of the truth is exercised upon them. Some people have thought that; they have said that the gospel is preached and that the truth has a kind of general moral effect upon people. For instance, to take a human theme, a capable orator, a man wanting to persuade men and women to vote at an election for a given party, can put the case so well that he can exercise a moral influence upon his listeners. But it is not that. It is an operation of the Spirit upon the men and women themselves, in the depths. It is not merely that the Holy Spirit heightens our natural [p 71] faculties and powers. It is more than that. It is the Spirit acting upon the soul from within and producing within us a new principle of spiritual action.

Now it must be that; it cannot be less than that. Because these things, says Paul, are all spiritual. And that is why the natural man does not understand them; and that is why, as I have often reminded you, we should never be surprised, or to the slightest extent disappointed or put out, when somebody brings us the argument that ‘Christianity cannot be right because look at this great man and he doesn’t believe it!’ How often have you heard that argument! Someone says, ‘You know, I cannot believe this, because if Christianity were true, it could not be possible that all these philosophers and scientists and all these great statesmen and other men do not believe it.’

In the light of these things, it is very natural and we can understand it perfectly well. The greatest natural intellect cannot receive this, he is ‘a natural man’. And you need a spiritual faculty to receive the wonderful truth about the two natures in the one Person; the outstanding doctrine about the Trinity; the whole doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement, and so on. This is spiritual truth and to the natural person it is utter folly, it is foolishness, as Paul says. So when the Holy Spirit does enable us to believe it, it must be something beyond the heightening of our natural faculties. It is not simply that He brings the truth of His great moral suasion to us. No, no. We need some new faculty, some new principle, and that is the very work that He does. He implants within us this new spiritual principle, this principle of spiritual vitality and activity, and it is as the result of this that the general call of the gospel comes to us in an effectual manner.

So, then, let me again give you some scriptural proofs of this, because I do have them. You will find a practical illustration in Acts 16:14. Here is Paul, preaching in the town of Philippi. It is a very crucial passage for us because it was the Apostle’s first visit to Europe and it was the first time that the Christian

gospel was ever preached there. And do not forget that the first convert that the Christian gospel obtained in Europe was a woman called Lydia. She was the first person in the history of Europe to whom the call of the gospel came. How did it happen? We are told: 'A certain women named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us'—as many others did. The Apostle sat down and preached the word. There was the external call; he told them the gospel, the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ and the meaning of the facts. He said all [p 72] this and we are told that among those listening was a woman called Lydia and that she heard this, as many have heard the gospel preached in a church or a chapel but have gone home in an unbelieving condition and have died as unbelievers. What was it, then, that made the difference with Lydia? Notice! '... whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.'

Now there it is perfectly. The word is preached, yes, but people do not pay attention to it. They look at one another while it is being preached, or they write in their books or they recite poetry to themselves or they are smiling at one another. In a sense they hear it, but they do not attend to it and you cannot be saved until you attend to it. What made Lydia attend? The answer is, '*whose heart the Lord opened*'. The Lord put something in her heart, this internal work, and the result of that was that she paid attention, and she saw the gospel and received it. The external call became the internal call, the general became effectual. She believed and was baptised and also her household. It is unmistakable—it was the Lord opening her heart that made the difference; but for that, she would never have believed.

And then, of course, we have a great theological statement in 1 Corinthians 2:10–15. Paul has just been saying that the princes of this world do not know God's secret wisdom, 'for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (v. 8). The princes had heard about these things but they had not believed. But we believe, says Paul. Why? What is the difference between us and the princes of the world? It is this: 'But'—and there is the contrast—'God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so'—notice this—'the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.' No man can know them, it is the Spirit of God alone who can know them. 'Now we have received'—we the believers, the Christians—'we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God'—Why?—'that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual'—and we are that, thank God—'judgeth'—discerns, [p 73] understands—'all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.'

And again I could refer you to Ephesians 1:18 and to 1 Thessalonians 1:5 once more, and to Philippians 2:13. In other words, there are proofs positive of this statement that it is the internal operation of the Holy Spirit upon the soul and the heart of men and women that brings them into a condition in which the call can become effectual. And when the Spirit does it, of course, it is absolutely certain, and because of that some people have used the term—which I do not like myself—*irresistible grace*. I do not like the term because it seems to give the impression that something has happened which has been hammering at a person's will and has knocked him down and bludgeoned him. But it is not that. It is that the Holy Spirit implants a principle within me which enables me, for the first time in my life, to discern and to apprehend something of this glorious, wondrous truth. He works upon my will. 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.' He does not strike me; He does not beat me; He does not coerce me. No, thank God, what He does is operate upon my will so that I desire these things and rejoice in them and love them. He leads, He persuades, He acts upon my will in such a way that when He does, the call of the gospel is effectual, and it is certain, and it is sure. God's work never fails, and when God works in a man or woman, the work is effective.

So let me plead with you to consider those great passages of Scripture that I have put before you. Study them, pray over them, meditate with them. And as you do so, I think you will agree with me that there is only one thing to say and it is this:

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing.

Augustus Toplady

I am what I am by the grace of God and by that alone.

8

Regeneration—a New Disposition

In the last lecture, we saw that the Bible teaches that in the case of the saved there is an effectual call. That call comes in such a way that they accept it and we realised that this is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in each person; it is a supernatural work which makes the call effectual in believers, in the saved. But of course even that does not bring to an end our consideration of this question.

We must now ask: What is it that the Holy Spirit does to enable those who become believers, who are saved in this way, to believe the truth? What exactly does He do in order to make the general call effectual? And the answer is, *regeneration*. Now you notice the order in which we are taking these doctrines. Earlier, we spent some time in considering the order of salvation, the order in which these things should be considered, and this seems to me to be the inevitable order: the general call; yes, but effectual in the saved. What makes it effectual? The Holy Spirit regenerates.

It is interesting to notice the relationship between this effectual call and regeneration. There is a sense, of course, in which regeneration precedes the effectual call.

‘Well, why didn’t you put them in that order?’ someone may ask.

It was for this reason: having started with the general call we notice that there is this division into the two groups and it is clear that it must be effectual in some and not in others. When you ask what it is that makes it effectual, the answer is, regeneration. But looked at from the eternal standpoint, they come in the other order, and what happens is that the general call is responded to by the regenerate. In other words, the call becomes effectual because they are regenerate. That is largely a technical matter and yet I think it is good for us to [p 75] have these things clearly in our minds.

Here, then, is this great central and vital doctrine of regeneration. There can be no question at all but that from our standpoint this doctrine, together with the doctrine of the atonement, is incomparably the most important doctrine of all, and there is a sense in which we simply cannot understand Christian doctrine and Christian truth without being clear about the doctrine of regeneration. And yet I would suggest that this doctrine is seriously and sadly neglected amongst us. Oh, I know that lip service is paid to it and that people talk very glibly and generally about being ‘born again’. But to what extent do people study it? To what extent have we really looked into it and discovered what exactly it means?

No, there is undoubtedly a failure in this respect. Search the various hymnbooks and you will, I think, be struck by the paucity of good hymns on this theme of regeneration. We have seen that there is a defect in most hymnbooks with regard to strong doctrinal hymns on the Holy Spirit. The hymns we have are superficial, subjective and generally sentimental. And it seems to me that exactly the same thing can be said with regard to this great doctrine of regeneration. This is significant, I feel, because there is no doubt, as I hope to show you, that this doctrine is absolutely pivotal. Why is it that we persist in stopping with the idea of forgiveness only, and fail to realise that this other doctrine is as essential to us as the doctrine of the atonement leading to the forgiveness of our sins?

The only other general remark I would make is this: I have always been convinced, and I am now more convinced than ever, that people who are in trouble about these great doctrines of grace are generally so because they have never clearly grasped the significance and meaning of the doctrine of regeneration. If we only grasp this clearly, most of the other problems solve themselves. But of course, if we are not clear about this, if we do not realise exactly what happens to us in regeneration, then it is but natural that we should be in difficulties about the effectual call and many other subjects.

Let us, therefore, approach our subject by first of all simply looking at the various terms that the Bible itself uses with regard to this great event that the Holy Spirit produces within us. First, there is the word *regeneration* itself. In Titus 3:5, the apostle Paul speaks about ‘the washing of regeneration’. That is

actually the only instance in which the word 'regeneration' is used in the New Testament to describe this great, climactic event in the history of the saved soul.

[p 76] Then there is a second group of terms which mean *to beget* or *to beget again*, *to bear* or *to give birth*; and there are quite a number of these. In John 1:13, for instance, in the prologue to this Gospel, we read, 'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' Then there are all those instances in our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, in John 3:3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. And you have the same word in several passages in the first epistle of John: 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1. 'Born of God' is a great statement in 1 John.

Next, there is another word which rather conveys the suggestion of *bringing forth* or *begetting*. This is found in James 1:18, which reads, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.' Then there is a large group of words which carry the meaning of *creating*. We read in Ephesians 2:10, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. ...' It is also in 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature'—a new creation. In Galatians 6:15 we read, 'For neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,' or a new creation; and again in Ephesians 4:24: 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Again, that is a term used to describe this amazing event in the history of the soul: it is a new creation.

And finally there is the word *to quicken*. Now the example of this is in Ephesians 2:5, where we read, 'Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved).' You may be surprised that I do not say Ephesians 2:1 which reads, 'And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins', but the expression about quickening is not there in the original, but has simply been supplied by the translators for the sake of understanding, and rightly so. And then there is just one other example of that word, and it is in Colossians 2:13, 'And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.' It is the parallel, of course, to the statement in Ephesians 2:5, something that we constantly find with these two epistles.

Those, then, are the actual terms which are used in the Scriptures to denote and to convey the teaching concerning this great climactic change. So, what do we mean by regeneration? Now if you read the history of the use of this term in the history of doctrine or of the Church, you will find great confusion, because it is a term that has been used loosely and even individual writers are not consistent in **[p 77]** their use of it. Sometimes it has been used in a very restricted sense, but sometimes in a wide sense to include almost everything that happens to the believer—justification and sanctification as well as regeneration—and this is the practice, for instance, in Roman Catholic writers.

So as we consider what we mean by regeneration, the one important thing, it seems to me, is that we must differentiate it from conversion. And yet how frequently they are confused. But regeneration is not conversion and for this reason: conversion is something that we do whereas regeneration, as I shall show you, is something that is done to us by God. Conversion means a turning away from one thing to another in practice, but that is not the meaning of regeneration. We can put it like this: when people convert themselves or turn, they are giving proof of the fact that they are regenerate. Conversion is something that follows upon regeneration. The change takes place in the outward life and living of men and women because this great change has first of all taken place within them.

You can look at it like this: there is all the difference between planting the seed and the result of the planting of that seed. Now regeneration means the planting of the seed of life and obviously that must be differentiated from what results or eventuates from that. There is a difference between generation and birth. Generation takes place a long time before the birth takes place. Generation is one act. It leads subsequently, after certain processes have been going on, to the actual process of birth. So it is good to hold the two things separately in our minds, and remember that when we are talking about regeneration, we are talking about generation, not the actual bringing forth, the birth.

Now the effectual call comes in in the actual birth, and that is what gives a proof of the fact that men and women are alive. The call is effectual: they believe. Yes, but that means that the process of generation, the implanting of the seed of life, must have already taken place. I find it helpful to draw that kind of

distinction because it will help us to differentiate not only between regeneration and conversion, but between regeneration and adoption. For again, people often confuse adoption into sonship with regeneration, and yet, clearly and patently, they are two different things, as we shall see.

‘So then, we define regeneration as the implanting of new life in the soul. That is it in its essence. If you like a definition which is a little more amplified, consider this: it is the act of God by which a principle [p 78] of new life is implanted in a man or woman with the result that the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. And then the actual birth is that which gives evidence of the first exercise of this disposition.

Having put that to you as a precise definition, let us go on to consider the essential nature of what takes place when we are regenerated. This is obviously of very great importance and therefore we must start with certain negatives so that we may be quite clear as to what regeneration does not mean and what it does not represent.

The first thing we must say, negatively, is that regeneration does not mean that a change takes place in the substance of human nature, and the important word there is *substance*. The doctrine of regeneration does not teach that the substance, or the raw material, of what constitutes human nature, whatever it may be, is changed.

Or we can put it like this: we must not think that some actual, substantial physical seed or germ of life is introduced. Regeneration is not a kind of injection or infusion of actual physical substance into us. It is not anything physical, it is a spiritual change.

Thirdly, we must not think that it means that there is a complete change of the whole of human nature. The regenerate person does not become something entirely different. It does not mean that (and we shall see as we go on with these doctrines why all these negatives are important). In the same way, it does not mean that man becomes divine or that he becomes God.

‘Ah, but,’ says someone, ‘are we not partakers of the divine nature?’

Yes, but not in the sense that we suddenly become divine. We do not become like the Lord Jesus Christ with two natures—human and divine. We must be very careful to exclude that.

Another negative is that regeneration does not mean addition to or subtraction from the faculties or the essence of the soul. Now some people have thought that—and every one of these negatives is put in to safeguard against things that have been thought and said from time to time about regeneration. The five faculties of the soul are mind, memory, affection, the will and conscience and some people seem to think that what happens in regeneration is that an additional faculty is put in or that, somehow or another, one or more of the other faculties is taken out or is changed. But that is not the biblical doctrine of regeneration.

And my last negative is that regeneration does not just mean moral reformation. Again, some people have thought that. They have [p 79] thought that all that happens in regeneration is that people’s wills are changed and that, because of this, they reform themselves and live a better life. But that is nothing but moral reformation; it is not regeneration.

Let us, then, come to the positive. What is regeneration? It is, let me repeat, the implanting of a principle of new spiritual life and a radical change in the governing disposition of the soul. Let me explain what I mean by that. The important thing to grasp is the whole idea of *disposition*. In addition to the faculties of our souls, there is something at the back of them which governs them all and that is what we refer to as our disposition. Take two men. They have the same faculties, as regards their abilities there may be nothing to choose between them, but one lives a good life, one lives a bad life. What makes the difference? The answer is that the good man has a good disposition and this good disposition, this thing which is behind the faculties and governs them and uses them, urges him to use his faculties in the direction of goodness. The other man has an evil disposition, so he urges the same faculties in an entirely different direction. That is what one means by disposition.

When you come to think of it, and when you analyse yourself, your life and your whole conduct and behaviour, and that of other people, you will see at once that these dispositions are, of course, of

tremendous importance. They are that condition, if you like, which determines what we do and what we are. Let me give you some other illustrations. Take people who have different interests and abilities. Take two people who are more or less opposite; one who is artistic and another who is scientific. What is the difference between them? Well, you cannot say that it is merely a difference in intellectual power, nor is it a difference in the faculties of their souls. No, but there is in every person a disposition which seems to determine the kind of person he or she is. It is this that directs the faculties and the abilities so that one person is artistic and the other scientific, and so on. Now I am making this point to show that what happens in regeneration is that God so operates upon us in the Holy Spirit that this fundamental disposition of ours is changed. He put a holy principle, a seed of new spiritual life, into this disposition that determines what I am and how I behave and how I use and employ my faculties.

Let me give you one great illustration to show what I mean. Take the case of the apostle Paul. Look at him as Saul of Tarsus. There is no question about his ability, nor about his understanding, nor about [p 80] his will power. There is no question about his memory. His faculties are there and are clear and outstanding; he has always been a remarkable man. But there he is, persecuting the Church, regarding the Son of God as a blasphemer, and he goes down to Damascus, 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter', using all his powers to exterminate the Christian Church. But look at him later, preaching the gospel as it has never been preached before or since, with the same powers, the same abilities, the same personality, the same everything, but moving in exactly the opposite direction. What has changed? It is not the faculties of Paul's soul—they are still the same: the same vehemence, the same logic, the same thoroughness, the same readiness to risk all, out and out, he is the same man, obviously. And yet the whole direction, the whole bent, the whole outlook has changed. He is a different man. What has happened to him? He has a new disposition.

Now, I am emphasising this for this good reason: it is only by understanding this that we are able to understand the difference between regeneration and a psychological change and process. You see, when men and women are regenerated, they do not become all the same, like postage stamps. But when they become the victims of a psychological movement they tend to become identical—a very important distinction. When people are regenerated, the particular gifts which make them the men and women they are always remain. Paul, as I reminded you, was essentially the same man when he preached the gospel as he was when he denounced and persecuted it. I mean by that that he was the same individual and did things in the same way. We are not all meant to be identical as Christians. We are not all meant to speak and to preach and to pray in the same way. The gospel does not make that kind of change, and if you think of regeneration as doing that, then you have a false doctrine of regeneration. What it does is to deal with and to change this disposition that is at the back of everything; this fundamental something that determines direction and way and manner. It is vital that we realise that the change in regeneration takes place in the disposition.

Then, secondly, because of the power of the disposition in us, it therefore follows of necessity that this change is going to affect the whole person. Does anybody think that I am contradicting one of my negatives? I have maintained that the whole person is not entirely changed—am I now saying the opposite? I hold to my negative, but I do say that, *in principle*, because of the change in the disposition, the whole person is affected. The way I use my mind will be affected, the [p 81] operation of my emotions will be affected, and so will my will, because, by definition, the disposition is at the back of all those and gives direction to them. So when this disposition of mine is changed, then I am like a person with a new mind. Before, I was not interested in the gospel; now I am very interested in it. Before, I could not understand it; now I do.

But the change in my disposition does not mean that I have a greater intellect now than I had before! No, I have exactly the same intellect, the same mind. But, because the disposition governing it is changed, my mind is operating in a different realm and in a different way and it seems to be a new mind. And it is exactly the same with the feelings. A man who used to hate the gospel, now loves it. A woman who hated the Lord Jesus Christ, now loves Him. And likewise with the will: the will resisted, it was obstinate and rebellious; but now it desires, it is anxious, it is concerned about the gospel.

The next thing we say is that it is a change which is instantaneous. Now you see the importance of differentiating between generation and coming to birth? Generation, by definition, is always an instantaneous act. There is a moment, a flash, in which the germ of life enters, impregnates; that is one instantaneous action. In other words, there are no intermediate stages in regeneration. Life is either implanted or it is not; it cannot be partly implanted. It is not gradual. Now, again, I do want to emphasise this point. When I say that it is instantaneous, I am not referring to our consciousness of it, but to the thing itself, as it is done by God. The consciousness, of course, comes into the realm of time, whereas this act of germination is timeless, and that is why it is immediate.

So the next thing—and this again is most important—is that generation, the implanting of this seed of life and the change of the disposition, happens in the subconscious, or, if you prefer it, in the unconscious. Our Lord explained that fully to Nicodemus (John 3). It is a secret, an inscrutable operation, that cannot be directly perceived by us; indeed, we cannot even fully understand it. The first thing we know about it is that it has happened, because we are conscious of something different, but that means that we do not understand it and that we really cannot arrive at its secret.

Now, let me give you the authority for this. Nicodemus, like all of us, was trying to understand it. Our Lord said to him, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (John 3:3). ‘My dear Nicodemus,’ He said in effect, ‘you are trying to understand the [p 82] difference between yourself and Me and what I am doing. Stop at once! It is not a question of changing, or of understanding, this or that particular thing, it is the governing disposition of your life that must be changed; you must be born again. It is something at the back of all these faculties that you are trying to use.’

‘But,’ Nicodemus said, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?’ (John 3:4). He wanted to understand, and our Lord kept on giving the same reply, and Nicodemus continued to argue.

Eventually our Lord put it to him like this: ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth ...’ There is something sovereign about it. You do not know when it is going to come and go, it decides its own time. You do not know where it starts and where it ends. ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof—you are aware that it is happening—‘but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth’ (John 3:8). You do not see it; you can hear it, you can see things waving in the breeze, but you do not understand it. There is a mystery about the wind, something inscrutable. You cannot fathom it or grasp it with your understanding, but you see the results. ‘So—like that—is every one that is born of the Spirit’ (v. 8).

Now there are some people who completely miss this because they would translate the wind in verse 8 as ‘the Spirit bloweth’—the Holy Spirit. But patently it does not mean that, it cannot mean that, because our Lord is using an illustration. He is talking about the wind, the gale, if you like, not the Holy Spirit, nor any other spirit. ‘[It] bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof—you cannot see it, but you see the effects and the results—‘so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.’ There is the essential nature of this great change.

My fourth point is that regeneration is obviously, therefore, something which is done by God. It is a creative act of God in which men and women are entirely passive and contribute nothing, nothing whatsoever. We read in John 1:13, ‘Which were born’—you do not give birth to yourself—‘not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God’—entirely. God implants this principle, this seed of spiritual life. And again, of course, there are the words our Lord spoke to Nicodemus, ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh’—and it cannot do anything about it—‘and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (John 3:5–6). In other words, the [p 83] terms are that we are *born again*. It is something that happens to us; we are begotten, we do not beget ourselves, we cannot generate ourselves. It is entirely the work of God in us and upon us.

We have not yet finished our consideration of this great and pivotal and central doctrine, but I do trust that, at this point, the great thought is clear in our minds and in our understanding, that it is there, in the disposition, that God operates, and it is God through the Holy Spirit who does it. We are born of the Spirit.

Now I hesitate to use the illustration, but you remember that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary but He was conceived of the Holy Ghost. Something comparable, similar to that—not the same thing, let me be clear about that—seems to happen here. This principle of spiritual life, this change, therefore, in the disposition, is something that is done by the Holy Spirit of God. Human nature is not entirely changed by it but because the disposition is changed the whole man or woman is like a new creation. In every respect they are different people because this fundamental thing that governs all else has been changed in them.

The faculties, however, remain as before. Never try to be somebody else, be yourself. God wants you to be yourself. He has made you as He has made you, and you can best glorify Him by being yourself. Beware always of Christian people who always talk in the same way and are the same in most respects, that is more likely to be psychological than spiritual. The man or woman, each individual, remains what he or she was, and thus you have the glorious variety in the apostles and in the Christian Church throughout the centuries. All together testify to the same Saviour and the same grace, the same regeneration, the same change in the disposition, but revealed according to the gifts and faculties, the propensities and powers that God has given to each person.

What a wonderful salvation, what a glorious way of redemption! Oh, I like a word which is used by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews in the second chapter. It describes and defines perfectly what I am trying to say. Talking about this great salvation, the author says of God, 'For it *became* him'—it was like Him, it was His way of doing it—' ... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering' (Heb. 2:10)—it became Him! And I trust that we all, having looked thus briefly and inadequately at this great doctrine, would say the same thing; it is a way of salvation that becomes Him, the almighty God.

9

The New Birth

We have, let me remind you, been asking how it is that the call of the gospel becomes effectual in certain people. And in the last lecture, we began to answer that question by saying that the call becomes effectual in men and women as the result of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. It becomes effectual because in these people there is now a principle which was not there before which enables them to respond to this spiritual truth, this divine truth, that comes to them. And that is the difference between believers and unbelievers, those who are saved and those who are not. The latter have the 'natural mind', they are in the flesh, they are not spiritual, and that is why these things mean nothing to them. But they mean everything to the others and that is because they are now spiritual, and they are spiritual as the result of regeneration. So we began considering what the Bible teaches about regeneration. We considered the terms in Scripture and then we came to examine its real nature. It is not a mere change in some of the faculties of the soul, but it something behind that; and this we defined as being a change in a person's fundamental disposition.

Now as we proceed with our consideration, I want to emphasise again the profound nature and character of the change. It is something that is emphasised everywhere in Scripture, which talks about our being given 'a new heart' (Ezek. 36:26), and 'heart' in the Bible generally means, not merely the seat of the affections, as in current usage, but the very centre, the seat, of the whole personality. So when the Scriptures talk about giving us a new heart or a clean heart, they are talking about what I have described as the fundamental disposition, the thing that controls and determines everything else, the change is made there.

[p 85] This whole question of regeneration, as we saw when we considered what our Lord said to Nicodemus, is, of course, a great mystery. It is a miracle, it is supernatural. Our Lord compared it to the wind in order to get Nicodemus, and all of us through Nicodemus, to see that there is a sense in which we just cannot finally understand it. 'Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). And yet it does behove us, as I am never tired of saying, to go as far as we can. So, in an attempt to make this wonderful change more or less comprehensible to us, I pass on to you what I, at any rate, regard as the best illustration that I have come across. It is an illustration that is suggested by the Scripture itself, and it is that of the whole process of grafting.

You may be anxious, for instance, to grow a certain type of pear. Now a way in which it is often done is this: you are given just a graft, a portion, a shoot, of the variety you like. Then you take a common wild pear tree and hack into it and into that wound which you have made in the tree, you put this shoot, this sprout. Then you bind them together. And eventually you will have a wonderful pear tree, producing nothing but your chosen variety of pear.

But in the meantime you have many things to do. You do not merely leave it at that. What happens is that the strength and the power, as it were, the life and the sap that comes up through that wild pear tree, will enter into this shoot and it will produce fruit. Yes, but below the level of the grafting, the wild pear tree will still tend to throw out its own wild shoots and branches and want to produce its own fruit. So you have to lop off these natural branches. You have to cut them, prune them right down and, if you do that, a time will arrive when the tree will produce only this wonderful type of pear that you are anxious to grow.

You see, at first you seem to have two natures in the one tree, but if you prune off the old the new will gradually master the whole and you will eventually have a pear tree which is producing the type of fruit that you want. Now that seems to me to be incomparably the best illustration that has ever been used with regard to this matter. You are putting new life in so that at one stage you have got one tree but with two natures—the cultured, cultivated nature, and the wild nature. Yes, but if, by pruning off these wild branches, you see to it that the strength of that tree is only allowed to go into the grafted-in branch, not only will that be strengthened and bear its fruit, it will **[p 86]** gradually conquer and master the other. It

seems to have a power to send its life down into the old until eventually you have the excellent pear tree that you desired at the beginning.

Now no illustration is perfect, but it does seem to me that that goes as far as we can possibly go. That is what happens, in a sense, in regeneration. There is still only one self, there are not two selves. But this new nature is put within us. We are called upon to mortify our members that are on the earth. We have to go on pruning and keeping under that which belongs to the old nature and, as we do so, this new life will grow and develop and produce fruit and the new nature will be increasingly in evidence. I am anxious to stress this point, because I am afraid we can even go further and say that some people, who regard themselves as truly evangelical, altogether deny the truth and the doctrine of regeneration. So I want to put this very strongly. In regeneration, a real change takes place and that within us. It is more than a mere change in our relationship to truth or to a person. A change takes place in us and not outside us only, and it is as definite as the grafting of a pear shoot into a pear tree.

Nor is this a change that remains only while we remain abiding in Christ. Now there is a very familiar teaching about sanctification which is put to us like this: the illustration is taken of a poker. There is the poker, it is cold, black and hard and cannot be bent. So you take that poker and put it into a fire and leave it there. And in the fire the poker becomes red hot and malleable, so that you can bend it. Ah yes, we are told, that is all right, but the poker remains red and hot and malleable only as long as it is kept in the fire. That is an illustration of abiding in Christ, and as long as you abide in Him there will be this new life, it is said, and this new way of living. But if you take that poker out of the fire and leave it out, it reverts completely to what it was before; it becomes black and cold and hard.

Now all that is taught to show the importance of abiding in Christ. It tells us that if we do not do so, we revert exactly to the condition that we were in before. But that, I suggest, is a denial of the doctrine of regeneration! Those who are Christians and who are born again, may backslide; they may not abide in Christ in this mystical sense, but even then, they do not return to where they were before. They are born again; there is this new principle in them; the change has taken place and the change is still there. They are not manifesting it fully but it is there and we must not describe those people as reverting to the precise position they were in before.

[p 87] It is exactly the same with that other illustration about the lifebelt. The sinner is compared to a man in the sea who cannot swim, but, we are told, as long as he puts on the lifebelt he is held up. Yes, but if he wriggles out of the lifebelt, he will sink to the bottom. Now there again, it seems to me, is a denial of the doctrine of regeneration because it tells us that when the man is not abiding, he finds himself in exactly the same position in which he was before, as if nothing had happened to him and no change had taken place.

But as we have said, the doctrine of regeneration teaches that the change is one which takes place not merely in our relationship to the Lord or in our relationship to truth, but is something that God does within us. It is a new life put in us, a new principle of life and obedience, and therefore, of course, it is something which grows and develops and becomes progressively greater. Listen to the apostle Paul saying that: 'But we all,' he says, 'with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). Now there, you see, is development and growth. Why? Because this principle of life has been put in. 'We are changed,' as Charles Wesley puts it, drawing upon that verse, 'from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place.' The work is within us, and we are changed, we are no longer the same. All these scriptural terms should surely have saved us from the error that is illustrated in the pictures of the poker and the lifebelt. We are talking of a rebirth, a new birth, of being born again, of a new creation. Each of us is virtually a new person.

Now I cannot emphasise that too strongly because it is not only something that is clearly taught in Scripture, but when we come on later to deal with the doctrine of sanctification, we shall of necessity see how important it is that we understand this particular teaching about regeneration. If we do not, we shall unconsciously be denying the doctrine of regeneration altogether in our anxiety to get people to abide in Christ. It is right to exhort people to do that, and we shall do so when we come to that doctrine, but we

must never put it in such a way as to give the impression that regeneration simply consists in a new relationship to Christ. That is to introduce a very real confusion.

So, then, having emphasised the profound inward character of the change, let me go on to ask a question: Why is this change absolutely essential? On what grounds have we the right to say that it is? Well, first of all, Scripture teaches that. You remember again what our Lord said to Nicodemus: 'Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be **[p 88]** born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). Then he also says: 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (v. 5). The rebirth is an absolute, utter essential. A man cannot even see the kingdom, let alone enter it, unless he has been born again.

Paul teaches the same thing in Galatians 6:15: 'In Christ Jesus,' he says, 'neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.' That is the only thing that matters: not circumcision, nor the absence of it but the new creature, the new creation. And again, in Ephesians 4:24, Paul says the same thing when he describes the new man, 'which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness'.

But, in many ways, one of the most important texts in this connection is Hebrews 12:14: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' Holiness is absolutely essential and, mark you, holiness there does not merely mean a sanctification that you may or may not receive. Without holiness no man shall—can—see the Lord. So it is no use saying that some Christians have received sanctification and some have not, and that those who have not are still going to heaven—without holiness heaven is impossible. And it is in regeneration that this holiness is implanted in us. This new life is a holy life, a holy principle is placed within us.

There, then, are the explicit statements of Scripture. But there are other statements which teach the same thing by implication. Eternal life is defined as a knowledge of God: 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). Our Lord says that He has come 'that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' (John 10:10). He has come to give us eternal life and eternal life comprises this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. And that in itself makes regeneration an absolute necessity. God is holy. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. So life eternal is to know Him and to have fellowship with Him. And, therefore, it means, of necessity, that my nature must correspond. There must be something in me which corresponds to that and can enjoy that.

Yes, but we know that, by nature, men and women as the result of the fall, and as the result of sin, are the exact opposite of that. And again, that is why our Lord puts it so plainly in speaking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was trying to understand and thought he could go from where he was to the next position. No, no, says our **[p 89]** Lord, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:4), and there is nothing in common between them at all. You cannot mix the flesh and the Spirit, it simply cannot be done. It is no use arguing, He says, the thing is impossible. There is the spiritual, here is the sinful, that which belongs to the flesh, and you cannot bring them together. You must be born again. You must be made spiritual.

So the character of God and the character of men and women as the result of sin makes regeneration essential, because there is no such thing as an innate divine spark in human beings. Of course, the people who believe in a divine spark do not believe in regeneration and they are perfectly consistent. But it does seem rather odd that people who denounce the doctrine of the divine spark nevertheless seem to think that there is something in human nature which can do a great deal and which does not make regeneration an absolute and prior necessity.

So regeneration must come at the very beginning because if it is possible for me to do something which will eventually lead to my regeneration, I do not need regeneration. If I, by myself, as I am as the result of the fall and of sin, can appreciate spiritual truth, if I can appreciate the gospel and say, 'Yes I'm going to pay attention to that,' and then, as the result of my paying attention, I am born again, well then, I do not need the gift of life. If I have already got the ability and the power and the discrimination to recognise truth and to desire it, then I do not need to be regenerated. But the fact is, of course, that I do not have

such a power. Men and women, as the result of the fall and of sin, do not desire this truth. They are at enmity against God. They are opposed to God. 'You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works,' says Paul (Col. 2:21). They hate the law of God. They have nothing to do with Him. They are carnal, carnally minded. They 'mind the things of the flesh' (Rom. 8:5). So regeneration is not only essential, but is essential at the beginning; you can have nothing without it. It is impossible for anything to happen in us which can make us Christians until regeneration has taken place.

Now that brings us on to the next question: How exactly is regeneration brought about in us? This is an interesting subject. It is not merely a question of the moral influence of the truth. Those who are not evangelical say that as people listen to the gospel, as they come under its influence and its power, it changes them. They like the ideas, they take hold of them, and the effect of the ideas and of the truth is such that they become different people; they are changed. But that is [p 90] not it. We are talking about something that happens down in the depths of the personality, and this is what brings about change.

Moral influence can, of course, make a great difference. It can make people change their ideas. It can make them change their way of living; it can turn a drunkard into a teetotaler—it has often done it. You can present arguments and the argument may go home. Someone may give up drink completely, become very sober, and an advocate of temperance, without Christ being mentioned at all. Under the moral effect of truth, and the moral influence of ideas, people can produce great changes in themselves. But that is not what we are dealing with here.

Secondly, it is not produced by baptism either. This is an old controversy, an old source of discussion. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that regeneration is produced and accomplished through the instrumentality of baptism, and only through baptism. You must be baptised before you can be regenerate. I do not want to anticipate a later lecture, but let us be clear at this point. In baptism, Roman Catholics teach that our sins are forgiven and that our moral nature is changed and renewed within us. We are told that baptism delivers us from the inherent power and defilement of original sin. You remember that, as the result of the fall of Adam and our connection with him, we are all defiled, and the power of sin has entered in upon us. Now Roman Catholics teach that when a child is baptised, it is delivered from the inherent power and pollution of original sin. All that it has inherited from Adam is washed away, blotted out, and not only that, by baptism we are made children and heirs of God.

The Anglo-Catholics also teach baptismal regeneration. And, strange though it may seem, the same is true of the Lutherans. Luther never quite got rid of this view, and neither have his followers. There is one difference between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic views. The Catholics say that you cannot be regenerate without baptism; the Lutherans say that you can but that the usual, normal manner is by means of baptism. Well, we do not teach that. We say that regeneration is not by baptism, that there is abundant scriptural evidence in the book of Acts alone to prove that the people who were baptised were those who gave evidence that they were already born again. Indeed, they were baptised *because* they had been born again. It was given as a sign and a seal to them because they had produced evidence of the new birth.

But to us a much more interesting and fascinating question is this: What is the relationship of regeneration to the word that is preached? [p 91] There are a number of texts that suggest that our regeneration takes place through and by means of the word. Let me suggest two to you. James 1:18: 'Of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.' Then there is 1 Peter 1:23: 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.' However, you will remember that in the last lecture I drew a distinction between the act of regeneration and the coming to birth and said that there may be a long interval between the two. Now I suggest to you that both these texts I have quoted are concerned about the bringing to birth. And it is certainly the word that does that. It is the effectual call, coming through the medium of the word, that, as it were, brings the seed of life to life, so that the birth takes place. But if you keep in mind the distinction between the generation and the actual coming to birth, I think you will see the difference. The word is used, not in the act of generating, but in the bringing out into life of that which has already been implanted within.

At this point some would quote the parable of the sower and the different types of ground, and emphasise that the life is in the seed and so on. But surely the whole point of that parable is to emphasise the character of the ground into which the seed is put. Is it stony ground? Is it encompassed by thorns? And so on. Or is it good ground? In other words, the teaching in that parable is that what really matters is that fundamental something which we call the disposition. And if that has been changed and put right, then, when the word comes, it will be effectual; it will lead to the result; it will yield the fruit.

Indeed, the Scriptures do seem to teach that quite explicitly. Take, for instance, John 6:65: 'Therefore said I unto you,' says our Lord, 'that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.' Now there were the people, hearing the same word, and as we have already seen, some came, some went away—what was the difference? It is this, our Lord, says, '... except it were given unto them of my Father.' And again I would remind you of what we are told about Lydia. It was because the Lord had 'opened her heart' that she attended to Paul and received the word. It was not the word that opened her heart, it was the act of the Lord. It was this that led to her reception of the word. That surely must be the order. And the argument of 1 Corinthians 2, especially verses 12 to 15, obviously teaches the same thing.

But there are two final arguments about this which are not only of [p 92] great importance, but, it seems to me, of very great interest also. What about the Old Testament saints? Now when we were dealing with the doctrine of the covenant, we were at great pains to emphasise that the Old Testament saints are in the same position as we are. There is only one covenant in the Old and in the New Dispensations. And you and I today are the children of Abraham, Abraham is our father, because we are children of faith. There is a difference, of course, in the administration of the covenant in the Old and in the New, but only one great covenant of grace. Our Lord tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be in the kingdom and that others will come from the east and from the west while the Jews will be left outside (Luke 13:28–29). In other words, the Old Testament saints were born again. David was born again, he was a new man, a new creature, and so were the patriarchs and the prophets.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it like this at the end of chapter 11. He said that those saints did not receive the promise in full. His argument is that it was kept back so that they should not, as it were, run ahead of us. Here it is: 'And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect' (Heb. 11:39–40). So we are made perfect together. But if those Old Testament saints were regenerate, as they must have been, it is clear that it is not the word that actually performs the act of regeneration. Regeneration is something that is not mediate through the word, but immediate. It was the Spirit of God who dealt with them and operated upon them.

The other argument is that about children, especially about infants. Now we all believe, do we not, that there are infants and children who have gone and who will go to heaven and spend their eternity in the presence of God. Now how can a child be saved? Obviously every infant needs to be saved. If you believe in the doctrine of the fall and in the doctrine of original sin, you must believe that every child is born in sin and 'shapen in iniquity' (Ps. 51:5); every child is dead in trespasses and in sins (Eph. 2:21). They all inherit original sin and original guilt from Adam, every child that is born. How, then, can any child be saved? How can any child ever go to heaven?

Now, if you want to insist upon the fact that regeneration always follows upon hearing the word and believing it and accepting it—how can an infant be saved? The infant cannot receive truth, it does not have the ability; it does not have understanding, it has not awakened [p 93] to these things. So is there no hope for any infant? We do not believe that, we obviously reject such a suggestion. And the answer is, of course, that a child is regenerated in exactly the same way as anybody else, because it is the action of this almighty being, of God Himself through the Holy Spirit. He can implant the seed of spiritual life in an unconscious infant with the same ease as He can do it in an adult person. Therefore you see why it is important for us to consider whether regeneration is something that happens indirectly through the word or whether it is indeed the direct operation of God upon us. And I am teaching again, as I did in the last lecture, that it is immediate, direct, it is God creating anew as He created the world out of nothing at the beginning.

And, finally, the last thing is that obviously, in the light of all this, regeneration is something that can never be lost. If you are regenerate, you will remain regenerate. It seems to me that this is absolutely inevitable because regeneration is the work of God. Yet there are those who seem to think that people can be born again as the result of believing the truth and then, if they backslide or fall into sin or deny the truth, they lose their regeneration. But if they come back again and believe again, then they are regenerate again—as if one can be born again and die and be born again and die an endless number of times! How important doctrine is! How important it is that we should be clear as to what the Scripture teaches about these things! It tells us that regeneration is the work of God Himself in the depths of the soul and that He does it in such a way that it is permanent. ‘No man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand’ (John 10:29).

‘I am persuaded,’ says Paul, and let us notice this, ‘I am persuaded’—he is certain—‘that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 8:38–39). And when Paul says that, he is expounding regeneration. It is not merely the relationship between us, it is because God has put this life in me, that nothing can separate me from Him. And when we come to deal with the mystical union which follows directly from this, we shall see how still more inevitable this must be. This is a permanent work and nothing can ever bring it to an end.

Take those verses from the first epistle of John: ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin’—which means that such a person does not go on abiding in sin. Why? Well—‘for his seed remaineth in him: **[p 94]** and he cannot sin, because he is born of God’ (1 John 3:9). He cannot go on sinning because he is born of God. Let us be clear about that. The man or woman who is born of God, who is regenerate, simply does not and cannot continue—abide—in a life of sin. They may backslide temporarily, but if they are born of God they will come back. It is as certain as that they have been born again. It is the way to test whether or not someone is born again.

Or take that other word in 1 John 2:19: ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.’ They were members of the Church, these people, they appeared to be Christians, they said the right things and up to a point their life seemed to be right, but they ‘went out’. Why? They went out ‘because they were not of us’—they were not regenerate. They had never been born again. That is why they have gone out, says John, in a sense, to give proof of the fact that they have never really had life.

‘But what about Hebrews 6 and 10?’ asks someone.

The answer is that there is nothing in either of those chapters to suggest that those people were ever regenerate. They had had marvellous experiences, but there is nothing to say that they were born again. They were not, and that is the explanation. The regenerate abide. They may backslide, they may fall into sin, they may fail, but they abide, because the life is there. The others may appear to be fully Christian but if there is no life they will not abide. Life shows itself, it gives proof of its existence—as we shall go on to see.

10

A Child of God and in Christ

You will remember that we are still considering this great doctrine of regeneration—the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the believer. It is such a vital and all-important subject that I have deliberately not hurried with it. I have forgotten all about form and precision and have allowed the great truth itself to lead us and to guide us. Now we have considered something of its essential nature. We have considered also why it is absolutely essential, and we have seen how it is brought about and in particular its relationship to the word. We have emphasised in particular that no means are used in our regeneration; it is the direct, immediate work of the Spirit upon our souls. Furthermore, it is something that can never be lost; it is a work done by God and it is a work that is permanent. Ultimately, the security of the believer, as we shall see when we come to deal with the doctrine of final perseverance, rests specifically upon this great doctrine of regeneration.

We come now to the consideration of a subject which, while it is essentially doctrinal, is also more practical. The essential purpose of these lectures is to look at doctrine, but I have tried throughout to show that this is not something dry and arid, theoretical and abstract. My concern with doctrine is because of all things, it helps me most in the living of the Christian life. So we must, perforce, turn occasionally to consider the practical application and therefore I want to deal now with the results to which regeneration leads, or to put it another way, the proofs of the fact that we are regenerate. I know that this troubles large numbers of people and that is why I am turning to it. ‘My difficulty is,’ they say, ‘how may I *know* that I’m regenerate?’ Now that is an essential part of the doctrine of regeneration and that is why I have [p 96] called this the *results* to which regeneration leads. It is a subject about which the Bible has a great deal to tell us.

We can start from this general principle: regeneration, we have shown, is the implanting within us of a principle of spiritual life. Very well, life is something that always shows itself. A baby gives proof of the fact that it is born alive and not still born, by screaming or moving. You cannot have life without some kind of manifestation of that life and that is as true of spiritual life as it is of any other form of life. So the Bible has many tests which it puts before us in order to help us to know whether we are truly regenerate or not. The classic passage of Scripture on this is the first epistle of John. One man who wrote a book on 1 John very rightly, I think, gave it the title *The Tests of Life*. And that is precisely what the first epistle of John is. But I always feel that the Beatitudes are also a test of life and of regeneration and they are the tests put forward by our Lord Himself.

Now let us look at this briefly. In the first epistle of John there are four main tests which John constantly repeats. (There are other subsidiary tests, but we will not be dealing with these.) 1 John is an epistle which can be divided up with comparative ease on condition that we realise that it depends upon the recognition of these four major tests of spiritual life or of the fact that we are regenerate. I shall not take them precisely in the order in which they appear but they are to be found in every section of the epistle.

The first test is *believing that Jesus is the Christ*. John says, ‘Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God ... Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God’ (1 John 4:1–2). Now that is a tremendous statement. It means the full doctrine about the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that you believe that He is indeed eternal God, one of the three Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity. Apply that test to some of the cults around today and you will see what a vital test it is. It is not enough that you praise Jesus Christ, not even enough that you say He is the Son of God. You must say that He is Jehovah, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh—the eternal Son of God, co-equal, co-eternal with the Father—that the second Person in the blessed Trinity has come in the flesh. It was not a phantom body, ‘The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14). It is all that

we said earlier¹ about the great doctrine of the person of our [p 97] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. John is very fond of repeating this. He says it again in chapter 5 in the first verse: 'Whosoever,' he says, 'believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him,' and so on. And, you remember, Paul has said the same thing. He said, 'No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost' (1 Cor. 12:3). You cannot say it otherwise. The man who tells me that Jesus is Lord, and puts the right content into that statement and is not merely repeating it mechanically, is giving proof of the fact that the Holy Spirit is in him, that he is regenerate.

The second test is the test of *keeping the commandments*. That is actually the first test that John introduces: 'And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments' (1 John 2:3). And John constantly repeats that also; you will find it in every section of the epistle. He says it again in the very last section: 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous' (1 John 5:3). He sometimes refers to it as 'doing righteousness' (1 John 2:29). That is the way to distinguish between the child of God and the child of the devil, John says. And not only that; not only does this child of God, this person who is born again, keep the commandments, to him the commandments are a delight. God's commandments, says John, are not a burden; they are not against the grain. Christians are not always kicking against them and wishing they were not there; they enjoy keeping the commandments. You will find that again elaborated by Paul in Romans 7. So keeping the commandments is a most important test. Our relationship to the commandments of God and of Christ proclaims at once whether or not we are recipients of this blessed new life.

The third test is that *He has given us His Holy Spirit*. 'Hereby we know,' says John, at the end of the third chapter, 'that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us' (v. 29).

'But,' says someone, 'how do I know that I have received the Spirit?'

Well, we shall have to deal with that later on as we continue in our consideration of this doctrine, but one aspect of it is certainly this: there is such a thing, says the apostle Paul, as 'the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15). Paul says that again in Galatians 4:6: 'God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' The Spirit is 'the Spirit of adoption' and one of the proofs, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is in us is that, [p 98] though we may not understand it fully, we have a feeling, a consciousness, that God is our Father. He is no longer a God afar off, but is our Father. We say, 'My God, my Father.' There are also other manifestations of the presence of the Spirit but we must leave these to a subsequent lecture.

The last test is that *we love the brethren*. 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren' (1 John 3:14), and this is a wonderful test. It is a test that points on to the next theme that we shall consider, namely the mystical union of all believers with the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore with one another. This is inevitable, you see. If we are all joined to Him and joined to one another, we are related to one another and we inevitably love one another. In other words, we recognise Christians when we meet them. In a sense, we don't need to be told that people are Christians, we recognise them at once and we feel that we have always known them. They belong to the same family, we are related to one another. We prefer their society to any other. If you offered us the choice of spending our evening with the so-called great people of this world or with some humble unknown Christian people, we would prefer to spend our evening with the unknown Christian people. There is something in common; we love them; we know that we belong together; nothing can ever separate us. 'We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.' If we do not recognise Christians, even at their worst, and love them, then we had better examine the whole foundation of our position. The children of the family love one another.

Those, then are the four main tests given by John in his first epistle, but there are other tests suggested elsewhere in Scripture and I just want to note them. Here is one which I regard as of great value and which has, many a time, been a great comfort to me: the consciousness of a struggle within. That is an extremely valuable test. Paul puts it perfectly in Galatians 5:17 where he teaches us that 'the flesh lusteth against the

¹ In Volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*.

spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these two,' he says, 'are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.' The Spirit and the flesh. They are warring or 'lusting' against one another. What it means is that Christians, by definition, are people in whom a great competition is taking place. The Holy Spirit, as it were, wants them for God, but the flesh—this other spirit that is worked by the devil—wants them for the kingdom of darkness. So they are fighting for possession and Christians are aware of the fact that they are the seat of conflict, that a kind of internecine warfare is taking [p 99] place within them. They are conscious of these two forces, these two powers, and men and women who are conscious of that have a right to know that they are Christians.

But be very careful. I am not merely talking about the consciousness of good and evil, right and wrong; they have a sense of moral decency and have a code of ethics and may feel that they let themselves down. I am not referring to that. What I am referring to is very different. In the old unregenerate life, you are aware of the fact that you are handling the whole situation, everything depends upon what you do. *You*, as it were, are dealing with the conflict. But what I am describing now is that you become aware of the fact that there is another Spirit apart from yourself, in you, dealing with you, working in you, drawing you, weaning you from the world and indicating truth to you. You are aware of the operation of the Holy Spirit and you are aware of the power of Satan in a sense that you never were before.

A very good sign, therefore, that people are born again is that they become more acutely aware of the existence and the working of Satan than they have ever been hitherto. There is no need for Satan to busy himself very much with the unregenerate. They can be left, as it were; they are already bound; they are already in his kingdom and they cannot escape. But once people are transferred to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of light, the devil makes a new effort and in a spiritual way comes to them and attacks them. And they are aware of this other presence that is fighting for their life and for their very existence. Flesh and Spirit—the conflict is a proof of regeneration.

Another very good test is this: anybody who is aware of a desire to know God and not merely a desire to be blessed by God, can be quite happy and certain of being a child of God. Everybody wants blessings, of course. Yes, but the peculiar mark of children is that they are interested in the person. They want their Father. They want to know their Father better. They are more interested in the Giver than the gift, the Blessor than the blessing. They begin to know something of a hunger and thirst for God Himself, as the psalmist puts it, 'for the living God' (Ps. 42:2). Their soul thirsts for the living God. And whatever may or may not be true about you, if you have a desire to know God Himself, you can be quite happy that you are regenerate. That is something that the unregenerate is incapable of, because the natural mind is 'enmity against God' (Rom. 8:7) and we are all by nature, as Paul says, 'alienated and enemies' (Col. 1:21), away from God. Unregenerate men and women are haters of God and do not want Him, [p 100] and are always ready to believe anything they may read in the newspaper which purports, however vaguely, to prove that there is not a God. They are against God, but the children desire to know God.

The last test I would mention at this point—and again I regard this as very important—is that children of God do not merely desire forgiveness of their sins and an avoidance of the consequences of sins, but they also know what it is to hate sin. In other words, in Paul's words in Romans 7, they say, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?' (v. 24). Now sinners, unregenerate men and women, do not like the consequences of sin, they do not want to be punished for sins, but they know nothing about a sense of sin, they do not know a true conviction of sin. They have not seen sin in all its vileness and foulness, in all its ugliness, they do not hate it. But the children of God do. That is why our Lord says concerning them: 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness' (Matt. 5:6). Why are they blessed? It is because they are already children of God. Unbelievers cannot know, the unregenerate cannot experience, this hunger and thirst after righteousness and true holiness. They may want to live a good life and keep up to their standards, but Christians go beyond all that. They have a positive hunger and thirst for a positive righteousness. They want to be like Christ. They want to be like the saints of whom they have read. They are not content merely with not committing certain sins but want a clean heart. They want to be pure. They want to be holy. They want to be like God. They hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Those, then, it seems to me, are some of the main tests. They are not the only ones but I regard them as the most important tests which we can apply to ourselves in order to discover whether or not we are truly born again.

However, in dealing with this whole subject of regeneration in his first epistle, John also introduces something else and that is *our union with Christ*. That appears many many times in that epistle. For instance, 'He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him' (1 John 3:24). In other words, John sometimes writes in terms of regeneration, of the seed of life, and at other times he puts it in terms of the union of the believer with his Lord. Now this doctrine is quite inseparable from the doctrine of regeneration with which we have just been dealing, and that is why we have to take it at this point. I think you will agree that there is no more vital, sublime and glorious doctrine than this.

Now some may be surprised at the fact that we are taking this **[p 101]** doctrine now. Indeed, you will find that many would take it as possibly the last doctrine of all, the final doctrine, the one to which all the other doctrines lead up. They believe that the union of the believer with Christ is something that we only attain when we have arrived at an unusual degree of holiness and of sanctity and therefore would not include it here, comparatively at the beginning. Their confusion is entirely due to the teaching of the mystics. The mystics have their gradation of the manner in which one travels along the mystic way, and, according to their teaching, the ultimate end of the believer is to become absorbed in and 'lost in' the divine.

That is characteristic of practically all the mystics—and when I say 'the mystics' I am putting the term in inverted commas. The apostle Paul was a mystic but not in the sense of which I am now speaking. I do not want to call them professional mystics but I think you know what I mean by that. I refer to the mystics who are more philosophical than spiritual or the mystics who are more philosophical than scriptural. These mystics, particularly among the Roman Catholics, have a view of these matters that is closer to philosophy than to biblical truth. And as I understand his writing, even a great Englishman like William Law has to go into this category. He was a man to whom John and Charles Wesley owed a great deal in the early stages, but they broke with him. They left him, and very rightly so, because they found that he was too philosophical and not sufficiently scriptural. All these philosophical mystics tend to think of the union of the believer with Christ as a kind of absorption into the eternal. This same kind of thing is also characteristic of the teaching of many of the eastern religions.

Furthermore, unfortunately, that kind of teaching has often influenced Christian people and even, indeed, evangelical Christians. So they tend to think that the only people who really experience this union with Christ are those unusually and exceptionally holy, sanctified people who, by tearing themselves away from the world and mortifying themselves, have at last attained this mystical union. But I want to try to show that that is an utterly false doctrine, and that the doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ must come at this particular stage in our consideration of the doctrines.

Why is this? Because, as I think I shall be able to show you, all the benefits of Christ's redemptive work come to us through this union. I will go further and say this still more strongly by putting it negatively. We cannot receive any blessing whatsoever from the work of **[p 102]** the Lord Jesus Christ unless we are joined to Him, unless we are in union with Him, every one of us. Let me give you one verse straightaway which will establish the position. Take this statement: 'Blessed,' says Paul, 'be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ' (Eph. 1:3). That is it. All these blessings, all these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, are all ours in Christ and we have nothing at all apart from that.

Let me give you one other verse, which I shall quote again later on, which says the same thing. John puts it in the very prologue of his Gospel: 'And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace' or 'grace upon grace' (John 1:16). We have all received His fulness. How? By being joined to Him. You receive nothing unless you are joined. You must be joined to the source before you can receive anything whatsoever. Therefore, you see, we are constrained to say that even regeneration itself, which we have already been considering, is, logically, an outcome of our union with Christ.

Chronologically, as regards time, of course, there is no doubt but that the two things happen simultaneously. The moment we are joined to Christ, we are born again. The moment we are joined to Him we receive this principle of life. If you look at it from the strict standpoint of time you cannot put one before the other; but, logically, you almost have to put the union before the regeneration. I have taken them in this slightly different order because starting, as I have done, with the whole idea of the call, it seemed to me that as we emphasised the effectual call, we then had to go on to regeneration, but then say that this union of the believer with Christ is the cause of the regeneration.

Now in many ways, of course, it can be said that *the* special and particular work of the Holy Spirit is to produce this union. Was that not what our Lord meant when He turned to the disciples and said, 'It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you' (John 16:7)? It is out of this union, you see, that all the blessings proceed. Here is a bit of homework, a task for Bible students! You will find that this doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ seems, in many ways, to be the doctrine of all doctrines given to the apostle John to emphasise. Of course it is elsewhere—you find it in the apostle Paul—but it does seem to be the doctrine particularly emphasised by John. Now work through his Gospel and note carefully [p 103] the point at which he begins to talk about this union. I think you will discover that it is the point at which John specifically introduces the teaching of our Lord concerning the Holy Spirit. In other words, you will find it beginning in John 14. The moment our Lord begins to tell His disciples about the Holy Spirit, He begins to tell them about the union. In many ways, the classic passage on this whole doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ is to be found in that section of John's Gospel which runs from chapter 14 to the end of chapter 17. What a glorious portion of Scripture it is! And yet, you see, it comes in precisely in connection with the doctrine of the person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

That is what I meant when I said that the particular work of the Spirit does seem to be to unite us to our beloved Lord. There are those who would teach—I do not know to what extent they are justified scripturally, but at any rate it is a thought that is worth repeating—that that is the special work of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead, in the blessed Holy Trinity. They say that the third Person is, as it were, the kind of connecting link between the Father and the Son. That may be pure speculation, we do not know, but we do know that it is He who unites us to the Son and to the Father, and that this work of communion and of union seems to be His particular office.

Now, then, as we approach this great, glorious and transcendent doctrine, let us start again by considering some of the terms that are used in the Scripture itself. And first and foremost we have to put that expression which, alas, so many of us tend to slip over in our reading, whether in private or in public, but which, in many ways, is the greatest term ever used concerning anybody in the Scripture: 'in Christ', 'in Christ at Corinth', 'in Christ at Colosse'. Paul uses it in that list of names which he gives in the sixteenth chapter of Romans, a chapter which so many people do not read because they say, 'It's nothing but a list of names!' Read it again and you will find that Paul refers to Andronicus and Junia who, he says, 'were in Christ before me' (v. 7). And what a thing to say! The Christian is a man or woman who is *in Christ*. 'The saints', wherever they may live, are '*in Christ Jesus*'. The phrase varies but there it is, it really says everything; and the point I am emphasising is that there is no such thing as being a Christian unless you are in Christ. You cannot be a Christian just by believing certain things and saying, 'Now if I keep on, one day I shall be in Christ and joined to Him.' Not at all! You are either in Him now or you are not a Christian.

Let us take another passage. In John 15, our Lord compares this [p 104] union to the union between a branch and a tree. He says, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches' (v. 5). That is something which will help us to understand this mystical union. It is comparable to that which exists between a tree, the trunk and the branches which are a vital part of that tree. That is a vital relationship, a union.

But then the Bible also says that this union is comparable to that between the head and the members or parts of a body. 'Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,' says Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:27. And Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 4:15-16:

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Then in Ephesians 5: Paul has still another comparison—and, incidentally, the apostle has a greater variety of illustrations and analogies with regard to this question of the union of the believer and Christ than with regard to any other subject. In Ephesians 5 he says, ‘For we are member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church’ (Eph. 5:30–32). The union, he says, existing between the believer and the Lord is the same as the union between a husband and wife, it is that kind of union.

But then we have another picture in 1 Peter 2:4–6 where Peter says, ‘To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house ...’ You see the idea? The relationship is compared to a building, and in verse 6 Peter goes on to say that our relationship to Christ may be likened to the relationship between individual bricks or stones and the chief cornerstone: ‘Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious.’ And that is a very important relationship in the erection of any building.

And then finally there is one other comparison. It is a comparison which Paul makes and it is a vital one from the standpoint of doctrine. He draws a contrast between the union of the unbeliever with Adam [p 105] and the union of the believer with Christ. It is the great argument in Romans 5, which is repeated in 1 Corinthians 15:22 and 49. In Romans 5 the whole argument is that death passed on to all people because of Adam. Why? Because of their relationship to Adam; that is the whole doctrine of original sin. We are all condemned in Adam because of Adam’s sin. He was our representative, you remember,¹ he was our federal head and, not only that, we are bound to him, we were in the loins of Adam when he fell. In Adam all died. In Christ all shall be made alive again. That is it. The relationship of the believer to Christ is the same sort of union and relationship as that old relationship of the whole of Adam’s posterity to Adam. We are all born in Adam and we are related, we are joined in that way. Yes, but, being born again, we are in the same sort of relationship to Christ. What a vital doctrine that is when we come to consider the results of the union! We shall see that it is the most precious truth we can ever grasp. Read it again for yourselves in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 from verse 21 onwards.

So I trust that I have made the connection between these things plain to you. Regeneration and union must never be separated. You cannot be born again without being in Christ; you are born again because you are in Christ. The moment you are in Him you are born again and you cannot regard your regeneration as something separate and think that union is something you will eventually arrive at. Not at all! Regeneration and union must always be considered together and at the same time because the one depends upon the other and leads to the other; they are mutually self-supporting. And now, as we have looked at the Scriptures, and on the basis of these Scriptures, we shall go on to try to consider something of the nature of this union, then something of how the union is established and then some of the glorious results of the union. May God give us grace and ability to lay hold of these profound and precious practical doctrines! There is nothing, I say at the end as I said at the beginning, that so strengthens my faith and fills me with a longing to be pure as He is pure, and to live even as He did in this world, as the realisation of what I am and who I am because I am a Christian. I am a child of God and I am in Christ.

¹ See Volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*.

11

Union with Christ

In our consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption—the redemption that has been worked out and purchased by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—we have now arrived at a consideration of the doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ. I was at pains, in introducing this doctrine in the last lecture, to emphasise the fact that it is a doctrine which, of necessity, must always be taken in conjunction with the doctrine of regeneration. The two things are almost simultaneous. Logically, the union should be put first, but not chronologically. We are regenerated because of our union with Christ; it is from Him we derive our life; it is from Him we derive everything. Therefore we are looking together at one of the most glorious of all the doctrines of the Christian faith. There is none which is more sublime than this, in which we are reminded that we really are made partakers of Christ, that we are partakers of the divine nature, so it goes naturally and inevitably with the doctrine of regeneration. And in the last lecture, having given the reasons why this doctrine must come at this point and not at the end of a series of doctrines, we simply gave the scriptural terms used to describe the nature of the union. So now we are in a position to proceed to a more detailed consideration of this doctrine.

The first thing, clearly, to consider is the nature of the union. Now the very terms that are used in the Scriptures with respect to it, and which we have looked at, give us the key to the understanding of the character of the union. But again, perhaps we had better start with a negative. We must not think of this union between the believer and Christ as if it involved a kind of confusion of persons. It must not be thought of in the sense that our substance, or the essence of our being, [p 107] becomes merged and lost in the substance, or the essence of the being, of our Lord. Now I emphasise that because of the teaching of the mystics who always tend to think of this union in those terms. Ultimately, their conception of complete salvation is that we become lost, absorbed, in the eternal.

That is the idea in certain eastern religions and there is a sort of kinship between a great deal of mysticism that goes by the name of Christian with the more general mysticism that characterises those eastern religions. In all of them one finds the idea of what is called *Nirvana*. You become lost. You go out of existence altogether by being absorbed into the divine and into the eternal. Now the scriptural doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ does not mean that at all. The Bible teaches very clearly that you and I will exist as individuals throughout the countless ages of eternity. We do not become lost or merged and absorbed into God. We, ourselves, as persons, will not only always be and exist, but we shall enjoy the beatific vision. We shall enjoy seeing God, and we shall enjoy being in His glorious presence.

When we considered the doctrine of the person of our Lord we had to emphasise exactly the same thing. The two natures in our Lord—his human and divine natures—are separate and distinct, but they are joined. There is not a new nature which is partly human and partly divine. No: He is God, and He is man; He is divine and He is human. The two remain separate and yet they are together. They are not intermingled. They are not fused in a materialistic sense. So the union of the believer and his Lord must likewise not be thought of in terms of a confusion or intermingling of substance.

But, on the other hand, I am equally anxious to stress another negative which is that the union between the believer and Christ is not merely a union of sympathy or a union of interest. It is not merely a loose, general, external association of separate persons who happen to have the same interest, or the same enthusiasm. No, that again is important because there are some who, in their anxiety to avoid the errors of mysticism, have represented this union in just that way. You know what I mean by that? You can have people joining together to form societies. They may be interested in music or in some particular musician, so you have a Beethoven society or a Mozart society, and so on. Or people may have an interest in art and they form a society. They have a common interest which brings them together and they call it a union. Well, of course, in a sense it is a union, but my point is [p 108] that that is not the kind of union that binds together the Lord and any one of us His followers. It is not merely that we are interested in salvation. It is not merely that together we are interested in God and in His kingdom. We are, but the union is much

bigger and deeper than that. So I am anxious to emphasise those two important negatives, though they happen to be at opposite extremes.

What, then, is the nature or the character of the union? First, it is *a spiritual union*. Now this is where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is so vitally important. We are joined to Christ and we are in union with Him by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us. It is the function, the special work of the Holy Spirit to join us thus to Christ, and we are joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit's presence in us. Let me give you some Scriptures to substantiate that. Take the statement in 1 Corinthians 6:17: 'But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.' Here the Apostle is reminding the Corinthians that their bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and that is why they must avoid certain sins of the flesh. Paul says, 'He which is joined to an harlot is one body' with that harlot (v. 16). Then he adds the opposite truth: 'He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.' So it is a spiritual and not a materialistic union. Or take again 1 Corinthians 12:13: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit'—the same idea again. We are joined to Him in this amazing and mysterious manner by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, it is *a mystical union*. Now what do we mean by this very difficult term? Well the best way to explain it is to take the comparison which the Apostle himself uses in the last portion of Ephesians 5. These verses are sometimes read at marriage services, and rightly so. In some marriage services we are told that the relationship between a husband and a wife signifies unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and His Church. Certainly there in Ephesians 5, the Apostle does say that the union between the Lord and the Christian believer is comparable and similar to the union between a husband and a wife. Now that is what I mean by a mystical union. It is very difficult to put this in language. There is a union, and you cannot find a better term for describing it than this term *mystical*. Not only are the two made one flesh but they are bound together in an intimate manner and the two really become one—it is a mystical union.

Then the next way of describing the union is to say that it is *a vital union*, and this is obviously of the greatest importance. It means that our spiritual life is drawn directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. We are [p 109] sustained by Him through the indwelling Holy Spirit. There is nothing more important in the Christian life than to realise that our union with Him is a vital one. It is a living thing. It is not something mechanical or conceptual; it is not a thought or an idea; it is really a vital, spiritual union.

Look at some of the statements of Scripture which demonstrate that. Take the great statement in John 1:16, one of the most amazing and marvellous statements in Holy Writ: 'And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.' That says it all. That is our relationship to Him, says John; something of His fulness and of His life is passing into us and we are receiving it. And many other statements say the same thing. Take John 14:19–20 where our Lord says in this very connection, 'Because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.' You see how vital a relationship it is, and all because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Or, again, take John 17:22–23: 'That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.' What sublime teaching!

The trouble with all of us is that we do not realise the truth of these things. But this is the truth given by the Lord Himself. It is His prayer for His people that they may know the meaning of this vital spiritual relationship. And he does not hesitate to compare it with the relationship that subsists between the Father and Himself: as the Father is in Him so He is in us and we are in Him. But take the statement of this truth which is made by the apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' There is nothing greater than that, and what it does teach is that this is a life-giving relationship; it is a union of life, 'not I, but Christ liveth in me'. And then Paul goes on to say, 'And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.'

The next term, therefore, that I must use is the term *organic*. Now the difference between organic and vital is that the term 'organic' suggests a kind of two-way traffic, it is a union in which we give as well as receive. In many ways, the best statement of this is to be found in Ephesians 4:15–16: 'But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole

body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in [p 110] love.' What a statement! But you see how it brings out this organic element. We are to grow up into Him who is the head, yes, but you notice that Paul says that the whole body is 'fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth'. So that we do not only receive, we also give; we all are active members. Every part of the body is playing a vital role in the life of the body. We are not simply passive. There is an organic relationship, an organic union. There is an activity and a vitality in the parts as well as in the head. They all make their contribution.

Now that is the concept of the Church as the body of Christ and it is a tremendous idea. Nothing, surely, is more stimulating to our faith, nothing more encouraging, nothing more stimulating to our practical holiness, than the realisation of this wonderful and exalted truth about ourselves. I say once more that I am increasingly convinced that what chiefly accounts for the low state of spirituality in the Christian Church is the failure to grasp these doctrines. We think so much in subjective terms, and we spend so much time in trying to work something up, that we fail to see that the way to become holy is to understand the truth about ourselves and to realise our high calling and our privileged position.

Then the other statement of the organic union is again in that same passage in Ephesians 5 where Paul compares it to the relationship between the husband and the wife. Each has his or her duties, each has a separate function, but in the union the two play their part, and that is the relationship between Christ and the Church. We have our part to play, our lot to contribute.

The next term is personal: this union is *a personal union*. Now I use that word in order to emphasise that every one of us, separately, is in union with Christ. This needs to be emphasised because there is a teaching which is very popular, especially among Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics, and, indeed, I notice that it is insinuating itself into those who like to call themselves 'liberal evangelicals', a teaching which maintains that we have no direct union with our Lord as individuals but that we are only connected to Him through the Church. This teaching does away with the individual aspect, and emphasises the corporate aspect. Indeed, therefore, it goes on to say that in a sense we cannot be born again except in and through the Church, which is a complete denial, not only of scriptural teaching, but particularly of the evangelical emphasis. The evangelical emphasis is that we all have a personal relationship with our Lord, and it is only [p 111] because of that that we are members of the body.

Of course, in a sense you cannot separate these things, but I am anxious to emphasise that I do not derive my life from the Church, I derive it from the Lord. Because we all share His life at the same time, we are all member of His body, and we are all in the Church. You cannot be a Christian without being a member of the mystical body of Christ. But the right order is to put the person and individual first and the corporate second. So that I am not born of the Church—the Church is not my spiritual mother—I am born of the Spirit. And the moment I am, I am in the Church, the unseen, the mystical Church. So let us emphasise the personal aspect, and let us make certain that we will never allow any specious teaching to rob us of that individual element. We do not have to go to Him through the Church; we can go to Him one by one, and we are united to him singly as well as in a corporate manner.

The last term is that it is *an indissoluble union*. I need not emphasise that. It follows of necessity from everything we have been considering together during the past lectures. It is inconceivable to me that we can be joined to Christ in this way by the Spirit and then go out of that union, and then come back and enter into it again, and then go out again, and keep on coming in and going out. This is once and forever. Nothing, no one, 'nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38-39). It is an indissoluble union. Thank God for it.

So let us go on now to consider how the union is established. If that is the nature and the character of the union, how is it brought about? Clearly we are face to face here with a very great mystery and we must tread very carefully. But at any rate we can say that two main elements are involved. First and foremost, it is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:5 puts it like this: God 'hath quickened us together with Christ'. It is the work of the Spirit to quicken us. We have already looked at that. And He quickens us

‘together with Christ’—that is the union. So in the effectual call, in our regeneration and in all that we have been considering, the main work is done by the Holy Spirit.

But then we must also emphasise that as the result of that, our faith comes into operation, and our faith is a vital part of the union. It is not the first thing, it is the second, and quite inevitably this leads us on to the consideration of the biblical doctrine of faith. Our faith helps to sustain the union, to develop it and to strengthen it—this [p 112] union that is primarily established as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is only as faith becomes active that we become aware of this union and of our regeneration and all the other things that we have been considering. It is only as our faith comes into operation that we rejoice in it and desire it more and more. So in the biblical passages dealing with the union of the believer with his Lord, the element of faith is of necessity emphasised. It must be. The Spirit establishes the union and leads to faith, and faith, as it were, desires it more and more and keeps it going. So we eat of His flesh and drink of His blood and as we do so, the union between us becomes closer and dearer and deeper. Faith draws increasingly on His fulness and the more we realise the truth about the union, the more we shall draw upon it. You see the difficulty of establishing an exact chronological order in these things, indeed, it is almost impossible, but that is the way in which the union is established and maintained.

But, again, let us be careful about our negatives in this section. We must repeat that the union is not established by or through the Church. We have shown how the Roman Catholics would teach that without mother Church you can never be born again at all, you can never become a Christian, the Church, they say, is absolutely essential at that point. We deny that strenuously. There is nothing to indicate it in the Scriptures. And equally, we must be at pains to emphasise that the union is not established by the sacraments. It is not established by baptism; let us emphasise that again. We do not believe in baptismal regeneration in any shape or form. Nor is it brought into being by the sacrament of the Lord’s supper. Both these sacraments can be invaluable in maintaining the union, and in stimulating our desire that the union may be deeper and greater, but they do not bring it into being.

You will be familiar with that false sacramental teaching which would have us believe that grace is actually transmitted mechanically, in the water or in the bread or in the wine, and that these sacraments act—I must use the technical term, because it is used so frequently that it is good that we should all be familiar with it—*ex opere operato*, which means that they act and operate in and of themselves. We deny that completely. Without our faith there is nothing in the sacraments. The act of christening or baptising an infant does not transmit life or join a child to Christ. No, it is impossible. Nowhere do you find that conception in the Scriptures, and we must resist the teaching in a most strenuous manner.

[p 113] So, then, we have seen the way in which the union is established. Next we come to something in which we should all delight and for which we should praise God—the *consequences of the union*. What a glorious, endless subject this is! It should always be the great theme of preaching to believers and yet how infrequently do we hear sermons on the consequences of the union of believers with their Lord.

We can subdivide this under two main headings: you can think of this great subject objectively or subjectively. Let me give you parallel terms. Put by the side of objective: *federal*; put by the side of subjective: *spiritual*. I cannot do anything more at this point than just give you a number of headings. When we come to deal with the doctrine of sanctification, I trust we shall be able to elaborate some of them. But for now let us try to look at it as a whole, that we may see something of what our union with Christ must of necessity mean with regard to us.

Here are some of the things which are taught in the Scriptures. Take the federal and the objective aspect first; we must start with that. I am almost tempted to stop there and digress! We must always put the objective before the subjective. We do not like doing that, of course. We are all interested in the subjective; we want the feeling of the experience, and in our concern about that, we are not careful about the grounds. The result is that as our feelings come and go, we become unhappy, and all because we have not based our understanding on the objective truth. Certain things result from our union with our Lord, quite outside the realm of our experience, and these apply to our status, our standing, our position.

Now the term *federal* is the term that Paul has in mind in Romans 5. By nature, all of us are joined federally to Adam. God made Adam the representative of humanity. He is the federal head. Take the

illustration of the United States of America. That country consists of a number of different states and each state has its own legislature—its own government, in a sense—but then in addition to that there is what they call the federal government which includes them all. They are all related in this federal union. Now the teaching of the Scripture is that the whole of mankind is in that kind of federal union with Adam and, as we have seen, it was because of that that Adam's sin is imputed to us. Because we are joined to Adam federally, in this legal sense, what he did applies to us. He sinned—we sinned; he fell—we fell. That is the doctrine of original sin and original guilt.

But now, on the other side, we are told—and you will notice the parallelism in the teaching—that we who are Christians are in precisely the same relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are [p 114] federally related to Him. What does that mean? It means that we have been crucified with Him. We must not interpret Romans 6:6 in a subjective or experiential sense. It is not, it is objective. It says that because I am joined to Christ federally, when He was crucified I was crucified. That is a statement of fact. God regards it like that. We are told that, 'We have been planted together in the likeness of his death'—that is Romans 6:5. Romans 6:8 says we are 'dead with Christ'. We have died with Him. More, 'we are buried with him by baptism into death' (Rom. 6:4). And Romans 6:11 adds, 'Reckon ye also yourselves to be ... alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Now all these things are true of all of us who are Christians, all of us who are in Christ. Because of this federal relationship I must believe that I have been crucified with Him. In exactly the same way that when Adam sinned, I sinned, so when Christ was crucified I was crucified. I died with Him, was buried with Him, and rose with Him. Go on to Ephesians 2:6: 'And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Now Paul is not talking here about something that is going to happen to us. What Paul says there is that, federally and in terms of this relationship, though we are still on earth, we who are Christians are in Christ seated with Him in the heavenly places *now*.

But we have not finished. We are told that we are 'complete in him, which is the head ...' (Col. 2:10). That is obviously, again, a federal statement, a legal statement, or a *forensic* statement. I hope that nobody feels that all this is bewildering and baffling. My dear friends, I am telling you the greatest things you will ever hear, I am telling you the truth about yourself and about myself, thank God! Do not be thrown by these terms, these are the scriptural statements. Of course they are difficult, but anything worth having is difficult. And if you are not interested in it because it is difficult, I say that you had better make sure that you are a Christian at all. We are seated in the heavenly places, we are complete in Him. Listen again: 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus,' Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' Already that has happened. Of course, actually and experientially it has not all been worked out. But I am already finally redeemed in Him. That is why in Romans 8 Paul jumps from justification to glorification and says that those who have been called have already been glorified. That is why the union is indissoluble. But let us hold on to these things one by one. He 'is made unto us wisdom, and [p 115] righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' So, what this teaching really says is something like this: our sins were imputed to Him; His righteousness is imputed to us. When we come to the doctrine of justification I shall elaborate that, but that is what it means at this point, that all that is in Him is put to my account because of our union.

The next thing, therefore, that I must emphasise is that *we are sealed by the Holy Spirit* because of our union with Him. It is by the sealing, in a sense, that the union comes about; but the two are separate. Because I am joined to Him, I am sealed by the Spirit. It is because I am one with Him that I receive the Spirit which He received without measure.

The next consequence of this union is that we receive the adoption. That is a separate doctrine and we shall be dealing with that. The union of the believer with Christ is not the same thing as the adoption, as we shall see, but the adoption is one of the consequences of the union.

And the last thing is this: because we are adopted, Paul argues, again in Romans 8, that we are 'heirs of God' and, therefore, 'joint-heirs with Christ' (v. 17). Christ is an heir, so we must be joint heirs, and we are joint heirs of the glory which God has prepared for those who love Him. So there in that list I have been giving you the federal and the objective results of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, let me just give you the list of the vital subjective and spiritual results. It means that we have fellowship with Him. That is a term that includes it all. This is elaborated in John 17 and in the first epistle of John. Again, you find it in John 1:16: 'And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for [upon] grace.' It also means, as we are told in 2 Corinthians 3:18, that we 'are changed into the same image from glory to glory'. What a concept! Because we are joined to Him, we become like Him. That is the purpose of salvation—to make us 'to be conformed to the image of his [God's] Son' (Rom. 8:29). As we are joined to Him, and as we look at Him with unveiled face, we become changed into His image.

That is the Christian life. That is what is happening to all of us. That is what must happen to all of us if we are truly Christian. We are not static. I am referring, of course, to our likeness to Him in His human nature. We do not become divine, but we do become as He was when He was living in this world. We become like God's dear Son. He is the firstborn among many brethren in that respect. And then, of course, it has the consequence that we bear fruit and become people He can use. That is the great teaching of John 15.

And then the last thing that I would emphasise is *our fellowship in His sufferings, and our fellowship even in His death*. 'That I may know [p 116] him' says Paul in Philippians 3:10–11, 'and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.' What great thoughts! We must work them out, think them out and pray them out. Paul puts that in another way in Colossians 1:24: 'Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.' I do not pretend to understand that fully, but I do know that there is no higher statement of the doctrine of the union of the believer with His Lord. The Apostle interprets his own sufferings in the flesh and in the body as, in a sense, filling up what remains of the sufferings and the afflictions of Christ Himself. Paul is bearing that in his own flesh. The result of the mystical union is that he enters into this mystical fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. There were people living in the Middle Ages of whom it is said that they so meditated upon and contemplated their Lord and all that He had done for them, that some of them even developed in their physical hands the imprint of nails, the *stigmata*. I do not know, it is not impossible. Such things do happen.

But all I am concerned to emphasise is that the more deeply we realise the truth about this union between us and our Lord, the more we shall know something of the fellowship of His sufferings. In this world He was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief' (Isa. 53:3). That was because of the sin of the world. And because He saw the enmity of the human heart against His Father, it hurt Him, it grieved Him and He suffered. There is no more delicate test of our relationship to Him and our union with Him than the extent to which you and I know something about this suffering. It is not a glib talking about 'wanting souls to be saved'. No, no. It is much deeper than that. That can be purely carnal. But this is something that is always spiritual; we really suffer because of the sin of men and women and their lost condition. Because of our union with Him, we may know something of groaning in the spirit as He knew it; this deep concern, this pain, this agony of soul. It is one of the subjective consequences of our union with our blessed Lord and Saviour.

May God through the Holy Spirit open our eyes to this wondrous doctrine of the union of the believer with His Lord, and may we be at great pains to work it out in detail, to apply it to ourselves, to tell ourselves, 'I am crucified with Him. I am planted into the likeness of His death. I have died with Him. I have been buried with Him. I have risen with Him. I am seated in the heavenly places with Him. That is my position. It is true of me because I am in Christ and joined to Him.'

12

Conversion

We come now to a kind of turning point in our consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. So far we have been looking at His work as He does various things to us, in the depths and recesses of our being. All that we have considered so far in terms of the effectual call and regeneration and our union with Christ can be described in that way. It is something that the Spirit does and of which, at the time, one may not be actively conscious, or at least our consciousness is not essential to the work being done.

Now we come to what we may describe as the manifestations and the results of that work. But though I put it like that, we must again be very careful in the use of chronological sequence. So many of these things really cannot be divided up in terms of time like this. We must keep them clear in our minds, we must keep them clear as ideas, but so many seem to happen at almost exactly the same moment. It has been argued by some of the greatest teachers of the Church that a person may be regenerate for a number of years without its manifesting itself. I find it very difficult to subscribe to that, but I hesitate to pit my opinion against such great authorities. Again, I say that simply to show the kind of distinction that I am drawing.

So we must now consider the manifestations of all that we have considered together and here, too, the question of the order of these doctrines is most interesting. Once more, people disagree as to which doctrine should be put next, but for myself, the next is the biblical doctrine concerning *conversion*. Here is the regenerate person, the regenerate soul. Now that person is going to *do* something, and that action marks the moment of conversion.

What do we mean by conversion? It is the first exercise of the new [p 118] nature in ceasing from old forms of life and starting a new life. It is the first action of the regenerate soul in moving *from* something to something. The very term suggests that: conversion means a turning from one thing to another. The term is not used very frequently in the Scriptures but the truth which the word connotes and represents appears constantly.

You will find that in the Scriptures the term itself is sometimes used in a more general way for any turning. For instance, it is sometimes used even of a believer. Our Lord rebuked Peter on one occasion and said, 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren' (Luke 22:32). He meant: When you come back again, when you have turned back. Here the word does not refer to Peter's original coming into the Christian life, he was already in it, but he was going to backslide, he was going to go astray and then come back. That is described as conversion, but in the consideration of biblical doctrines, it is well to confine the word 'conversion' to the sense which is normally given to it when we talk together about these things, that is, it is the initial step in the conscious history of the soul in its relationship to God, it is the first exercise, the first manifestation, of the new life that has been received in regeneration.

This, of course, is something which is essential and there are many statements to that effect. It is stated specifically in Matthew 18:3: 'Verily I say unto you,' says our Lord, 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' But all the texts which we have already considered in dealing with the doctrine of regeneration are equally applicable here, texts such as, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:14), and, 'the carnal mind is enmity against God' (Rom. 8:7). Men and women must come from that before they can be Christians; they must turn from that to this other condition. So conversion is essential. Nobody is born a Christian. We were all born in sin, 'shapen in iniquity' (Ps. 51:5); we were all 'the children of wrath, even as others' (Eph. 2:3), we are all subjects of original sin and original guilt, so we must all undergo conversion; and the Bible is quite explicit about this.

The next question, therefore, to ask is: How does it take place? What is the agency in conversion? And here the answer is quite simple. It is first of all and primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit does it through the effectual call. We have considered that doctrine and that is how this process of

conversion takes place. [p 119] The call becomes effectual and it is that which leads to the next step—what you and I *do*. You notice that we are mentioning this for the first time, but in any definition of conversion you must bring in the human as well as the divine activity. The call comes effectually and because it comes effectually we do something about it. That is conversion: the two sides, the call—the response. We have seen how all this becomes possible, but in dealing with conversion, of necessity we must give equal emphasis to the activity of human beings. Now in regeneration and in the union, we are absolutely passive; we play no part at all; it is entirely the work of the Spirit of God in the heart. But in conversion we act, we move, we are called and we do it.

We come, then, to consider the characteristics of conversion and this, I sometimes think, is one of the most important topics that Christian people can consider together. Why is that? Well, it is vital that we should consider the biblical teaching about conversion because there is such a thing as a *'temporary conversion'*. Have you noticed how often that is dealt with by our Lord Himself in His own teaching, how at times He almost seems to discourage people from going after Him? There was a man who said, 'I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,' and our Lord, instead of saying, 'Marvellous!' said, 'Wait a minute. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:19–20). "Do you realise what you're doing?" he said in effect. "It's a very foolish man who goes to war without making sure of his resources. It's an equally foolish man who starts building a tower without making certain that he's got sufficient material to finish it.'

Our Lord, because He knew the danger of a 'temporary something' happening, was constantly dealing with it, and seemed to be repelling people. Indeed, they charged Him with making discipleship impossible. Take that great sixth chapter of John where the people were running after Him and hanging on to His words because of the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, and our Lord seemed to be trying deliberately to repel them. So a large number, who thought they were disciples, went back, we are told, and walked no longer with Him. It is quite clear that our Lord was giving that teaching quite deliberately because He was drawing a distinction between the spirit and the flesh. He knew that they were carnal and He was anxious to stress the vital importance of grasping the spiritual.

Take also the parable in Matthew 13—the parable of the sower—and our Lord's own exposition of it. Notice particularly verses 20 and [p 120] 21: 'But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.' But notice what our Lord says about this same man: he, 'anon with joy receiveth it [the word]'. That is what I mean by a temporary conversion. He seems to have received the word, he is full of joy but he has no root in him and that is why he ends up with nothing at all. Now that is our Lord's own teaching; there is the possibility of this very joyful conversion and yet there is nothing there in a vital, living sense, and it proves temporary.

There is also further teaching in the Scriptures about this same thing. Take Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. We are told in verse 13, 'Simon himself believed also: and ... was baptised.' And yet look at the end of that man's story. He was 'in the gall of bitterness' (v. 23), and Peter simply said to him that he had better ask God to have mercy and grant him repentance. He seemed to be a true believer, but was he?

Then Paul speaks, in 1 Timothy 1:19–20, of 'Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.' Now that is very serious teaching and he says the same thing in 2 Timothy 2. Here Paul is writing to Timothy about certain people who seemed to have been believers but were now denying the resurrection, as a result of which, some frightened Christians thought that the whole Church was collapsing. It is all right, says Paul: 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his' (v. 19). God knows; He is not deceived or deluded. There is such a thing as temporary conversions, temporary believers, but they are not true believers. That is why it is so vital that we should know the biblical teaching as to what conversion really is.

What about the case of Demas, I wonder? There are many who would say that Demas was never a believer at all. I would not like to go so far. He may have been backsliding: 'Demas hath forsaken me,

having loved this present world' (2 Tim. 4:10). But at any rate he is a doubtful case. And then you come to that great classic passage in this connection in Hebrews 6, with a similar passage in the tenth chapter of that epistle. 'It is impossible for those who were once enlightened ... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance' (Heb. 6:4, 6). [p 121]

Therefore I deliberately use this heading of 'temporary conversion'. There is obviously something wrong with these people, so we must ask questions. We must consider, we must have definitions, because 'All that glitters is not gold.' All that appears to be conversion is most certainly not conversion according to our Lord's own teaching and the teaching of the inspired apostles. So I know nothing that is so dangerous, reprehensible and unscriptural as to say, 'But you mustn't ask these questions.' No, no, let them come. Always ask: Does the Scripture entitle us to say that? If we are to be true teachers of the word, and helpers of others, and concerned about the glory of God, we must realise that there is such a thing as a temporary conversion which is based upon misunderstanding.

My second reason for being concerned about precise definitions is that there are not only temporary conversions but even *counterfeit conversions*. Now I draw a distinction, you will notice, between the two and the difference is that in the case of a temporary conversion, conversion is something that has happened as the result of the presentation of the biblical truth. In the case of a counterfeit conversion, it is a phenomenon which, though closely resembling and simulating Christian conversion, has been produced by some other agency that is not the truth. So we must draw the distinction.

This was never more necessary than today, because there are so many people who seem to think that as long as there is a great change in the person's life, it must be a true conversion. If a man gives up sins and lives a good life and does good, that, they say, is Christian. But it may not be. It is possible for a man to undergo a great, profound, climactic change in his life and way of living and experience which has nothing to do with Christianity. People may even come out of the world and join a church, and their whole life from the outside may apparently be different, but it may be a counterfeit conversion. It is a conversion in the sense that they have left one thing and have come to another, have given up sins and are now doing good but it is counterfeit because they lack the necessary essential relationship to truth. If you are only interested in phenomena, if you are only interested in someone who can get up and say, 'My whole life is absolutely changed,' then you need only go to books on psychology. Psychology has been very popular now for many years, and it makes a most powerful attack upon the Christian faith—that is why I am so concerned about it. I heard a man say that if his Christian faith were attacked, it would not worry him. He would simply reply, 'I don't care what you [p 122] people say; I don't care what science says, I *know* because of what's happening to me.'

Now my response to that was, 'Yes, and every psychologist in your audience would smile. They would say, "We agree that you have had a psychological change and experience. But, of course, many things can do that." And they would continue to dismiss the whole of Christianity.'

No, the defence of the Christian faith must never rely simply upon some experience that you and I have had. The defence of the Christian faith is objective truth. So unless we are careful at this point in defining conversion the danger is that we shall have nothing to say to those who have undergone one of these counterfeit experiences.

Then there is one other thing—and here we leave the counterfeit and the temporary and come to something which is more immediately practical. There are variable elements in connection with conversion, and because of these we must be very careful that we know what the essential elements are. Let me illustrate what I mean. Take the *time element*, the time factor in conversion. Must it be sudden? Is it impossible for it to be gradual? Well, I would say that the Scripture does not teach that it must of necessity be sudden. The great thing is that it has happened, whether sudden or gradual. The time element is not one of the absolute essentials; it may have its importance, but it is not vital.

Secondly, must one's conversion of necessity be *dramatic*? We all tend to emphasise these, do we not? They have human interest, we say, and we must be interesting. But must conversion be dramatic? Now if you read just one chapter in the Scriptures—Acts 16—you will see that you have no right to say that. Of course, if you only read the story of the Philippian jailer, then you will say conversion must be full of

drama. But I am equally interested in the story of Lydia and there is nothing to suggest that about her conversion. Not at all! It may have been quite quiet, but it was equally a conversion. So here we have another variable element. Dramatic quality may be there, but it may not be. It is not essential.

Then there is the old vexed question of the place of feelings. Of course, they must be there, but there are feelings and feelings. They may be very intense, or they may not be, but they are still feelings. We all differ by nature and temperament, and in this matter of feelings we differ very much indeed. The most demonstrative person is not always the one who feels most.

[p 123]

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

W. Wordsworth

So it is not the one who is weeping the most copiously who is of necessity the most intensely feeling. Another person may be feeling so deeply that his feelings are down beyond the very possibility of tears, as it were. Feelings are variable and express themselves variously in different people. They must be present, but God forbid that we should insist upon a particular intensity or display of feelings.

And then there is the whole question of age. Some have said that unless you are converted when you are an adolescent, you will never be converted at all, because the requisite psychological factors can never be there again. What utter rubbish! How unscriptural! I have never seen a more striking conversion than I once saw in a man aged seventy-seven: thank God for that! No, there is no age limit; age does not make the slightest difference. We are talking about something the Holy Spirit produces. There is as much hope for the man who is shivering on the brink of the grave and of hell as for the adolescent—if you are interested in true conversion, that is. If you are interested in psychological experiences, then I agree, adolescence is the right time for it. Everything is very explosive at that point; you merely strike a match and there it is. But we are not interested in psychological changes; we are talking about true, Christian, spiritual conversion. And there age, thank God, is a complete irrelevance.

Now we have considered these things because there is always a tendency to standardise the variable aspect of conversion. Sometimes it works out in the evangelist, in his desiring everybody to become a Christian in the same way, and he is doubtful of the converts unless they are all the same. But it may happen in us, too, we all desire to be the same. That is always one of the dangerous things about reading of somebody else's experiences; consciously or unconsciously we tend to reproduce them. It is a part of our make-up and of our nature, we are imitators, and if we like a thing that we see in someone else, then we wish that to be true of us, too.

Then we also tend to concentrate on particular manifestations of conversion. The feelings, for instance, are only one aspect, yet we put all our emphasis on them. This can be extremely dangerous because feelings, as I have indicated, are one of a number of variables, and this **[p 124]** way may lead to tragedy. Some people are always insisting upon the presence of a variable quality, which is not essential. Thinking it was essential, and not having experienced it, they say that they have never been converted. And this can lead to untold and unnecessary unhappiness. In a way, the great instance of that is John Wesley who thought, immediately after his experience in Aldersgate Street, that that was his conversion, that he had never been a Christian until that moment. Years later he said that he had been quite wrong about that and that he was a Christian already but was 'more like a servant than a son'. All that happened to him there, he said, was that he *realised* his faith.

Well, Wesley may have been right or not; we do not know. But all I am indicating is that if we postulate something that is variable, and insist upon it, we may do ourselves or somebody else great harm. We may tell other people that they are not converted because they do not conform to our particular standard. So we must be very careful that we do not go beyond Scripture and say things which the Bible does not say. Therefore, how vital, how essential it is, that we should have clear definitions in our mind.

What, then, are the permanent and essential elements in conversion? Now these are made quite plain in Scripture, but not only there. We know that what we shall now be considering must be true because of the previous doctrines. This is something that really thrills me! There is such a consistency in the scriptural teaching. These doctrines are all consistent with one another, and if we allow ourselves to be led by the Bible, we shall not be denying at one point what we have said at another. And the doctrines we have already considered make the truth of these permanent and essential elements in conversion inevitable and clear.

Another argument—and I do want to emphasise this—is that what the Scriptures tell us about the permanent and essential elements in conversion has always been repeated in all great revivals in the long history of the Christian Church. That is most important. If you start saying that, because this is the late twentieth century, we can expect something different or that things need not be the same, you are being unscriptural. If this is the work of God, I do not care what century it happens in, it will have the same marks upon it, the same stamp. Read the history of revivals and you will find that they have always reproduced similar characteristics. It has often been said that every revival is nothing but a return to the book of Acts. Every true sign of religion [p 125] is first-century religion coming up again. Always! There is a standard pattern, and all the histories show that the revivals conform to these great essential elements.

It is not only true in the history of revival. It is equally true in the history of persons, individuals, the saints who have been converted. Men and women of God are always the same. I do not care where they are, from what country, what century, or what time—it makes no difference. The fact is that they are men and women of God, and it is their relationship to God that determines what they must be. And that does not change throughout the centuries because God does not change. There is no special type of man or woman of God for the twentieth century, and do not believe it if anybody tells you there is. They must be the same, they always have been. You can read of them in the early centuries, in the Middle Ages, at the time of the Reformation, in the period of the Puritans, the evangelicals of the eighteenth century—they are always the same. And each one reminds you of the others.

What, then, are these permanent elements? There are two essential elements in conversion, and these are emphasised everywhere in the Scripture, in the Gospels, in the book of Acts and in the epistles. Paul, fortunately, has put it all in a phrase for us, in Acts 20:21, on that moving occasion when he said farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. I have sometimes thought that if there was one scene in history more than any other at which I should like to have been present, it was just that. ‘I’m going,’ Paul says, in effect, to the elders, ‘you’ll never see me again, and I want you to hold on to the things I’ve told you, and to remember what I did when I was with you.’ What was this? ‘Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*’ That is conversion. Those are the essential and the only essential elements in conversion. Repentance and faith. Sudden or gradual, it does not matter. Repentance must be there; faith must be there. If one is missing it is not conversion. Both are essential.

At this point, let me ask a question. In which order do they come? Which comes first, repentance or faith? Now that is a fascinating question. There is a sense in which faith is bound to come before repentance, and yet I shall not put it like that, and for this reason: when I am talking about faith, I mean it in the sense that the apostle Paul used it—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not faith in general. There must be faith in general before you can repent, because if you do not [p 126] believe certain things about God, you do not act upon it and there is no repentance. But I am referring to faith in the special sense of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In that case, repentance comes before faith and Paul puts them in that order: ‘Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Why must repentance come first? Well, you will find that it always comes first in Scripture. Who was the first preacher in the New Testament? The answer is John the Baptist. What did he preach? The ‘baptism of repentance for the remission of sins’ (Mark 1:4). This was *the* message of the forerunner and the forerunner always comes first. Then the second preacher was the Lord Jesus Christ and if you turn to the Gospels and observe the first thing He ever said you will find that He again exhorted the people to repent and to believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). So, exactly like John the Baptist, the first thing He taught was repentance.

Then what did Peter preach? Take the great sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter preached and the people cried out saying, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' This was the reply: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost' (Acts 2:37–38). *Repent*. And, as I have already quoted to you, repentance was the message of the apostle Paul. He started with repentance. He did it in Athens: God '... commandeth all men every where to repent' (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is of necessity the first message, and it surely must be. It is scriptural, yes, but Scripture also enables us to reason. Let me put it to you like this: Why should men and women believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? It is no use just asking them to believe in Christ. They are entitled to ask, 'Why should I believe in Him?' That is a perfectly fair question. And people do not see any need or necessity for believing in the Lord Jesus Christ if they do not know what repentance is. Of course you may be inviting them to Christ as a helper, or as a friend, or as a healer of the body, but that is not Christian conversion. No, no, people must know *why* they must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The law is our schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24) to bring us there and the law works repentance.

In other words, the primary point about conversion, the primary thing in the whole of Christian salvation, is to bring us into the right relationship with God. Why did Christ come? Why did He die? The **[p 127]** answer is that He did it all to bring us to God. And if we think about these things in any way except in terms of being reconciled to God, our view is entirely false. I say it hesitatingly because I know the danger of being misunderstood, but there is far too much Christianity today, it seems to me, that stops at the Lord Jesus Christ and does not realise that He came and did everything in order to reconcile us to God. Indeed, it was God who was 'in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). I think the greatest weakness in evangelical Christianity today is that it forgets God. We are interested in experiences, we are interested in happiness, we are interested in subjective states. But the first need of every soul, as we shall see, it to be right with God. Nothing matters but that. The gospel starts with God, because what is wrong with everybody is that they are in a wrong relationship to Him.

So we *must* put repentance first; it is the original trouble, the main consequence of the fall and original sin. God is orderly in His working, and He starts with the big thing, the first thing. Therefore, in the next lecture, we shall go on to deal with repentance.

[p 128]

13

Repentance

Repentance, as we have seen, always comes before faith in our response to the gospel, so we will now look at repentance. The best way to start when considering all these doctrines—a method we have consistently adopted—is to notice the meaning and the connotation of the terms that are used. Now the word *repentance* means ‘to think again’, ‘to think once more’. So whereas you had dismissed this whole subject of religion, and had given up thinking about it, repentance means that you think again. ‘Repent’ is, of course, a Latin word which we have taken over into the English language and as far as it goes it is all right. Yet in many ways it is a great misfortune that this particular word is the one that we use most frequently and the one that we find in our various translations of the Scriptures because the original Greek word, *metanoia*, used in the New Testament is a much bigger word than its Latin equivalent. *Metanoia*, repentance, does not merely mean to think again. It carries with it a much more significant element, which is that this thinking again results in our changing our minds. And that is a vital addition.

Jesus told a parable which states this perfectly.

A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

(Matt. 21:28–32)

[p 129] Now the point I am making is shown very clearly in the case of the first son. When the father asked him to go and work in the vineyard, he refused: but afterwards he repented and went. So what happened to him? Well, he obviously reconsidered it. Having said in that brusque, impolite manner, ‘I will not,’ and having walked away, probably in a rage because his father was interrupting his plans, he came back to it again and he thought again about it. It does mean that—that is the first step. You go back and re-examine the thing you have already dismissed. You think again. Ah yes, but not only that: he thought differently. He changed his mind. He now went and worked in the vineyard, which he formerly had refused to do.

But that does not exhaust the full content of this great term. You change your mind, yes, but in changing your mind, you must be conscious of a sense of regret for the wrong view that you had taken previously and the wrong conduct that had emanated from that wrong view. So clearly, this element of regret is also present. This young man, when he thought about it again, must have said, ‘It was very wrong of me to have spoken like that to my father.’ Not only did he change his mind, he regretted that he had said and thought the wrong thing. So we see that generally the best way to discover the meaning of New Testament terms is not so much to consult dictionaries as to consult the context. Our Lord defines what He means by His terms in a parable like this.

Then there is another element which is vitally essential in repentance and that is *a change of conduct*: ‘Afterward he repented, *and went*.’ The action was a part of the repentance. If the son had merely changed his point of view and had felt sorry that he had spoken to his father in the way he did, but then had just sat down, or had gone to spend the afternoon at the seaside with his friends, he would not really have repented. That would have been remorse. It is a vital part of the process of repentance that we *do* the thing that we formerly were refusing to do. There, then, are the essential elements of this condition, this attitude, this new something that comes into being when people hear the call of the gospel effectually and respond to it.

The next question is: What leads to repentance? In a sense, we have already answered by saying that it is the effectual call. Yes, but that is not enough. We must analyse it still more. What produces repentance in

us? And the answer of the Bible to that question is the blessed word *grace*. Repentance is a gift of God which leads to an activity on the part of men and women. Take Zechariah 12:10 where God says [p 130] that 'the spirit of grace and of supplication' will be poured out on His people. That is it. Without grace and supplication there cannot be repentance.

Then come to the New Testament. 'Him' says Peter, 'hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins' (Acts 5:31). Had you ever noticed that Christ gives repentance quite as much as He gives forgiveness of sins? Then in Acts 11:18 we read about the reaction of the people who had listened to Peter's story of the conversion of Cornelius. They were amazed that the Holy Spirit had descended upon these Gentiles exactly as He had done on the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. And, we are told, 'When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.' Repentance is the gift of grace, the gift of God.

Moving on to Paul, he writes to Timothy, 'In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth' (2 Tim. 2:25). Paul is telling Timothy what to do with people who have become heretical, people who have gone astray and Paul says that Timothy must instruct them in meekness. And this is Paul's reason: 'if God peradventure will give them repentance'. You notice where repentance comes from.

So repentance is a gift of grace, leading to action on our part. And the way in which God does this is through the teaching, the preaching, of the Word. The Bible is full of this. The gospel is preached, the word is proclaimed, calling men and women to repentance. '[God] commandeth all men every where to repent' (Acts 17:30). How? By the preaching of the word. You have a great instance of that in the book of Jonah where Jonah's preaching produced repentance in the Ninevites. There is another in Acts 2 when the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, was preaching at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. And as he preached, and as the Holy Spirit applied the word, the people cried out saying, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' (Acts 2:37). That is an indication of repentance, and it was the preached word that did it. It is the presentation of the truth that produces this condition of repentance.

And Paul again, in reminding the Thessalonians of what had happened to them, tells them that the gospel that he had preached had come 'not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy [p 131] Ghost, and in much assurance'. And what was its effect? They 'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God' (1 Thess. 1:5, 9). It produced repentance.

Now that brings us on to our third principle. We have considered the terms, and how repentance is brought about, and now we must ask this question: *What is it in men and women that is engaged or involved in repentance?* We are now trying to measure and to estimate the greatness of repentance and my reason for doing this is not only that it is something that is plainly taught in Scripture but that furthermore while these lectures are called discourses and addresses (and I call them that myself), I cannot forget that I am a preacher. And a man who can forget that he is a preacher when he is handling the word of God needs to repent, because this is not to be considered theoretically, it is something very practical. We must consider this matter because, surely, the thing that accounts more than anything else for the state of the Church, as well as the state of the world today, is our failure to realise the full content of what is meant by repentance. This is the note that is missing. Very often people are rushed to decisions without knowing what repentance means. We have not taken the biblical view of repentance in its height and depth and length and breadth.

Let me show you, then, what is engaged in a man or woman in repentance, what is involved. And the answer is, of course, the whole person. Repentance must include the whole person or it is not really repentance. Now the classic statement of this is in Romans 6:17: 'But God be thanked,' says the Apostle, 'that ye were servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.' Or 'the form of sound words', it does not matter which way you translate it.

So let us analyse that. What is engaged? Well, first and foremost, the mind, the intellect. So many people seem to think that the way to call people to repentance is just to press them to *do* something. They address the will only. But the will comes last, not first. Again, there is another statement of this in Romans

3:20: 'By the law,' says the Apostle, 'is the knowledge of sin.' That is what the law is for. Now I do trust that nobody gets tired of my constant references to the Puritans; it will be a sad day when people do tire of them! But I refer to them for this reason: they always believed in doing what they called 'a thorough law-work' before they applied the message of the gospel. They took time, in other words, to see that people were truly convicted of sin. [p 132] This preliminary law-work was equally characteristic of the preaching of George Whitefield and of John and Charles Wesley. Indeed, it continued to be the characteristic of true evangelical preaching until the end of the nineteenth century.

Now 'law-work' meant just this: 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.' And that is the function of the law. The law 'was added because of transgression' (Gal. 3:19). It was never introduced in order to provide people with a way of salvation, it could not do that because it was 'weak through the flesh' (Rom. 8:3). So, then, why the law? Well, it was introduced to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Rom. 7:13). Men and women do not like this idea of sin, they rebel against it, they hate it. And that is the very reason why they need to be held under the law. They need to be convicted of sin, they need to have their mind addressed and enlightened with regard to their condition. So preaching about repentance starts with the intellect and the understanding. If you exclude the intellect and the mind, it means you are excluding the law as well, and that is a terrible thing; for it is God Himself who gave the law and He gave it for this specific purpose.

'Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' says Job (Job 42:6). Consider also Psalm 51 and notice the deep feeling expressed by David. Then take the famous parable spoken by our Lord about the Pharisee and the tax collector. We are told that the tax collector, 'smote upon his breast' (Luke 18:13). He not only felt that he could not look up into heaven, that he had no right to speak and could only stand afar off, but he smote his breast. Romans 7:24 says, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' And in 2 Corinthians 7:11 there is an extraordinary description of the emotions involved in true repentance. But our blessed Lord Himself has said the whole thing in one of His beatitudes, in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are they that mourn' (Matt. 5:4); they are not only poor in spirit, they mourn. Now is this not something that somehow or other has been overlooked by us? How often at the present time do you see people in agony because of sin? How many of our converts know anything about an anguish of soul? How often today are men and women seen to be shedding tears because of their conviction of sin? How many people have you known who have groaned because of their sinfulness? Have *we*, I wonder? But all these are to be found in the Scriptures.

Repentance includes the heart and the feelings. It is not a passing sorrow; it is not some desire for something. No, no, this law-work [p 133] leads to profound emotion. As I have said, the intensity of the emotional manifestation will vary from case to case. We differ emotionally as we differ in every other respect, but what I am concerned to emphasise is that there always must be this powerful element of emotion; and it is not true repentance if it is not there. Think of Charles Wesley's great hymn: 'Jesu, lover of my soul'. Let us never forget that it was that godly, moral and religious young man who said,

Just and holy is Thy Name,

I am all unrighteousness.

Vile and full of sin I am.

You feel the emotion; he is conscious of it. There must be a kind of anguish, a sense of fear and dread. The emotions are always engaged in repentance; as Paul says 'a godly sorrow' (2 Cor. 7:10).

And then, thirdly, repentance also includes the *will*. This is vital. As Isaiah said, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought' (Isa. 55:7). He must forsake it. He is not only to feel sorry, he is not only to see his sin, he must *leave* it. 'Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God' (Joel 2:13). *Do* something about it. Having seen the sin, the law-work having been done, your mind having been persuaded, having thought it—act upon it! I might have included the text from Joel 2 equally well in the previous section, under emotion. Christian people, the trouble with us is that we are much too healthy; we have never really groaned because of our sinfulness; we have never felt it. We are much too light: that is the trouble in the Church. But this is the scriptural definition of repentance.

Then that brings us to Luke 3, with John the Baptist's preaching: 'Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham' (Luke 3:8). You have got to do something about it, said John. It is just not enough to feel something while I'm preaching, 'Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.' And then John went into details. The people came to him in deputations asking him, 'What shall we do? (Luke 3:10, 12, 14). And he gave them very specific answers to their questions, answers which deserve careful consideration. To the people, he said, 'He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.' [p 134] Then publicans also came and asked the same question, 'And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.' Finally soldiers came, 'And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.' The will must be engaged.

You find the same teaching in the parable about the two sons in Matthew 21; there is a turning which is an essential part of repentance. The will comes into operation and it turns us *from* what was wrong *to* what is right. Paul's commission given to him by our Lord on the road to Damascus told him to go and teach the Gentiles, 'to *turn* them from darkness to light' (Acts 26:18). Action is an essential part. And Paul reminds the Thessalonians again, 'How ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God' (1 Thess. 1:9).

Now that gives us some estimate of the greatness of this act of repentance: it takes up the whole person. But the fourth principle is: *What are the questions or the matters with which repentance deals?* Here again we will see the greatness of repentance. What are the subjects? The first is *God Himself*. Repentance means a changed view of God. We think again. We have had wrong views of God and we now have another view. Yes, and an entirely different view of men and women.

Then the other subject is the relationship between God and man. We see how that needs to be changed. According to 'the natural man' there is no need to worry about that because God is love. If he believes in God at all, 'God is love,' he says, 'I do a bit of good and everything will be all right.' When men and women repent, they have an entirely new mind on this relationship, and also on life itself and the whole purpose of life and how it should be lived. And a great change takes place in their view of death and of eternity. In other words, repentance not only includes the whole person, it includes that person's whole outlook upon everything that is of value and of concern in this life and in this world.

In the fifth principle we must consider *what exactly repentance leads to in experience*. How can I know that I have repented? First of all, it involves a change in our view of and thoughts concerning God. It is only when we repent that we really see the holiness and the greatness of God. The moment we see it, we have repented. We have this other view. By nature, our view of God is entirely wrong: 'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be' (Rom. 8:7). 'The fool hath said in his heart, [p 135] There is no God' (Ps. 14:1). And then there are others who, if they claim to believe in God, have a God of their own conjuring up and of their own imaginations, some projection of themselves and their own ideas. Those who say, 'I believe in God,' have no conception of God. Their view of God is wrong; it is false and they need an entire change.

Once again, is this not also something which has gone sour, which has got lost and gone astray among us? Do we walk in the fear of God? Are we people who give the impression that we know something about the greatness of God? People who come near to God walk softly. We are told in the book of Acts that the believers walked 'in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost' (Acts 9:31). But somehow or other we seem to have harboured the idea in these last years that the Christian's joy means that there must never be any impression of the fear of God. But we are told by the New Testament to serve Him with 'reverence and godly fear' (Heb. 12:28), because He is great, He is holy. Yes, you can have the joy of the Lord and yet walk in the fear of the Lord at the same time. It is a holy fear. It is not a fear that 'hath torment' (1 John 4:18), it is not a craven fear, but surely the nearer we are to Christ and to God, and the more Christ is formed in us, the greater will be our conception of God and we shall reflect it in our humility. Somehow a sense of God seems to have vanished from us. We are so glib and superficial; we talk about 'being converted' and so on, but we forget that we are brought to a holy God.

So we have lost a reverence for God and, therefore, for the whole of life, and also for the justice of God and the truth of God. But all these things bring us to a knowledge of the mercy of God, of His compassion, His kindness and His love. These things all go together. The Christian, at one and the same time, knows about the justice of God and the love of God. Justice and mercy are met together—that is essential Christianity. It is only the Christian who can hold those two things at the same time.

Indeed, it is this artificial, erroneous dichotomy which we seem to have introduced that is so unscriptural. People are so anxious to emphasise the love of God, that they forget the justice of God which is still there. In Christ they are met together. On the cross of Calvary the justice is fully satisfied and the love streams forth; but at the same time the Christian's love of God is a holy love; the Christian's joy is a holy joy. Everything must be holy. So that is something of the new thoughts and the new idea of God that people, who have repented, have when they come to themselves.

[p 136] A further change is that far from being self-satisfied as they were, they now have a sense of guilt and of unworthiness. They have a feeling that they have sinned against God. Not only that; they have, as David brings out so amazingly in Psalm 51, and as Paul shows in Romans 7, they have a sense of pollution: 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts ... Wash me ...' (Ps. 51:5-7). I need to be washed. I am polluted and foul. 'In me,' says Paul, '(that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing' (Rom. 7:18). Is that true of you? Have you realised that? However we may interpret that chapter, it must mean that at some time or other we have felt that.

And that is the question: have you ever felt that pollution? Do you know yourself sufficiently well to know it? Have you ever known that in you dwells no good thing? 'Vile and full of sin I am,' wrote Charles Wesley. The greater the saint the more he or she is aware of that. In other words, their repentance is deeper. They know about the corruption of their heart, the vileness that is in them as the result of the fall and original sin. And then they realise, on top of all that, their own weakness, their own helplessness. Those who think they can live the Sermon on the Mount in their own strength are people who are just ignorant, that is the only thing to say about them because the first statement in that sermon is, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Matt. 5:3), the people who realise they cannot do anything.

What else changes? Well, their views on life and living. They now have a sense of the hatefulness of sin. They are not only aware of their sinful acts and their sinful nature, they hate sin as sin. They have a profound hatred of it as something opposed to God that should never have entered into this world. But, on the other hand, they have a sense of the beauty of holiness, the beauty and the perfection of righteousness. They see the beauty and the glory of God's holy law. These things are no longer abhorrent to them. They acknowledge that the law of God is perfect and pure and holy and just and righteous. It is no longer grievous to them. They do not talk about the Christian life being a narrow life. In a sense, they almost want it to be narrower. They are not trying to live as near as they can to the world; they hate all that and desire to be holy.

What, then, is the result of all this? Let me summarise it. Repentance must result in a sense of grief and of sorrow because of sin. It includes self-loathing—a hatred of one's sinful nature. Do we hate ourselves, I wonder? 'Oh wretched man that I am!' says Paul in **[p 137]** Romans 7:24—that is it. It also leads to a sense of fear because we have sinned against this holy God, who is righteous and just and who is the Lord of the universe and the Judge eternal.

Our self-loathing in the light of God's justice and holiness leads to a longing for deliverance, and that, in turn, leads to our doing everything we can in order to make deliverance possible. People who repent do their utmost to save themselves. They may mislead themselves for a while in doing that, but it is a good sign, a sign that they are trying to do everything they can to set themselves free.

And then that goes on to confession of sin to God and a consuming desire to please Him. It means not only that they are poor in spirit and mourn, but that they cry out to God to have mercy upon them. 'Have mercy upon me O God' (Ps. 51:1). Our Lord has put it perfectly in His parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector: 'God have mercy upon me a sinner.' That is the position of those who have repented. They do not, they cannot say more than that at that point. They are broken-hearted; they realise it all; they can but

cast themselves upon the mercy of God. They cannot plead anything else, but they plead that, That, in a sense, is a definition of repentance.

Now just to complete this, let us consider briefly the differences between remorse and repentance, because they are not the same thing. In remorse, you can have a sorrow because of failure and you can be very annoyed with yourself because you have done something that you know to be wrong and that you should not do. Indeed, remorse can go further; it can even include a fear of the consequences. Let us never forget that remorse can go as far as that. But that is not what Paul calls 'godly sorrow'. Let me remind you of what that is. Paul writes:

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance. [You can be made sorry without sorrowing to repentance.] For ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow [this is the thing] worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of ... For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge!

2 Corinthians 7:9–11

You see the passion, the feeling, the emotion. They have seen it with **[p 138]** their minds, they feel it and have done something about it.

So what are the differences between repentance and remorse? Well, true repentance, differing from remorse, includes these elements. It gives us a sense of having offended against God and having grieved Him and hurt Him. It gives us, I repeat, a sense of pollution and of utter unworthiness. It makes us say

I hate the sins that made Thee mourn

That drove Thee from my breast.

William Cowper

It gives us a longing and a determination to be rid of sin. This vehement desire, this activity, this zeal, this revenge that Paul is talking about, this is godly sorrow.

We can again sum it up in one of the Beatitudes. This is the ultimate test of true repentance and the thing that differentiates it most of all from remorse—repentance gives us a hunger and thirst after righteousness. It makes us desire to be like Christ and more and more like Him, to be righteous and holy and clean. We do not simply feel sorrow because we have fallen again and because we are suffering afterwards and have let ourselves down—not at all. Remorse is negative—repentance is positive.

Oh for a heart to praise my God,

A heart from sin set free;

A heart that always feels Thy blood

So freely shed for me.

Charles Wesley

That is repentance.

14

Saving Faith

Having looked at the great biblical doctrine of repentance, we are now ready to look at the corresponding doctrine of *faith*. This particular subject is one of which we read right through the Bible. I suppose that there is more said about faith in the Bible than about anything else because faith is that by which all the blessings of salvation ultimately come to us. We are saved by faith, we are sanctified by faith, we walk by faith. ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith’ (1 John 5:4), and so on.

All these blessings come to us through the medium of faith, so that clearly this is a matter about which we should be quite certain in our minds. Furthermore, as you read the history of the Church throughout the centuries you will find that there has been much disputation about faith and obviously so, because, since it is so central, the enemy, the devil, is more likely to attack here than in connection with any other article of the truth, and he has done so. Indeed, the great Protestant Reformation was, in a sense, nothing but a rediscovery and a redefinition of this great doctrine of faith.

However, it behoves us to touch only upon the great central principles in connection with this doctrine. We could spend a great deal of time on it, but we have much ground to cover and, therefore, we shall consider the most salient features. Faith is the instrument or the channel by which all salvation that is in Christ Jesus enters into us and is appropriated. It is the thing that links us to the fulness that dwells in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is faith in its essence.

Now as you read the Bible, you will find that the word ‘faith’ is used to cover a number of different terms and has several connotations. We are confining ourselves in this study to one only and that is *saving* [p 140] faith, but I will pause very briefly to show you two other uses of the word ‘faith’.

In 1 Corinthians 12, you will find a list of the spiritual gifts—gifts of miracles, gifts of healing, and so on, and among them is the gift of faith. Now faith there obviously does not mean saving faith, because the Apostle’s whole argument in that chapter is that every Christian does not have every one of these gifts of the Spirit; some have one gift, some have another.

So then, it cannot be saving faith because every Christian has that. No, in 1 Corinthians 12 faith refers to the special ability which God, through the Holy Spirit, gives to certain people to live a life of entire dependence directly upon Him—the kind of gift that George Müller or Hudson Taylor had in order that they might exercise their particular ministries. George Müller, indeed, is often known as ‘the man who believed God’. In other words, he had, in an exceptional way, the spiritual gift of faith.

One other use of this word ‘faith’ is found in the list of the fruit of the Spirit given in Galatians 5:22–23. The Authorized Version has: ‘the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith ...’ But that is not a good translation because faith there really means faithfulness. It cannot mean saving faith because that is not one of the fruits of the Spirit. You will generally find that the context will make the meaning quite plain, if you just pay attention to it.

So, to return to saving faith: What is faith? Now, first, we must answer that question generally, and here I would start with a negative. We must stress the fact that it is not something natural. People often put it like this to us. They say, ‘Faith is a natural faculty that every person has. You are always exercising faith in your life, you couldn’t live for a day without doing so.’ Then these are the illustrations they use. ‘You go by train from London to Brighton and immediately you’re exercising faith—in the engine, in the engine driver and in the rails, the sleepers, the bolts and nuts, and so on.’ Or they say, ‘A man goes into an aeroplane—well, he’s exercising faith.’

Now I entirely dissent from that argument and I think it is very important that we should disagree with it. To start with, I do not call that faith at all, because to sit in that train and go from London to Brighton is not an exercise of faith. We are just doing something based upon the law of mathematical probability. That is a vital distinction. What we are saying to ourselves, either consciously or [p 141] unconsciously, is this:

the chances are that this train will go from here to Brighton without an accident. I know that there are occasional railway accidents but they do not happen every day. The law of mathematical probability tells me that probably this train will take me, without an accident, to Brighton. Now that is not faith at all.

Or, to put it another way: as we sit in the train, we are acting on the general experience of men and women who travel in trains. We see others doing the same thing and we know that they do it every day. Experience teaches us that on the whole it is safe to go on a journey in a train. You could say that we are acting upon an argument which is based upon general observation of certain facts.

But that, I say, is not at all faith in the biblical sense, and it is very important to realise this because sometimes the appeal is made like this: 'As you trust the train and the engine driver, why don't you trust the Lord Jesus Christ? You simply have to apply that faculty which you're using every day to this matter of your salvation and you'll be saved—why don't you do it?' Well, the answer is that you cannot do it, and that is why you see that there must be an essential difference between the two.

No, the faith described in the Bible is something unique. You see it to perfection in Abraham and the birth of Isaac. Charles Wesley echoes this story in his hymn. He says,

Faith in Thy power Thou seest I have

For Thou this faith hast wrought.

Faith is not a natural faculty that he has always possessed. It is God who has wrought it.

Dead souls Thou callest from their grave

And speakest worlds from nought.

Then again,

In hope against all human hope

Self desperate I believe.

You do not go into a train like that, do you? You are not hoping against hope that you will arrive in Brighton. Of course not! Quite the reverse. But when Abraham believed God, he *was* hoping against hope. He was not working on the law of mathematical probability. [p 142] He was ninety-nine and Sarah was ninety. All human experience was against it. The law of mathematical probability was dead against it. Observations of life, reason, all were against it. Abraham hoped against hope, but he became the father of the faithful. Now that is the biblical faith. How wrong it is, therefore, to think of faith, and to describe it, and to ask people to exercise it, as if it were some kind of natural faculty which we all have. We do not have it. Charles Wesley puts it perfectly when he tells us that it is something that is 'wrought by God'.

That brings me to my second point. What is the origin of faith? And the answer is, it is the gift of God. Again, you see the importance of taking doctrines in the right order. How important it is that we should have studied regeneration and so on before coming to faith. This again is the gift of God.

But here we come to a controversial point. Take the statement in Ephesians 2:8: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and *that* not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' Now the whole question is: what does the 'that' mean? What does it refer to? There are those who would have us believe that it is a reference to the salvation. But surely it cannot be that. If it were, then Paul is just repeating himself. He has already said, 'By grace are ye saved', and he goes on to say that in the entire paragraph, so if he just repeats it again here, what is the purpose? No. By 'that' he is referring to faith, not salvation. 'By grace are ye saved through faith; and that'—the faith as well—'not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.'

Yes, faith is the gift of God, and this, of course, can be proved quite easily by the previous doctrines that we have already considered. Think again of 1 Corinthians 2 and all that we have seen about the natural man to whom the things of God are 'foolishness' (v. 14), and Romans 8 where the carnal mind is described as being 'enmity against God' (v. 7). Such a person cannot exercise faith, as we have seen. In other words, the seed of faith is placed in us in regeneration and will be called into activity by the effectual call.

Or, to prove the same point from a different angle, let us look at it like this: faith, ultimately, is governed by what we have called our disposition. It is our fundamental disposition that determines whether we have faith or not. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews talks about ‘an evil heart of unbelief’ (Heb. 3:12). That is it. Faith is not an intellectual matter only, as we shall see. It is our disposition. If we have an evil heart, then we will be unbelievers. Whether we have faith or not is determined by our fundamental disposition.

[p 143] Or, again, the Lord Himself says, ‘How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?’ (John 5:44). ‘You people cannot believe,’ says our Lord in effect, ‘your whole disposition is wrong. You are seeking honour one from another, and while you do that you will never have faith and you will never believe. How can you believe?’ And then He repeats it, ‘Why do ye not believe me?’ (John 8:46). The same thing again: it was their disposition that was wrong. In other words, this is ultimately a moral question. It is something that concerns one’s whole moral being, so that we must cease to think of faith as a kind of natural faculty that can be turned in the direction of God. No, it is the gift of God.

So how, exactly, does it come into being? What brings it forth? Here is another very important point, and the answer is that it is brought forth by the Scripture, by the word of God. It is by the truth that it is brought into being. Now there are innumerable proofs of that. Take, for instance, the great commission that our Lord gave to His disciples after His resurrection, just as He was bidding them farewell: ‘Go ye therefore,’ He said, ‘and teach all nations’ (Matt. 28:19). Disciple them, if you like, it is the same thing. Give them the information, preach the word to them, hold the truth before them.

Take, too, the commission given to Paul on the road to Damascus. Our Lord told him that He had called him, He was going to send him to the people and to the Gentiles. What for? ‘To open their eyes’ (Acts 26:18). He was to teach them. He was to show them their bondage to Satan and the terrible fate that was awaiting them.

But perhaps the classic passage on this is Romans 10, verses 10–17, where Paul writes of the preaching of the gospel and how it is that people believe. And here is the conclusion: ‘So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.’ That is the way in which faith comes into being and into operation. It is called forth by the word of God, by the truth, by the gospel, by the message preached. And so Paul exhorts Timothy, ‘Preach the word’ (2 Tim. 4:2). James 1:18 reminds us in the same way: ‘Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.’ And it is the same everywhere, right through the Scriptures, it is always by the word.

That, then, enables us now to go on to ask another very important question: What are the elements in faith, or in what does it consist? We are now ceasing to look at faith in general and are beginning to analyse it in particular. The first thing, obviously, as these quotations have established, is that it includes *belief*. You cannot have faith without [p 144] believing, the very word means that. It means an assent to truth, an assent to the word of God that is being put before us. Yes, but notice that in Hebrews 11 belief is not a vague, general, cursory assent. In verse 13 the word *persuaded* is used—a very important word because it brings out the point. These people, the writer tells us, ‘all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them.’ They were convinced of these things. So when we say that faith means belief, it does not only mean an awareness of or an assent to truth, but a firm conviction, we are convinced, we are persuaded.

Yes, but faith does not stop at that, and this is a most important point because there are some people who would define faith as just giving an assent to the truth. Clearly all this is of the most vital importance in the whole matter of evangelism. When people go to an enquiry room they are sometimes given certain information and asked, ‘Do you believe that?’ ‘Yes,’ they reply and they are told, ‘All right, you’re saved.’ Assent to truth is regarded by some as being the whole of faith—but it is not. Faith also includes an element of confidence, a readiness to commit oneself to it. Look again at Hebrews 11:13: ‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them’—then—‘and they embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.’ In faith there is inevitably an element of trust and often problems arise in the spiritual life because people

have stopped at the element of belief, and have not realised the vital importance of trust. But it is a part of faith.

Indeed we must go one step further. Faith also includes an element of commitment. You not only believe these things and trust them, you commit yourself—they ‘confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.’ Or as Romans 10 puts it, they *call upon* God. They believe it so much, they trust it so much, that they call upon God: ‘For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?’ (Rom. 10:13–14). Belief leads to the calling upon God, the trusting in God, the committing of oneself entirely to Him.

Now it is very important to draw this distinction because there is such a thing as intellectual assent only to truth. And that is not faith. It is sometimes also called historical faith. Alas, I have known people who have been in this position. To be quite honest, I am not sure that I myself have not once been in the position of mistaking historical faith [p 145] for true faith. Historical faith means that, perhaps because you were brought up in a religious atmosphere and were always taught the Bible, when you were young you went to Sunday School or to some classes, perhaps because of all that, you accepted Christianity intellectually. Not only that, you may see that it all hangs together. You may see that it is the only reasonable explanation of life, and so on. And you accept it all intellectually, as a system of truth. But it is not faith if it stops at that, because it is possible for people to do all that and not trust themselves or commit themselves to it all. There have been men and women, alas, who have been experts on the Bible but whose lives have shown very clearly that they have never trusted in Christ. They have a ‘form of godliness’ while ‘denying the power thereof’ (2 Tim. 3:5). The history of the Church, alas, is strewn with illustrations of this very thing; people who have accepted it all intellectually, but whose hearts have never been engaged, who have never been moved. They have never committed themselves. So we must be very careful that what we call faith is not merely that kind of historical faith.

Now, there is an old illustration, and I repeat it because I do not know a better one. It is a story which is told to show the difference between intellectual assent to a proposition and faith, and it tells of a man who could walk back and forth across a whirlpool on a plank. Not only did he walk across himself, he then got a wheelbarrow and wheeled that back and forth also. Now there was a little boy standing by the side of the river and the man asked him, ‘Do you think I can go over and come back safely without falling in?’

‘Yes,’ said the little boy.

‘Well,’ replied the man, ‘jump inside.’

‘Oh no!’ said the boy.

Now that’s it! It is a simple story but it does illustrate the truth up to a point. In faith there is something beyond intellectual agreement. There is trust, commitment. Faith is not merely a matter of belief.

What, then, is it in me that comes into operation in my faith? This again is a most important question because of the problem of historical faith, and also because of what the Bible itself, as we have seen, describes as temporary faith. The seed drops down and it springs up at once but it soon dies because it has no roots. In the same way, there are people who hear the word and believe it with joy, but they have no root and they wither away later on. And there are also the people who are described in Hebrews 6—those with temporary faith. So it is very important to ask what it is in us that is involved in faith. And the answer, [p 146] as I have been showing, is that it is the whole person, the mind, the heart and the will. So faith is not some sort of intellectual belief you carry with you in a bag, not something that you manipulate and bring in and put back when you like, but it is something that grips the whole of you.

There are two great texts on this. The first is again Romans 6:17: ‘Ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.’ The mind, therefore, comes first, and it must. If it is truth that calls forth faith, it must be addressed primarily to the mind. Now the Roman Catholics dispute that. They say that ordinary Christians do not understand the faith and the truth that they believe; the Church alone can do that. So, they say, all that people must do to become Christians is trust themselves to the Church. Their mind as such is not involved. You see, therefore, the importance of definitions. Over against the Roman Catholics, we must assert that the mind is involved.

Yes, but there was also a man called Sandeman who wrought great havoc in the Church towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. He still has some followers, but, sadly, there are many more unconscious Sandemanians. He taught that faith only touches a person's intellect, nothing else at all, and he misused Romans 10:9. He said that all we have to say is, 'Yes, I believe those things,' and then all is well. Your mere statement saves you: 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus ... thou shalt be saved.' That was his teaching, and he persuaded many people that it was right. But the result was that they did not worry about their feelings at all, or about their heart, or their will. It was merely a matter of intellect. And many were held and led into bondage by that teaching. So over against Sandeman we say, yes, faith is something that involves the mind and the intellect, but it does not stop at that. It must also involve the heart.

Here I turn to the apostle Peter: 'Unto you therefore which believe he is precious' (1 Pet. 2:7). Notice the *therefore*. You cannot believe in Him without being moved by Him. There is no value in what you call belief unless it leads to love. If you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ, you have nothing but an intellectual assent, a proposition concerning Him. 'It follows, as the night follows the day,' says Peter in effect, 'that if you really believe in Him, he is precious to you and you love Him.' Your affections must be engaged.

You may be surprised that I say this. There are so many people who glory in the fact that there is not much emotion in their evangelism. [p 147] But there should be emotion in evangelism. It should not only be emotion, but if there is no emotion, there is something wrong. Your heart should be moved and you should not come without tears of repentance and of joy. If you are not moved by your belief, it is not faith. We must always denounce *emotionalism* but God forbid that we should ever leave out emotion.

And, in turn, the will is engaged. Faith without works is dead. And there is no doubt about that. It is no use your saying that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ if you are still living a worldly life—that is what it comes to. I am not interested in what experiences people may give, if they are still worldly people, there is no point in their claiming to have faith and to have belief. 'As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also' (Jas. 2:26). 'Ye that love the Lord,' says the psalmist, 'hate evil' (Ps. 97:10). You cannot love the Lord without hating evil. It is bound to happen. You leave it, you turn away from it. Look at David in Psalms 51 and 139. Look at it everywhere in the Bible.

Consider, too, these people in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. When Abraham heard God's word to him, he believed and left his country though he did not know where he was going. Faith acts. The will is always involved. And if your will has not been involved, it is pointless to say, 'Ah yes, I believe that, I have accepted it.' In other words, the thing that needs to be emphasised today is that faith is not a sort of *believism*. That is a danger because in believism the heart is not involved and the will is not engaged. But in faith, I repeat, the whole person is engaged. Christ saves the whole man or woman and no part is left out. So you see that corresponding to the belief and the trust and the commitment is the intellect and the heart and the will.

That, then, is our essential definition of faith. But there are certain problems left, and we must deal with them because they are do often raised in discussions and people so frequently ask questions about them.

First, what is *the relationship between faith and reason*? The best answer I can give is that faith is not a matter of reason. Some people teach that it is. They say that if only men and women would use their minds, they would be bound to become Christians; they can reason themselves into Christianity. But that is thoroughly unscriptural. They cannot because the natural man or woman's reason is also fallen. Not only that, there are supernatural and miraculous elements in faith to which reason cannot attain. So true faith is not entirely a matter of reason. Indeed, I would quote to you the statement of the great Blaise [p 148] Pascal, perhaps the greatest mathematician that the world has ever known and who had an evangelical conversion. He said that the supreme achievement of reason is to teach us that there is an end to reason.

So what about faith and reason? Well, faith is not mere reason, but on the other hand, neither is it contrary to reason. It is not unreasonable; it is not irrational. That is the charge that is brought against us.

‘Ah,’ people say, ‘but what you’re teaching is a kind of irrationality. You say that faith isn’t a matter of reason. Well then, is it opposed to reason?’

No, it is not. It is not reason, neither is it contrary to reason. What is it then? It is *supra-reason*. It means that our reason brings us to the point when we realise that reason is not enough, and at that point we have nothing to do but submit ourselves to the revelation. And that is faith. Faith is accepting this revelation.

More and more I like to think of it like this. Faith means that I deliberately shut myself down to this book, the Bible. I refuse to philosophise. I refuse to ask certain questions. People are always asking them. They want to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. You cannot. You will never understand it. Your mind and reason cannot grasp it. It is too great. It is too divine. It is too eternal. So, you accept it; and you stop asking questions. One of the best signs of the real birth of faith in people is that they stop asking certain questions. Think of faith more like that, if it will help you. You come to the Bible as a little child and you accept it, and then you begin to find that it is most reasonable. Reason could not bring you into it, but once you are in it, you will find that it all hangs together; it is a great composite whole. There is the one message running right through. The parts are all there. They all fit together like a perfect mosaic. It is the most reasonable thing in the world, and yet reason will never bring you into it.

Faith brings you into the Bible and then you see the great reasonableness of it all. For Christ is not only the power of God, He is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and when you are in it, you see that this alone is wisdom and that everything else would be unfair and unreasonable. If faith were a matter of reason, then only people with great intellects could be Christians. On the other hand, faith is not unreasonable, because if that were so, no one with an intellect could be a Christian either. But because it is what it is, it puts us all on the same level. We accept this revelation, and then we proceed to understand. That is the relationship between faith and reason.

What about the relationship between faith and knowledge? Yes, [p 149] again, that is a most important point. Let me put it like this. There must be an element of knowledge in faith because faith comes into being as the result of the operation of truth. If the first element in faith is belief, and if it is belief of the truth, we must know what we believe. So Peter exhorts the Christians in this way: ‘Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear’ (1 Pet. 3:15).

But there is a great difference between *apprehending* and *comprehending*. Comprehending means that you can span a thing, that your mind can fully understand, while apprehending means being aware with the mind. Now the element of knowledge in faith is not the element of comprehension but it must of necessity be apprehension. When people come to me and I ask them if they are Christians, if they reply, ‘Well, I believe, I have faith,’ then I have the right to ask them, ‘What do you believe?’ You always have the right to ask Christians, or those who claim to be Christians, what they believe, and the Christian should be able to answer the question. As Romans 10:14 puts it, ‘How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?’ And Paul goes on to work out how faith comes by ‘hearing, and hearing by the word of God’ (v. 17). So there is this element of knowledge and of understanding in faith—it is apprehension rather than comprehension.

And that is why all the epistles go on to appeal to us to grow in knowledge. All the writers’ efforts were directed at making the people *understand* more and more, not simply feel more and be entertained more, but grow in an understanding of the truth so that they should know more today than they did a year ago. They are not still living in that old experience, but have more understanding.

‘Well then,’ someone may ask, ‘what is it that we are to understand? What is it that we are to know? Are you telling us that we are not Christians unless we understand the entire gamut of the Christian faith and unless we are experts in every single detail and every doctrine? Are you saying that a person who can’t really give a comprehensive account of the whole of Christian theology is not a Christian?’ No, as we have just seen, I am not! But I am saying that there are certain truths which are absolutely essential and vital to the integrity of the gospel, to the very being of faith. Then there are other truths which, though not essential to the integrity of the gospel, are essential to its symmetry and perfection.

[p 150] Let me explain what that means. There is a certain irreducible minimum and we must contend for that. But there are other doctrines and other aspects of the faith which are not absolutely essential to salvation but are essential to a complete, fully orbed, symmetrical conception of salvation, to a balanced, organised faith and the expression of it. In other words, there are certain doctrines that we *must* believe and there are others about which we are doubtful and about which there may be legitimate disagreement.

What, then, are these things that are essential? Well, we must believe in God. We must believe about the character of God. If we do not believe that God is holy, we are not Christians. If we do not believe that God is just and righteous, we are not Christians. In addition to believing in the love of God, we must believe in the other attributes that we considered in an earlier lecture.¹ The biblical revelation about this holy, righteous God who is the judge of the universe—that is essential.

It is equally essential that we should believe in our sinful and lost condition. I am not prepared to argue about that—that is absolute. If we do not know what a sinner is, that we are sinners and have repented, we are not Christians, we cannot be, and there is no value in our saying that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. For what is it to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unless it is to see that He is the Saviour and the Redeemer and the only one. But what do I need to be saved from? It is the guilt of my sin in the presence of this holy God. So I must be clear about the doctrine of sin and my lost estate and my helplessness, and then about the person and the work of Christ.

Paul himself gives these essentials in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15: 'For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received'—What?—'how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures' (v. 3). That is the first thing—the person and what He has done; the priestly work, the mediatorial work, the atonement. I do not argue about this. I know I am described as narrow, but if people do not see that they are saved only by the blood of Christ, well then, think what you like of me, I cannot see that such people can be Christians. It is essential. 'I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified' says Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul 'placarded' His death to the Galatians. It was always at the centre. This is not a matter to be argued about. This **[p 151]** does not belong to the symmetry of faith but to the integrity of faith, as do also some aspects of this great doctrine of the person and work of the Holy Spirit that we are engaged upon at the present time. If you do not believe in regeneration, if you do not see its utter absolute necessity, then I do not see that you have any right to regard yourself as a Christian. If you do not see that you are so lost that nothing but receiving new life from God can reconcile you and take you to heaven, then you are lacking at a vital point, a point that is integral and belongs to the very integrity of faith.

Those, then, are absolute necessities. And I would say that you have a right to insist upon the presence of those doctrines before you are prepared to tell a person, 'Yes, you have got faith.' Faith is not a vague feeling; it is not a vague desire to have certain blessings from Christ. Faith is a belief of this gospel, this word of God, this message, this truth that the apostles were preaching, the truth they write about. It is an acceptance, and an assent to that. It is a persuasion which moves me and makes me do something—that is faith. And I must know what I believe and whom I believe and what I believe concerning Him. Those are the irreducible minimums, the bare essentials, the things that belong to the very integrity of faith.

¹ See Volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*.

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Assurance

The subject at which we have now arrived is not only dealt with very frequently in the Scripture but, from our practical standpoint, is again of very great importance. I refer to the relationship between faith and assurance, or, as it is sometimes known, the assurance of faith. This is not only a practical question, it is one that has often perplexed people and is often the cause of considerable unhappiness. We are looking at it because it is one of the doctrines but, as I constantly remind you, we do not consider them merely to interest ourselves with intellectual problems. The intent behind this series is that our practical knowledge of God may be deepened and increased. So we are really dealing with something that is experiential as well as a doctrine that is taught in the Scripture.

Now there are some people who would say that assurance is impossible to the Christian in this life. That, for instance, is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, which regards this doctrine of assurance as one of the most pernicious and objectionable teachings of Protestantism. The whole Roman Catholic teaching is—and it follows, I think, from what we have seen of the Roman Catholic view of faith and of many other doctrines—that Christians cannot have assurance in this life; all they can do is to trust themselves to mother Church. But that is not assurance, because they are kept, as it were, permanently dependent upon the Church and upon the sacraments. But this idea that Christians can have some inward assurance is to them utterly abhorrent and a most dangerous heresy.

But that view is not only held by the Roman Catholics. The theological movement associated with the name of Professor Karl Barth of Switzerland, undoubtedly one of the most powerful theologians [p 153] of the twentieth century, at this point happens to agree with the Roman Catholic Church. Barth, again, thoroughly abominates and denounces this idea of assurance of salvation and he is quite consistent with his own system of theology in doing so. I think it is good that we bear this in mind, because one often finds good evangelical people applauding Barthianism and certain Barthian preachers without realising that it is an essential part of their position to deny the possibility of assurance of salvation. Barth dislikes experience altogether and his whole view is that you really can be certain of none of these things, and, moreover, that all our attempts at expression of our faith are, of necessity, wrong and fallacious.

Now, over against all that, the Protestant fathers—I mean by that Luther and Calvin and their companions—went to the other extreme and said that assurance of faith is an essential part of faith. Undoubtedly they took up that position partly as a reaction to the Roman Catholic Church. They were so anxious to liberate people from the thralldom and tyranny of the Church that they went so far as to say that without this assurance and certainty, a person's so-called faith was of no value at all.

And, again, this is not confined to the Protestant fathers. John Wesley, especially in his early days, taught exactly the same thing. He, having had his experience in Aldersgate Street, taught quite definitely for a number of years that faith must give the kind of assurance that he himself had received; that alone was true faith. Later on he modified that teaching.

It is interesting, here, to notice that the attitude of these different teachers towards assurance cuts right across their various other differences. John Wesley, the Arminian, taught that this assurance was essential. But there were other Methodists in that eighteenth century who were not Arminian and had the Reformed view, but they, at first, were equally insistent that assurance was an essential part of faith. For instance, this was true of the Methodist fathers in Wales who would only admit people into Church membership who had assurance of salvation. They sometimes went so far as to make aspiring church members say when assurance happened and how they received it, who the preacher was and what his text was!

That shows the extreme reaction that often occurs, especially when the period before it has been vague and indefinite and moral rather than spiritual. But there is no doubt that the prevailing Reformed teaching about this question is that which is taught, for instance, in [p 154] the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

This says that assurance is not an essential part of faith, that you can have faith without assurance, but that at the same time assurance is not only possible but is desirable and one should never rest until one has it. That has been the teaching most commonly held by evangelical people ever since the Protestant Reformation.

If, then, that is so, if it is right that you can have faith without assurance (though assurance is desirable), then we are entitled to say that in and of itself doubt is not incompatible with faith. You see, doubt must be put over against the assurance, not over against the faith. Men and women who have faith may be grievously assailed by doubts. Peter, for instance, having walked on the water towards our Lord, suddenly began to look at the boisterous waves; then he began to sink, and our Lord said to him, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' (Matt. 14:31). Our Lord did not say that Peter had lost his faith because he doubted, so doubt is not incompatible with faith, but it generally means that there is weak faith or a little faith and that may be due to many causes.

It may be due to sin. If Christian people fall into sin they will have a sense of condemnation and that in turn will probably lead to doubt. It does not mean they have lost their faith, but they may very well be in a condition of doubt until the sin has been confessed and relinquished and all is clear again. The faith remains but it is weak and uncertain and they are the victims of doubt for the time being.

However, doubt can also be due to a misunderstanding of the real nature of faith. People sometimes do not realise that faith is something active, something that must be applied. Take our Lord's question to the disciples in the boat. He was lying asleep and they thought that they were about to sink. But He turned to them and said, in effect, 'Where is your faith? You've got it but you're not applying it' (Matt. 8:26). Now if people do not realise that faith has to be applied, that it involves an activity, for the time being they may very well be the victims of doubt. And in the same way, we must understand that faith has to appropriate, faith has to lay hold on truth, and that again is a form of activity. If we remain in a purely passive state, waiting for something to happen, then the probability is that the doubt will be more prominent than the faith; but if we realise that faith appropriates—lays hold upon—we will get rid of our doubts and then our faith will become strong.

Then the next statement would be that, according to the Scripture, [p 155] you can clearly have faith without assurance. My authority for this is that Peter says: 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure' (2 Pet. 1:10). You and I cannot determine our calling nor our election, but we can make them sure, and the whole point of that passage is to exhort people to give this diligence. 'Add to your faith virtue,' he says; 'and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and the brotherly kindness charity' (vv. 5-7). And Peter impresses this upon us. You will have your entry into the everlasting kingdom of our Father if you belong to God's people. Yes, but if you want an *abundant* entry—that is his expression in verse 11—if you want to go in with this blessed assurance, then you must make your calling and election sure. Obviously, then, the implication is that you can have your faith but without the assurance, hence Peter's exhortation to us to have the assurance.

Or again: 'These things,' says John, 'have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life' (1 John 5:13). The Revised Version translation of that verse is very much better than the Authorised [King James] Version: 'These things have I written unto you that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.' That puts the emphasis on the fact that John is not addressing unbelievers. The letter was not written to people outside, in the world, but to members of churches. They are believers, yes, but John writes in order that they may *know* that they have eternal life. He wants them also to have assurance. It is obvious, therefore, that you can have faith without assurance, otherwise this letter need never have been written.

Then the fourth statement is a very interesting point, I think. Obviously, in connection with any sort of faith, however weak, however feeble, however immature, however small it may be, there must be a certain amount of knowledge and, therefore, of confidence, of assurance.

'But that is to contradict what you've just been saying,' says someone.

Well, on the surface it sounds like it, but let me explain. We agreed in the last lecture that faith must, of necessity and by definition, believe something. You cannot have faith in a vacuum. Faith means that, at any rate, you believe with your mind and give intellectual [p 156] assent to the truth that is taught in the word. You cannot believe without knowing what you believe. So, in believing these things about God and about our Lord and about salvation, there is a sense in which you must have a modicum of assurance and of comfort and of confidence, and yet I do not call that this true assurance of faith.

What, then, is the difference? We can put it like this. What I have just been describing is what I would call an *objective* assurance and there is a difference between an objective and a subjective assurance. Again, the classic illustration of this is John Wesley himself. Before the incident in Aldersgate Street when he felt that ‘strange warming’ of his heart, John Wesley believed the truth and he knew it was true—that was an objective assurance. But what he did not have until that night was the subjective assurance—the thing inside.

Now I remember this being put to me once very graphically by an old preacher who was lying on a sick bed. He was unhappy and I asked him what was troubling him.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I am absolutely certain, with the whole of my being, of the truth I have always preached.’

‘So, what is wrong?’ I asked.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘although I am certain of it, I’m not happy about its registration *here*’—pointing to his heart.

That’s it. He had an absolute objective assurance, but he was not clear, he was not happy, in the realm of his subjective assurance. And that is a helpful way of looking at it because there are many people, I find, in that very position. They say that they have no doubt at all about the truth itself and yet they very rightly say, ‘Yes, but I’m not happy about myself inside, my own assurance.’

True assurance, of course, includes both—the objective and the subjective.

So that brings us to the next great question: What are the grounds of assurance? I mean now the complete assurance—subjective as well as objective, internal as well as external. The first of these grounds is *the teaching of the word of God*. John says, ‘He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself’—then notice—‘he that believeth not God hath made him [God] a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son’ (1 John 5:10–11). So the first ground of my assurance is that it is stated here in the word. You will find the same teaching in John 3:33: ‘He that hath received his testimony [the testimony of the truth] hath set to his [p 157] seal that God is true.’ So in believing we are putting our seal upon the truth and saying, ‘God is true; what God says is true. I put my seal on it.’ It is another way of stating that if I do not believe, I am virtually saying that I do not believe God or that God is a liar.

So then, what has God said? What is his testimony? Let me remind you of some of the passages. Take John 3:36, for instance: ‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.’ Not shall have—‘he *hath*’. ‘And he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.’ Or John 5:24: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath’—not will have—‘hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.’ That again is quite categorical. Then go on to John 6:47: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath’—hath now—‘everlasting life.’ Take a verse from Acts: ‘To him give all the prophets witness,’ said Peter, ‘that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sin’ (Acts 10:43). The moment you believe in Him you receive remission of sins. And again, Paul, preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, said, ‘And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses’ (Acts 13:39).

Those, then, are the first grounds. Here I have these statements of Scripture which I have already accepted as the word of God. They make categorical statements about those who believe these things. They say that if they believe them they already have eternal life. So I face these statements; I say,

‘Therefore I have eternal life, the Scriptures say so, and if I do not believe that, I am making God to be a liar.’

But that is only the first ground of assurance; and I do want to emphasise this. There are, alas, certain people who would say that that is the only ground, that no more is necessary and they refuse to go beyond that. Now I regard that viewpoint as extremely dangerous. Later on we shall consider false assurance, false grounds of assurance, and I am not sure but that that is not one of them—to stop at that point. Oh yes, you start with that, you must start with it, and it must be there, but there is a kind of teaching which goes to people and says to them, ‘This is what the Scripture says, do you agree with that?’ If they reply, ‘Yes,’ then the teaching says, ‘Very well, you are all right.’ And they are just left at that. But the Scripture does not leave us at that. That chapter from 1 John which I have been quoting does not leave us at that. It tells us that there were once people who were members of the Church who have now gone out because they did not **[p 158]** really belong. Yet there was a time when they said that they believed all these things, and no doubt they were perfectly happy. ‘But they were not of us,’ says John; ‘for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us’ (1 John 2:19).

So, then, we have a second ground of assurance—what we may very well call *the test of life*. The Scripture tells me that if I believe, I have eternal life. So are there certain tests that I can apply to myself to make sure that I really have got eternal life? Here they are, again in this first epistle of John. The first is believing that Jesus is the Christ: ‘Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God’ (1 John 5:1). That is evidence that you are born of God (I shall define that a little more closely later).

John’s second great test is loving the brethren: ‘We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren’ (1 John 3:14). That is good, is it not? Because I prefer to be together with other Christians rather than in a cinema, I love the brethren and all is well with me. But wait a minute, let us be careful! John defines what he means by loving the brethren. It does include what we have just stated, but that is not enough. John goes on: ‘Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren’ (1 John 3:16). That is a part of loving the brethren. ‘But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth’ (vv. 17–18). Yes, it means enjoying their company and their society but it must include this practical side also if the need arise. Love is practical, always, it does things. So let us be careful that we apply the Scripture to ourselves truly and thoroughly.

Then the third test that John has is *keeping His commandments*. He puts it like this: ‘Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments’ (1 John 2:3). John keeps on repeating this, and in the fifth chapter he says, ‘For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous’ (v. 3). So as you read your Bible and you see it telling you not to do some things and to do others—does that go against the grain? Do you find it grievous? And are you putting those things into practice? That is a test of whether we have life or not.

And then the last test that I have eternal life is: *having the Spirit*. **[p 159]** ‘Hereby,’ John says in the last verse of the third chapter, ‘Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.’ That raises a very big question does it not? How do we know whether or not we have received the Spirit? It is important from the experiential standpoint in this way: the Scriptures teach us that the gift of the Holy Spirit is the seal which we have of the inheritance into which we shall enter. Paul says, ‘In whom ye also trusted, after that he heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in who also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory’ (Eph. 1:13–14). How do I know that I am going into the glorious inheritance? Well, my answer is: the Holy Spirit within me is the seal upon the document that I am an heir. And, in the same way, in 2 Corinthians 1:22, Paul calls the Spirit, ‘the earnest’. Now the earnest is a guarantee, something that is put into your hand in order to say, ‘I have given you that as a foretaste; you will get the rest, but I give you this as an earnest—the seal.’

But, further, how can I know exactly whether God has given me the gift of the Spirit? Here are some of the answers you will find in Scripture. The very fact that we believe truly that Jesus is the Christ, the very fact that we believe the doctrine concerning Him—which I elaborated upon in the last lecture in dealing with the person of Christ and the doctrine of the Atonement and so on—truly to believe that is a proof that we have received the Spirit. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God’ (Rom. 8:7); ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his’ (Rom. 8:9). The whole argument of Romans 8 proves that. The, ‘natural man’, the ‘carnal man’ cannot believe, he does not want to.

And, again, in 1 Corinthians we find the same argument: ‘the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God’ (v. 14). The ‘princes of this world’ did not recognise Christ, for had they recognised Him ‘they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’ (v. 8). And why did they not recognise Him? Because they did not have the Spirit. But God has given unto us, ‘Not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God’ (v. 12). ‘We have the mind of Christ’ (v. 16). So if you really believe these things you can be certain you have got the Spirit because, again as Paul puts it to the Corinthians: ‘No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost’ (1 Cor. 12:3). You cannot say this otherwise. So there is our first proof that God has given me the Spirit: my belief.

[p 160] Secondly, if I desire more of this knowledge it is good evidence that I have the Spirit. ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,’ says Paul in Romans 8:14, ‘they are the sons of God.’ So if you want to be led by the Spirit; if you have come to the end of your own resources; if you are distrustful of your own human understanding and of all philosophy; if you say, ‘I want to be enlightened, I want to be led by the Spirit in every sense,’ it is again evidence that you have the Spirit. It is only those in whom the Spirit dwells who want to be led by Him and submit to His leading.

Thirdly, the work of the Spirit within us is a proof that He is in us. What is that? Well first and foremost, revealing sin; that is always the first work of the Spirit. He brings to light the hidden things of darkness, the sins about which we are not at first conscious. As He becomes more powerful within, we become more sensitive to sin and we now regard as sin things which we used to overlook. This is a great evidence of the work of the Spirit. And He also produces a hatred of sin and a desire to be free from it.

Then the fourth evidence is the fruit of the Spirit. Go back to the great list in Galatians 5: ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith [faithfulness], meekness, temperance’ (vv. 22–23).

And then the fifth is the Spirit of adoption: ‘Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8:15).

I trust that this classification is clear to you. We have just been considering our reasons for saying that the Spirit is within us, which is one of the proofs that we have eternal life. This *test of life* is our second ground, or basis, for assurance in our Christian life, and the four proofs under the heading ‘test of life’ are all found in John’s first epistle.

And the third major ground of assurance of faith is *the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit*: ‘The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God’ (Rom. 8:16). Now this is crucial and at this point I must express a criticism of the Revised Standard Version. You will find that the RSV links verses 15 and 16 together and instead of saying, ‘But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God’, it has: ‘When we cry Abba, Father, it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.’ Instead of two things, it makes it one; that is, He bears witness by making me cry, Abba, Father.

But the Authorised [King James] Version does not say that and is **[p 161]** undoubtedly right. These two things are separate and distinct. The Spirit of adoption is something that is in our spirits. Indeed, Paul has been saying that: ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father’ (vv. 14–15). But the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit is something different, something additional—a witness. You notice that Paul does not say here, ‘that is borne through our spirit’;

but 'the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit'. Our spirits cry, 'Abba, Father.' Yes, and we must not say that that is the Spirit bearing witness in me. My spirit cries, 'Abba, Father.' Yes, but on top of that, the Holy Spirit bears witness *with* my spirit; He does not bear witness *to* it. My spirit does one thing and the Holy Spirit does something alongside.

As I have said, this is very important. This is, to me, one of the higher reaches of the Christian life. It is something that is very difficult to describe, and yet our Lord talked a lot about it. You will find the record in John 14, when He begins to introduce His teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. You will find that He says there that He and the Father will come to us and that they will take up their abode in us (v. 23). That is what I am talking about. That is what the Spirit does. When the Holy Spirit, this other Comforter, has come, the effect will be that the Father and the Son will come to us and will take up their abode in us. Indeed our Lord uses another word which is very striking. In connection with this selfsame teaching, He says, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him'—notice—'and will manifest myself to him' (v. 21). He will manifest Himself in a spiritual manner to this person and that is something that is done by the Holy Spirit, about whom He is speaking.

Then there are statements in the first chapters of the book of Revelation about the 'hidden manna' and the 'white stone' that are given to the believer, and about the hidden name—the new name. Nobody else understands it; they do not know anything about these things, but believers do; that is the Spirit witnessing with their spirit. Indeed, Paul has already said it in Romans 5 when he says, 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us' (v. 5). So what is this? It is something that is difficult to put into words, but it is an operation of the Holy Spirit within us which is definite and distinct and by means of which He gives us a realisation [p 162] and a consciousness of the living Lord. Christ manifests Himself to us and we know Him with a kind of inner intuition, over and above all that we believe about Him by faith. He is made real to us. I am very fond of quoting Hudson Taylor's prayer about this:

Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me

A living bright reality.

More present to faith's vision keen

Than any outward object seen,

More dear, more intimately nigh

Than e'en the sweetest earthly tie.

That is it. It is something to which God's people have testified from the very beginning.

Now this is the ultimate, the final ground of assurance. It is a certain knowledge because He is real to us, because He has manifested Himself to us according to His promise. And it is interesting to notice the saints who testify to this. Again, it cuts across all the different schools of theology. Luther had an experience of that; Jonathan Edwards had it; Whitefield had it; so did Wesley, Finney and Moody. In many respects they did not belong to the same schools theologically, but they all together witnessed to this experience which the Holy Spirit had given them when He testified with their spirits, and they felt it to be overwhelming.

Moody was walking down a street in New York City when it happened to him. He had to hold up his hands and pray God to stop; he was afraid he would be crushed and killed physically because of the glory and the grandeur and the transcendence of the experience. That is the ultimate ground of assurance though the feelings accompanying it may vary tremendously. Again, in the case of Finney it came as wave after wave upon him, and he was drenched with perspiration. Read the accounts of these men and what they have to tell you. For John Wesley it was not so overwhelming, but was a 'strange warming' of his heart. And so we could go on.

How, then, is one to obtain this assurance? Here are the rules taught in Scripture: first make certain of your belief. If you have not got assurance, make certain that you are really not relying upon yourself in any

respect for salvation. Be sure that you see all your righteousness as filthy rags and know that if you lived a thousand years you would never fit yourself to stand before God. Make certain that [p 163] you are relying only upon the finished work of Christ upon the cross, that you are solely dependent upon His righteousness. Apply the word of Scripture to yourself, get to know it, read it. Take these scriptures that I have been quoting; stand on them; apply them to yourself. Say, 'I have been crucified with Christ, I have died with Christ. The Scripture says it; I believe it and I stand on it.' Live the life. Yield yourself to be led of the Spirit. Seek His face. If you ask Him to fulfil His promise and to manifest Himself to you, He has pledged to do it.

Finally, let me say just a word on the difference between true and false assurance. False assurance is generally due to bad teaching, to false evangelism, to pushing people to decisions or trying to bring them to the birth before the process of the Holy Spirit is worked out. Our Lord talked about the people who would come to Him and say, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... and in thy name done many wonderful works?' And yet He will say to them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Matt. 7:22-23). They thought they were all right. They had an assurance, but it was false. The three parables in Matthew 25 teach exactly the same thing: the foolish virgins, the man who hid his talent and the people who asked when they had not done this, that and the other to Him. They thought that they had always pleased Him. But He said, 'You did not do it to these my brethren and therefore you have not done it unto me. You are not saved, you do not belong to me.' False assurance.

What, then, can assure us that our assurance is a true one? The characteristics of a true assurance are these: first and last and always—humility. Christians who have true assurance do not say that this is a jolly good life, nor that they are having a great kick out of it. No, no, there is always a humility about God's children because they know what they are and that they owe it all to Him. If your assurance does not make you humble, I beseech you, examine the grounds again. Go back to the Scripture. True assurance always produces humility. It also always has a practical effect on character and living. It leads to the kind of life depicted in the first epistle of John.

Another very good test is this: if you find yourself examining yourself, it is a sign of a true assurance. People who have a false assurance do not like self-examination; obviously not, because it is going to make them unhappy, it is going to shake them and they do not want that. But people who have true assurance are so concerned about being absolutely right that they examine themselves. Paul says, 'I keep under my body ... lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I [p 164] myself might be a castaway' (1 Cor. 9:27). He examined himself constantly and in 2 Corinthians 13:5 he exhorts the Corinthians, 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.' And the Christian is glad to do so. In 1 Peter 4 we are told, 'Judgment must begin at the house of God ... And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear' (vv. 17-18).

Now true Christians walk in reverence and godly fear. There is no carnal joviality about them, they are humble people who walk in the light of these truths. And, above all, those who have true assurance are always striving after a yet nearer conformity to Christ. 'That I may know him,' says Paul, 'and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ... I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind ... I press toward the mark' (Phil. 3:10, 13-14). And the Christian is always doing that. People with the true assurance always have an increasing desire to be more like Him. Yes, says John, 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure' (1 John 3:3).

Finally, listen to Whitefield describing how this amazing assurance, this direct testimony of the Spirit, was given to him. He had been seeking this assurance for a long time, and then he fell ill. He writes:

This fit of sickness continued upon me for seven weeks and a glorious visitation it was, the blessed Spirit was all this time purifying my soul. All my former gross and notorious and even my heart-sins also were now set home upon me, of which I wrote down some remembrance immediately and confessed them before God morning and evening. Though weak, I often spent two hours in my evening retirement and prayed over my Greek Testament and Bishop Hall's most excellent contemplations, every hour that my health would permit. About the end of seven weeks and after I had been groaning under an unspeakable pressure both of body and mind for above a twelvemonth, God was pleased to set me free in the following manner. One day, perceiving an uncommon drought and a disagreeable

clamminess in my mouth and using things to allay my thirst but in vain, it was suggested to me that when Jesus Christ cried out, 'I thirst,' His sufferings were near at an end. Upon which I cast myself down on the bed crying out, 'I thirst, I thirst.' Soon after this I found an health in myself that I was delivered from the burden that had so heavily oppressed me. The spirit of mourning was taken from me and I knew what it was truly to rejoice in God my Saviour and for some time could not avoid singing Psalms wherever I was. But my joy gradually became more settled and, blessed be God, has abode and increased in my soul saving a few casual intermissions ever since.

[p 165] Or consider a man who belonged to the Salvation Army talking about the same thing. Here, again, is a man who believed the truth. He had an objective assurance but he had not got the subjective assurance and he was seeking it. He writes:

I awoke that morning hungering and thirsting just to live this life of fellowship with God, never again to sin in thought or word or deed against Him; with an unmeasurable desire to be a holy man acceptable unto God. With that desire, I opened my Bible and, while reading some of the words of Jesus, He gave such a blessing as I never had dreamed a man could have this side of heaven. It was an unutterable revelation. It was a heaven of love that came into my heart. My soul melted like wax before fire. I sobbed and sobbed. I loathed myself that I had ever sinned against Him or doubted Him or lived for myself and not for His glory. Every ambition for self was now gone, the pure flame of love burned it like a blazing fire would burn a moth. I walked out of the Boston Commons before breakfast weeping for joy and praising God. Oh how I loved Him! In that hour I knew Jesus. [He had been a believer for years, remember.] And I loved Him till it seemed my heart would break with love. I was filled with love for all His creatures. I heard the little sparrows chattering—I loved them. I saw a little worm wriggling across my path—I stepped over it, I didn't want to hurt any living thing. I loved the dogs, I loved the horses, I loved the little urchins in the street, I loved the strangers who hurried past me, I loved the heathen, I loved the whole world. God did all that for me, blessed be His holy name. Oh, how I had longed to be pure. Oh, how I had hungered and thirsted for God, the living God, and He gave me the desire of my heart, He satisfied me. I weigh my words—He satisfies me. He has become my teacher, my guide, my counsellor, my all in all.

'I,' said our Lord—He was about to leave the earth and has said that He would send the Spirit—'I will manifest myself unto him' (John 14:21). And He does it through the Holy Spirit. And when men and women have this 'spiritual manifestation of the Son of God', as the saintly John Fletcher of Madeley called it, they have an absolute certainty and assurance that nothing can change. And, if we have not got that, we can have it. It is for us. Over and above the world; over and above our spirits and the tests we can apply to those spirits, there is this witness of the Spirit with our spirit. It is the heritage of all God's children who feel the need of it, who long to have it, who desire it, who seek for it.

Has He manifested Himself to you? Offer up to Him Hudson Taylor's little prayer, and He has pledged to answer it in His own way **[p 166]** and in His own time. You notice the difference between the two men I have quoted. There are still others, each with a different experience. But do not worry about that; do not worry about the exact character of the feelings. When the Spirit comes you will know. Do not believe a teaching which tells you, 'Just believe it has happened whether you've got feelings or not.' These men had feelings! And when you and I have this spiritual manifestation of the Son of God, we will not have to persuade ourselves that we have it; we will know. It is unmistakable, and it is for us.

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Justification by Faith

This is the fiftieth lecture that I have been privileged to give you on this great and glorious and, to me at any rate, enthralling theme, and I am very happy to think that on this occasion we come to a consideration of the great and vital doctrine of justification by faith only, the biblical doctrine of justification. There is no better test that we who are Christians can apply to ourselves to know the quality of life that we really have in Christ, than this one: What is our reaction to the mere mention of the word ‘justification’? It is a test that all Christians should apply to themselves, especially at the present time, because if there has been one word that has stood out more prominently, especially in the history of Protestantism, than any other, it has been this great word *justification*. It was the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith only that transformed the life of the mighty Martin Luther. This it was that brought into being the Protestant Reformation. This led to everything that has been so glorious in the annals of the Protestant cause ever since. But, for some peculiar reason, we do not seem to react to these great words as we used to. Something has gone wrong even with our Protestantism. I do not mean by that anti-Catholicism—that is a very different thing—I mean a positive Protestantism. There should be a thrill at the very word, especially when one realises its history.

But the great question is: What was the Protestant Reformation about? What did Martin Luther rediscover? What did he find when he went back to the Scriptures? And you see, therefore, that it is something which is vital and about which we should be absolutely clear. So another good way of testing ourselves is to picture ourselves seated at a table with an examination paper in front of us and here is the question: **[p 168]** ‘Give an account of the doctrine of justification by faith only.’ Do you know what it is that makes you a Protestant, what it is that marks you off from the Roman Catholics? That is the test.

So, let us look at this doctrine together, and perhaps the best approach is historical. Why was Martin Luther in trouble before his conversion? What was wrong with him before this truth suddenly dawned upon him? And what is wrong with all who are vague and indefinite and uncertain about the whole question of justification by faith? Now it was not that Luther had not heard of the term ‘Justification’, because he had. What was wrong with him was that he had the wrong view of it. In other words, he had the typical Roman Catholic view of justification by faith. Roman Catholics claim to teach that doctrine, but they never say ‘justification by faith *only*’. They regard that as the Protestant heresy.

First, then, let us look at this Roman Catholic error and in its essence it is this: the Roman Catholic Church confuses justification with sanctification. And that had been the trouble with Martin Luther before his conversion. The Roman Catholic view of justification is, first of all, that it means and includes forgiveness of sins and they are all right at that point. But they add that the sin inherent in us is taken out of us for Christ’s sake. And they do not even stop at that. They go on to say that in justification there is a positive infusion of grace into us and that, of course, comes by means of baptism. They say that in the act of baptism, grace is actually infused into the person who is baptised and that is a part of justification. Forgiveness, removal of sin—yes—but also the infusion at baptism of a positive righteousness, and not merely a positive righteousness, but the life of God as well.

And then Roman Catholics go on to say that justification is progressive. Of course, they are quite consistent there. If there is this infusion of grace, that is going to grow and develop, the justification must be progressive. Furthermore, typically, they have to go further and they even say it can be lost if we become guilty of what they call, ‘mortal sin’. But then, if we do lose it, they say that we can regain it by going through the sacrament of penance and the process of regaining it will be completed in purgatory.

Now that is the characteristic Roman Catholic view and that was the view that was held by Martin Luther before his conversion. But then, you remember, the story of his life goes on to tell us that suddenly he saw a statement in the Scripture. He had read it many times before but he had never truly seen it. This is what he saw: ‘The just **[p 169]** shall live by faith’ (Rom. 1:17)—and these words absolutely changed everything for him. His whole life was revolutionised; he became an entirely different man. He suddenly

saw that all his past ideas on justification had been quite unscriptural, utterly false, and the moment he saw this, he experienced a great liberation of his soul. He began to preach this truth and so began the great and mighty work of reformation.

Exactly what, then, did Luther see? It was that justification is a judicial act of God in which He declares that He regards those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as righteous on the grounds of the work and merit of Christ. God imputes and ascribes Christ's righteousness to us, and we rest on that by faith. That is what Luther saw. As a result, in a moment, he knew that he was right with God. Luther's problem had been that of Job: 'How should a man be just with God?' (Job 9:2). How can a man stand in the presence of God? That was the problem that oppressed the mind and heart of Luther. There he was, a monk in his cell, asking, 'How can I put myself right with God?' He fasted, he prayed, he sweated, he did good deeds, and yet the whole time he was more and more aware of the blackness and darkness of his own heart and of the utter unutterable righteousness and holiness of God. And he was trying to fit himself, to make himself just, along that Roman Catholic way, and he could not, but there he saw it suddenly. God declares him righteous, and he is righteous, because God says so, because God puts to his account the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the historical background in which we should rejoice more and more. The crux of the matter is this: the great mistake we all tend to fall in, as Luther had done, with regard to justification, is that we tend to think that justification means that we are made righteous or good or upright or holy. But that is quite wrong. In justification we are not *made* righteous, we are *declared* to be righteous—the thing is quite different. To say that in justification you are made righteous is to confuse it with sanctification. Justification is something legal or *forensic*. It is God, as the judge, who is responsible for administering His own law, saying to us that as regards the law He is satisfied with us because of the righteousness of Christ. Justification is a declaratory act. It does not do anything to us; it says something about us. It has no reference to my actual state or condition inside; it has reference to my standing, to my position, to my appearing in the presence of God. Now that is the biblical doctrine of justification. That is what Luther [p 170] discovered; that is what he began to preach and, in a sense, he spent the rest of his life in preaching it. It is the great central doctrine of all Protestantism and in every great revival you will find that this always comes to the forefront. It was what Whitefield used to preach, as did John Wesley.

So, then, it behoves us to establish this contention. How can we prove that this is really the biblical teaching with regard to justification, as over against, in particular, that Roman Catholic error? (And you will have observed, I think, that it is not an error that is confined to Roman Catholicism.) Let me give you, therefore, the biblical evidence that justification is forensic and declarative. Take it first of all in the Old Testament. We read in Exodus 23:7: 'Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.' That is what God says, that is the commandment given to the Children of Israel and it means: I will not let off the wicked, I will not say that such persons are guiltless.

But take also Deuteronomy 25:1: 'If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them, then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.' You notice, again, the context in which the word 'justify' is used. Here is a controversy between two men and they come to judgment. The judges who judge the case are told: 'They shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.' Obviously that is a purely legal matter. These judges are not going to change the nature of the two disputants but are going to make a declaration; they will pronounce judgment, they will say that one is right and that the other is wrong. And the act of declaring that one is right is referred to as 'justify the righteous'. It is a legal action.

Then take another verse: 'He that justifieth the wicked and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord' (Prov. 17:15). In that most important proverb justification is put over against condemnation; again, it is a legal matter. In neither case are you changing the person. God would never forbid us to make a man a better man, and if justification is the same as sanctification, then God could never say, 'He that justifieth the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' because that is a good thing to do! No, the condemnation is of those who say that a bad man is a good man, that a man who is guilty is not guilty. Again the term is forensic.

But take an illustration of the use of this word in the New Testament: ‘And all the people that heard him [the Lord Jesus Christ], and **[p 171]** the publicans, justified God’ (Luke 7:29). Now that can only mean one thing: they said that God was right and true. They did not change the nature or the being of God, but made a declaration about Him. They justified God. And then, of course, when you come to the scriptures with direct teaching about justification, you find that that is the sense which it carries everywhere. Read, for instance, Acts 13:39: ‘And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.’

Then in that great classic passage on this whole matter, in Romans 3:20–28, this meaning of ‘justification’ is repeated constantly: ‘Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ ...’ And then that tremendous conclusion in verse 28: ‘Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.’ Again, there are most important statements in chapter 4:5–7, especially the fifth verse: ‘But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.’ God does not justify a man because he is good: this is a statement about the ungodly. They are not changed, they are not made godly before God justifies them; He justifies the ungodly—and there are other statements in those verses.

Then you have the same teaching in Romans 5:1: ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God ...’ and again in the ninth verse. There is also a great statement of this in Romans 8:30–34: ‘Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.’ And then this: ‘What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?’ And the answer is: ‘It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.’ Again, you see, justification is opposed to condemnation, and nobody can bring an accusation because it is God who declares people just.

The whole time justification is legal and forensic, and as you go on with the Scriptures you will find this in other places: ‘But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6:11). And in **[p 172]** Galatians 2:16 there is a statement which is parallel to those in Romans: ‘Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.’ Galatians is the great epistle that gave Martin Luther his liberty. His famous commentary on the epistle to the Galatians is a book that you should read and the more you go on with it, the more you will enjoy it. Do not be put off by his polemic against the Roman Catholics. He had to do that because you must show what is wrong as well as what is right. People do not like that today, but Luther had to do it, and I think we must do it in our age and generation. So buy Luther on the epistle to the Galatians and follow through his mighty exposition of great verses like chapters 2:16 and 3:11.

Now in all the instances that I have given, God makes a legal declaration, that all the demands of the law upon us, as a condition of life, are fully satisfied with regard to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are no longer in a state of condemnation: ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:11). Why? Because God has declared it. He is the lawgiver and he says that Christ has satisfied the law. ‘For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth’ (Rom. 10:4). God makes this declaration and that is the whole meaning of justification by faith only.

But we do not leave it quite at that because we must point out that there are two aspects to this great declaration. There are two elements to justification. And this is most important. The first is what we may describe as negative. The negative element of justification is that which reminds us that God declares that our sins are forgiven. That is our first need, of course. The law condemns us all. ‘By the law is the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:20), and the law says, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one’ (Rom. 3:10). The whole world is ‘guilty before God’ (Rom. 3:19). I need to be forgiven. Something must be done about my

guilt. Now in justification the first step is that I am assured that by the work of Christ my sins are covered and are therefore forgiven; they are blotted out.

But (and this is the point) justification does not stop at forgiveness. Justification and forgiveness are not identical. There are, however, many people—and I must say, to be accurate, that there are even **[p 173]** evangelical people—who identify justification and forgiveness; and they do that because their doctrine of the atonement is wrong, as we saw in an earlier lecture.¹ They do not realise that, as part of the atonement, Christ rendered a positive obedience to the law before He obeyed it passively in His death upon the cross. In other words, there is a second, positive, element in justification. This means that, in addition to having our sins forgiven, we have imputed to us, or put to our account or to our reckoning, the positive righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He kept the law, He honoured it, and therefore He is righteous face to face with the demands of the law. And God puts that righteousness of Christ to my account.

Now that is important in this way. There are many people who foolishly think that justification only means that my sinfulness is forgiven and I am restored to the condition of Adam before he fell. If this is the case, then it is up to me now, by my own righteous living, to justify myself. Those who believe that say, ‘God, for Christ’s sake, forgives your sins and because you’re forgiven, you’re going to live a godly life. And if you do so, God will put that down to your account.’

But that is quite wrong! I have nothing at all to do in my justification. It is entirely the act of God. He attributes to me, He puts to my account, He imputes to me, the positive righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am not simply restored to the condition that Adam was in before he fell; I am much beyond that. Adam did not have the positive righteousness of Christ. I, as a Christian, have it; God has put it to my account. Count Zinzendorf’s hymn puts it perfectly:

Jesus, Thy robe of righteousness

My beauty is, my glorious dress.

We are covered with the positive righteousness of Christ.

O let the dead now hear Thy voice,

Bid, Lord, Thy banished ones rejoice;

Their beauty this, their glorious dress,

Jesus, the Lord our righteousness.

You see, that goes entirely beyond forgiveness. It is not negative, it is **[p 174]** positive. We are clothed with the spotless robe of His perfect righteousness.

That, then, is the contention, and we can prove it by these very Scriptures that we have already considered. It is there perfectly in Romans 3:20–22: ‘Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.’ It is a righteousness that God gives us and it is positive. Or you have it again in Romans 4:6: ‘Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.’ He is not talking about forgiveness. David saw it, he was a prophet at this point and the Holy Spirit revealed it to him. And it is also to be found in Paul’s great argument which runs through the second half of that most important fifth chapter of Romans.

For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (vv. 17–19)

¹ See Volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*.

Here we see not only Christ's passive obedience, but His active obedience as well, His keeping of the law and the contrast with Adam who broke the law and who therefore fell.

We have already considered Romans 10:4: 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' There is also 1 Corinthians 1:30: 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' And 2 Corinthians 5:21: 'For he [God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him'—not merely forgiveness, but positive righteousness in the presence of God. And finally, we read in Philippians 3:9: 'And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

All that is enough to show you that this is the essential teaching [p 175] with regard to righteousness. Let me make it still more certain by showing, very briefly, the essential differences between justification and sanctification. Look at it like this: justification is an act of God the Father, as we have seen; sanctification is essentially the work of God the Holy Spirit. There is this division of work, you remember, in the blessed Persons of the Holy Trinity.¹ It is the Father who declares righteous and just. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies.

Secondly, justification takes place outside us, as in a tribunal; sanctification takes place within us, in our inner life. I stand in the court when I am justified and the judge pronounces that I am free, it is a statement about me, outside me. But sanctification is something that is worked and takes place within.

Thirdly, justification removes the guilt of sin; sanctification removes the pollution of sin and renews us in the image of God.

And therefore, lastly, by definition justification is a once-and-for-all act. It is never to be repeated because it cannot be repeated and never needs to be repeated. It is not a process but a declaration that we are declared just once and for ever, by God. Sanctification, on the other hand, is a continuous process. We continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord until beyond the veil we are perfect.

So there is nothing quite so erroneous and confusing and unscriptural as to mistake the essential difference between justification and sanctification. As we have seen, it is the whole trouble with Roman Catholic teaching and all Catholic piety. It was the thing that held Luther in bondage, and once he saw it, and knew that he was free and just with God, he began to glory and to rejoice—and this is the essence of the Protestant position. Furthermore, of course, it led, in turn, as we saw in the last lecture, to Luther's assurance of salvation. But if you once confuse sanctification with justification, you will be doubtful as to whether you are justified or not. If you once bring in your state and condition and your sin which you may commit, then you are querying your justification. But if you realise that justification is forensic, external and declaratory, you know that you are justified whatever may be true about you.

How, then, does justification happen? The answer is, of course, that it is entirely God's act. It is something that He and He alone does. The Bible is very careful to put it negatively by saying 'not of works' (Eph. 2:9). Paul repeats that in Romans 4:5, 'But to him that worketh [p 176] not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.' We do nothing at all about our justification. It is God's declaration about us; we know it and we receive it by faith.

Now here we come to a crucial point. What do we mean when we say that we are justified by faith only? What is the relationship between faith and justification? This is important because some people think it means that we are justified on account of our faith. But that is the very essence of heresy and must be condemned root and branch. If I am justified on account of my faith, or because I exercise faith, then my salvation is definitely by works and God justifies me because of this work that I have done which I call faith. But the Scripture does not say that I am justified on account of my faith or because I am exercising faith, it says that I am justified *by* faith, which means that faith is the instrument—and nothing but the instrument—by which I am enabled to receive the righteousness which God gives me.

¹ See Volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*.

I wonder whether you realise the significance of this? There are people who say that the difference the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His death upon the cross has made is that, until then, God judged men and women according to the law. But they say that now the law has been put on one side; it is no longer in existence and God no longer asks us to keep it. All He asks us now is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we do that He will declare us just. But that is a complete travesty of the Apostle's teaching! The Bible never says that anywhere, because, if that were true, what would really save us in the end is *our* believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The biblical teaching is that faith, our faith, is not the grounds of our justification. The grounds of our justification is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to us. Christ, and not my faith, is my righteousness. It is not my believing in Him that saves me. It is He who saves me. So you see the subtle danger of regarding my faith as the grounds of salvation?

'Well, where does faith come in?' you ask.

Faith is but the channel, the instrument, by which this righteousness of Christ comes on to me. And as we saw when we considered faith, God does it like this. He gives us the new birth; He gives us this power and faculty of faith and then He enables us to exercise it. Through this exercise of faith we receive the righteousness that God imputes to us. It is all of God. 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Eph. 2:8). If we [p 177] had not been given the gift of faith, we could not receive the righteousness of Christ, but we are justified by the righteousness of Christ, not by our faith.

'But wait a minute,' says someone. 'Aren't you, in saying all that, forgetting what James has to say about faith in chapter 2:14-26? Doesn't he there contradict what Paul teaches in Romans 4? Paul says, "by faith only"; James says, "by works". What about that?'

Well, surely, the answer is that neither Paul nor James, at that point, is concerned with the question of justification as such; they are both simply dealing with the character of faith. They are arguing against different types of people. Paul is dealing with people who believed that they could justify themselves by their works, by the lives and their actions. And to them he has to say, 'No, justification is by faith only, and it was Abraham's faith that saved him.'

But James is speaking about people who, like certain people today, were saying, 'As long as I say I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I'm saved, it doesn't really matter what I do. If I say I'm a Christian and a believer, well, I can go and do what I like my sins will be forgiven.'

'Not at all!' says James. Then he proceeds to show that saving faith, faith worthy of the name faith, is a faith that includes obedience, it includes action: 'As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also' (Jas. 2:26). It is no use talking about faith and about being justified by faith,' says James in effect, 'if you haven't got true faith. And the way you test whether or not your faith is true is by asking whether it leads to certain things in your life.'

Now Paul is saying exactly the same thing. Paul's faith was not a kind of dead faith. it was very active; it proved itself and showed itself. Indeed, in Romans 6, Paul is making exactly the same point as James: 'What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace?' (v. 15). The whole of that chapter is really parallel with James 2. Paul and James are looking at two different problems and are correcting two particular types of error.

But as we have said, the great thing for us to realise is that our faith does not constitute our righteousness. God does not look at me and say that because I believe, He will count that as righteousness. Not at all! What He says is this: 'I will give to you the righteousness of my Son, who kept the law perfectly for you, and who died for your sins. He is absolutely righteous before the law and He has represented you before the law. He has fulfilled its every iota and therefore I will give you His righteousness.' He calls upon me to believe in Him, and He [p 178] has given me, by the gift of faith, the power to believe. So I look to Christ, not to myself, not to my faith, my righteousness is entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has made Him 'wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30). So I do not lean on anything in myself, not even on my faith. My faith makes me lean entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ. And, knowing that God has imputed His righteousness to me, I know that all is well between me and God. I

believe His declaration. My faith accepts it. He has put to my account the perfect, spotless, seamless robe of righteousness of His dear Son. That is the biblical and the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith only.

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17

Adoption

In the last lecture we saw how that great doctrine which was the great battle cry of the Reformation—justification by faith—is still, in many senses, the most vital and important doctrine for us to grasp and to understand. We now come to a consideration of some of the things to which justification leads, and among them is the biblical *doctrine of adoption*.

Now we must not stay with this, but I do beg of you again to consider the order of these doctrines, and to notice that the doctrine of adoption comes at this particular point. Here again we have a most glorious subject which is most encouraging and comforting to the believer. And yet, once more, for some inexplicable reason, it is a doctrine about which we very rarely hear. How often have you heard addresses or sermons on it? Why is it that, even as evangelical people, we neglect, and indeed seem to be unaware of, some of these most comforting and encouraging doctrines which are to be found in the Scriptures?

So, then, let us approach this doctrine by first of all considering the Scriptures in which the term is mentioned. Turn first to Romans 9:4, where we read these words: ‘Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.’ The Apostle is there referring to his kinsmen according to the flesh—the Jews, the Israelites—and I will show you later why I put that particular quotation before the next which comes from Romans 8:15: ‘For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear,’ says the Apostle, ‘but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.’ In verse 23 of that same chapter Paul uses the term again, when he is [p 180] talking about this day that is to come. He says that ‘the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.’ Then the next time we find the term is in Galatians 4:4–5. Paul is talking about how ‘when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law’—for this reason—‘to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.’ And there is another reference to it in Ephesians 1:5: ‘Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.’

There, then, are our Scriptures, and it is our business now to discover what exactly they mean and what this term ‘adoption’ represents. So, as we come to a definition, we had best perhaps, first of all, look at it from the standpoint of the etymology—the root meaning of the word—and it is this: *the placing* of a son. But in ancient languages it also came to mean something which it still means with us, namely, the transfer from one family to another and the placing of the one who has been so transferred as a son or daughter in the new, the second family.

Now if that is the primary, fundamental meaning of the term, that, at once, brings us to a consideration of the meaning of the term ‘son’ and especially the meaning of the term as used in Scripture. As you go through the Bible you will find that ‘son’ is used in the following ways: in the singular it invariably refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and to Him alone. He is *the Son*. Sometimes He is even referred to without the indefinite article as *Son*. He stands alone, in that sense, as *the Son of God*.

The term is also used in the plural of angels, and one gathers from the way in which it is so used and from the context that this is because the angels are God’s favoured creatures, and because, in the matter of intelligence and in certain other respects, they are like God Himself. The term is applied to angels in that way in Job chapters 1 and 6.

Then, in the third place, there is a very interesting use of this term ‘sons’ in Psalm 82:6 where it is applied to human magistrates: ‘I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.’ That is a very important statement because you will recall that in John 10:34 our Lord Himself quoted it when certain people objected to the fact that He was claiming to be the Son of God. Clearly it means that [p 181]

magistrates are sons of God in the sense that authority has been delegated to them from God and that, therefore, in the exercise of their magisterial functions, they are doing something that God Himself does.

The fourth use of this term refers to men and women as subjects of divine adoption; and here we must divide it up into general and special adoption. In the statement in Romans 9:4 Paul is referring to the nation of Israel. He says in verses 2–4: ‘I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart’ for ‘I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption...’ In a sense, that is a reference to Exodus 4:22 where God addresses the nation of Israel and tells them that He is adopting them as His son. Adoption is a term, therefore, that can be used in general of the nation of Israel. They were God’s particular people. That is why, in speaking through Amos, God said to them, ‘You only have I known of all the families [the nations] of the earth.’ Of course, He knew about all the other nations but He had a special interest in Israel. As a nation, they were the son of God. But the special use of this term is spiritual, and that is our primary concern—God adopting certain people to become His sons in a spiritual manner.

Now there are two points which I must take up here. I do so not because they are essential to a positive exposition, but because they are so frequently raised as arguments. They cause such confusion, that it becomes essential that we should consider them. There are those, for instance, who say that Scripture teaches us that all men and women are the children of God. Such people believe in what they call the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of all men and they claim that the Scriptures which support their contention are the following: first of all, a statement in Acts 17:25–29, where the apostle Paul, speaking in Athens, uses the phrase, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ Now that is a very important statement. Paul is telling the Athenians about this God whom they ignorantly worship—they called him ‘the unknown god’—and this is what he says:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath [p 182] determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver ...’

The second Scripture which these people quote is Hebrews 12:9 where the writer is exhorting us to be obedient and not to grumble at the chastisement of God. He says that we have all subjected ourselves to our earthly parents, and then he argues, ‘Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits [which means the father of all spirits] and live?’ And again, in James 1:17, we find a reference to God as ‘the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow or turning.’ So what do we say to this contention that God is the Father of all men and that all men and women are therefore the children of God?

Our first answer is that these very scriptures clearly refer to the relationship of God to all people in creation and in providence only. They are very similar to 1 Timothy 4:10 where we are told that God is ‘the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.’ It is the same kind of distinction. God is the creator of all humanity. In that sense He is the Father of the spirits of all people, but it has nothing to do with redemption and with the special relationship of God to men and women in terms of adopting them as children.

That is a distinction which you find everywhere in Scripture. We have already seen that in the Old Testament God regards Israel as His son in a special way. It is because of this that He says, ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth’ (Amos 3:2). But you get this distinction especially in the New Testament. For instance, in John 1:12 we read, ‘But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.’ Obviously, therefore, the people who are given this power or right or authority to become sons of God are in an entirely different category from others who do not believe. These are those who believe in his name, and the adoption only happens to them, not to the others.

Take also Romans 8:15: 'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.' Who is Paul writing to? Only to Christians, only to believers. He is not writing a general letter to the [p 183] world, but a special letter to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who are in Christ, and who have the Spirit of Christ.

Our Lord put it like this to the unbelieving Jews who had said that they were all children of God: 'If God were your Father,' He said, 'ye would love me' (John 8:42). But then He was more specific and said, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do' (v. 44). Surely that one verse alone is more than enough to demonstrate the case that not all men and women are the children of God in this special sense. Our Lord Himself draws that sharp distinction. And the apostle Paul in the epistle to the Ephesians says that we were all 'by nature the children of wrath, even as others' (Eph. 2:3). And it is only those who have been quickened with Christ who have become the children of God.

I could adduce many other Scriptures which show exactly the same thing, but those are enough. Indeed, any one of them is enough. There is a sharp distinction between the children of God and the children of this world. 'The whole world,' says John in the first epistle, 'lieth in wickedness' but, 'we are of God' (1 John 5:19). It is a distinction that is found everywhere, so we must reject this notion of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

The second point is the whole question of the relationship of our sonship to our Lord's Sonship. This, again, is very important. In becoming the children of God we do not become identical with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God-man, very God of very God and perfect man, perfect God, perfect man. We are not made gods. When we become children of God we do not become God in the sense that our Lord was. Our Lord Himself was very careful to emphasise that distinction. Take, for instance, what He said in giving His disciples the model prayer. He said, 'After this manner therefore pray ye' (Matt. 6:9). He did not include Himself. That is how you and I are to pray, and we say, 'Our Father'. He is not included with us, He did not pray that particular prayer.

But after His resurrection, our Lord made a still more specific statement. He said to one of the women, 'Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father' and to my God, and your God' (John 20:17). Why did He divide it up in that way? The reason is, obviously, that He was anxious to preserve this distinction. He did not say, 'I ascend unto our God and unto our Father.' No, He is the only begotten, He is the Son of God by generation; we are sons of God by adoption. And that is a most essential distinction.

[p 184] This enables us to go a step further in our exact definition of what is meant by the adoption. We can describe it, therefore, as that judicial act of God by which He confers or bestows upon us the status or the standing of children. That is its real meaning. And I am anxious to stress the fact that it is a distinct and a special movement, or division, of the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. It must be differentiated from all the other acts and yet we must not separate it. It is a distinct step but it is not an entirely separate step, as I have been emphasising. There is a sense in which these things, as it were, happen all together—regeneration and faith and justification, and so on. The same applies to this great act of adoption, and yet, for the sake of clear thinking, we must differentiate in our minds between these things. Adoption is not the same as justification; it is not even a part of justification, but is quite separate. In justification, you remember, we found that God declares us to be righteous; it is a declaratory, a forensic act. He declares that our sins are forgiven and that He accepts the righteousness of Christ which He has put upon us. So justification is not adoption. In the same way, we must be clear that adoption and regeneration are not synonymous. In regeneration we are given the new nature; we become partakers of the divine nature. We become new creations, new creatures. But that is not adoption.

In a sense, adoption is a combination of justification and regeneration. It is the new creature in a new relationship to God—as a child of God. Adoption is more than justification, it is more than regeneration, but it includes them both. Here is the man or woman with the new nature, declared to be just and free from the law and its condemnation, and to be positively righteous. Yes, but, in addition to all that, now declared to be a child of God. In a sense, again, it is a judicial act and another proclamation. But it

proclaims something new, something different. By adoption, then, we become the children of God and are introduced into and given the privileges that belong to members of God's family.

Now once more, unfortunately, I must turn aside and say something negative, which I shall put in the form of a question. Does this adoption apply to all Christians or only to some? Is there a distinction between being children of God and sons of God? I have to deal with this subject because there are two groups which teach that all Christians are children of God but that only some are sons of God. What is their attempt at a justification for that statement? Their main [p 185] evidence, they say, is Matthew 5:9: 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.' Now they get that in the Revised Version. In the Authorised [King James] Version the translation is 'children of God'. Now, they say, our Lord was preaching there to those who were believers and were therefore children of God—shown by the fact that He taught them to say, 'Our Father'. Yes, but it is only the people who act as peacemakers who become sons of God. That is the argument.

Then they say that in verse 45 of that same Sermon on the Mount, our Lord exhorted us not only to love those who love us but also to love our enemies: 'I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven.' Again, that is the Revised Version, while the Authorised Version reads, 'That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.' We do not dispute that they are quite right in translating it as 'sons', but they say that while all Christians are children, it is only those who love their enemies who become sons.

Then their next piece of evidence is in Luke 20:36 where our Lord is dealing with a question about the resurrection. The problem put to Him was about what would happen to a woman who had married a whole series of brothers. In the Revised Version the passage ends by saying that in the resurrection they are as the sons of God: 'being sons of the resurrection'. Now that, say the proponents of this view, only applies to certain people. Furthermore, they try to argue that in Galatians 3 and 4, where Paul reminds the Galatians that whereas they were children under the law, they are now, as the result of the work of Christ and the giving of the Spirit, sons of God (see, for example, Gal. 4:6-7). There again, they say, we find that same distinction. The Old Testament saints were only children of God; the New Testament saints, some of them who realise this, can become sons of God. And on the basis of this argument they say that not only is it true that not all Christians are sons of God, but it is only those who behave in this particular way who do become sons of God.

In other words, they say that by grace we are all children, but that becoming sons is not a matter of grace, but of application—making an effort, loving your enemies, being peacemakers and so on—and that if we only do these things we will then become sons of God. This is not of grace but of effort and of activity on the part of the believer. And they even go so far as to say that Christians who are merely children [p 186] will not take part in the first resurrection but only the sons, and that it is only the sons who will spend their eternity in the immediate presence of the Lord—the children will not have that privilege. Children will be in the new heavens and the new earth, but they will not be in our Lord's immediate presence.

You may be astonished to hear that there is such a teaching, but there is, and it is put forward by Christian people. But it is just another instance of the way in which, if we become overinterested in words and in mechanics, we can end by wresting the Scriptures from their true meaning, and doing them grave injustice, because, surely, this is an utterly artificial and, indeed, false distinction. I can demonstrate that from the very eighth chapter of Romans, which they are also so fond of quoting. I suggest to you that the very use of the terms in verses 15, 16 and 17 falsifies their entire argument: 'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are sons of God'—that is the Revised Version. Then it goes on—'and if *children*, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' Surely it is obvious that the Apostle is there using the two terms interchangeably.

But take again Paul's words in Galatians 3:26: 'For in Christ Jesus,' he says, 'we are all sons of God through faith.' That is the Revised Version. Who are the *we*? All Christians. And in Galatians 4:4-7, he is

again speaking, not of some special Christians, but of all Christians, even of these Galatian Christians who are going into error in certain respects. They are ‘the sons of God,’ Paul says; not only some of them, all of them. And in the same way in Ephesians 1, he is referring again to all believers, all Christians. All who are saved and redeemed by the blood of Christ are redeemed unto the adoption of children.

And perhaps the most significant thing of all is that the word that is rightly translated ‘sons’—and not ‘children’, because there are two different words in the Greek—that word is never applied to believers in any of the writings of the apostle John. In his Gospel and in his epistles the apostle John always refers to believers as *children*. He never uses the precise term ‘sons’, but obviously the whole time he is describing us in the position of sons and of those who have been adopted into sonship. Now it is quite inconceivable that the apostle John would have done that if there is this vital distinction between sons and children. According to that argument, the apostle John had never realised that Christians are sons of God, he simply regarded [p 187] them as children of God and, therefore, in his teaching he was depriving them of this special position which they claim the apostle Paul teaches with respect to them. So I conclude that taking the writings of Paul himself, this is an utterly artificial, false and meaningless distinction which is pernicious in its implications and teaching. And when you look at it from the standpoint of the whole of Scripture, and especially the writings of John, it is seen to be completely and entirely untenable.

So let me come to something more important and more interesting. What are the proofs that any one of us can have that we have been adopted? Well, you can find the scriptural proof. ‘For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:26). Also in 1 Peter 1:3–6 you find it again: we have been begotten again ‘unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you’—for us who believe in Him. We are the inheritance, that is the children. It is for all of us who believe in Christ.

Then the second way of assurance is that we are given ‘the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8:15); ‘we receive the adoption of sons’ (Gal. 4:5). You can be assured of the fact that you have received the adoption because you know that the Holy Spirit is dwelling within you. We saw the evidence for that earlier, so you can work it out. Especially we have His testimony with our spirits that we are the children of God. If we have that testimony of the Spirit with our spirit, it is an absolute proof that we have received the adoption.

And then last of all I would put the fact that we are led by the Spirit. That is Paul’s argument: ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God’ (Rom. 8:14). Paul does not say ‘As many as are actively acting as peacemakers or who are loving their enemies ...’ No! ‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God’; those who subject themselves to His leading and who rejoice in being led by Him, they are the sons of God.

There, then, are the proofs. Now, finally, let us consider the *results of our adoption*. First, if we have the Spirit of adoption, we have lost ‘the spirit of bondage again to fear’ (Rom. 8:15). Positively, in the second place, we have been given a spirit of liberty. In other words, we are no longer afraid of the law and its condemnation; we are no longer afraid of death; we are enjoying something of the glorious liberty of the children of God. Again, thirdly, I would remind you that we receive this spirit of adoption through the indwelling Spirit.

[p 188] But then, in addition, there are these results: because we have been adopted into God’s family, we are entitled to bear His name. We can say that we are the children of God. We are members of the household of God. We belong to God’s family. God’s name is upon us. He has said, ‘I will be your God, and ye shall be my people’ (Lev. 26:12). We are His people. You remember that Peter applies to Christians what God had said to the nation of Israel of old (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

What else? Well, the fifth benefit is that we enjoy the present protection and consolation which God alone can give, and the provision that He makes for His children. ‘Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered’ (Luke 12:7); nothing can happen to us apart from Him. Think of those gracious and glorious promises which are given to the children and which we prove to be true in experience: protection, consolations and the perfect provision for our every need. He has said, ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee’ (Heb. 13:5)—come what may.

The next benefit, at first, is not so pleasurable—fatherly chastisements. That is the whole argument of the first half of Hebrews 12: ‘For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth’ (v. 6). The argument is that if we are not receiving chastisement, then, we are not sons, but bastards. If we are children of God, He will chastise us for our good: ‘Now no chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby’ (v. 11). So that this is a very definite result of our adoption. If we are children of God, He is determined to bring us to glory and if we will not listen to His leading and teaching, He will chastise us because He loves us and because we are His sons. Because He has set His love and affection upon us, He is going to bring us through. So He chastises His children, but not those who are not children.

The next is this: *heirship*. ‘And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ’ (Rom. 8:17). What a wonderful argument! It is because we have been adopted into the family of God and are declared to be children, that we are the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The inheritance is certain.

The last point is the certainty and the security of it all. Yes, says Peter, you have been called to this ‘inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you’ (1 Pet. 1:4), and therefore secure. Paul has said the same thing in [p 189] Romans 8:38–39: ‘I am persuaded, that neither death nor life ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ If God has adopted you into His family, if you are a child of God, your destiny is secure, it is certain.

Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below nor above,
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever my soul from His love.

Augustus Toplady

It is a guarantee. If God has taken me into the family I am not only a child, I am an heir, and nothing, and no one can ever rob me of the inheritance.

As I said at the beginning, this is a most consoling, comforting and encouraging doctrine. Is it not a tragedy that it is neglected, that men and women stop at forgiveness, or even at sanctification, and fail to realise that this is the thing that ever reminds us, directly, of our relationship to God and of the wonderful inheritance, the indescribable glory for which we are destined? We are saved unto this adoption of children. Not merely forgiven; not merely declared righteous; not merely with this new nature. Above, beyond, in addition to that we are declared to be the children of God—sons of God, heirs of God, joint heirs with the only begotten Son of God.

18

Sanctification—the Different Views

I would like to remind you again at this point that it is most important in these lectures on doctrine that we should see the relationship of these different aspects of the truth to one another. We shall need to emphasise this considerably in this lecture because in connection with the doctrine that we are now considering, it is one of the most important points of all. We have, in other words, come to the doctrine of sanctification. The position we have reached is this: we have a new nature; we are born again; we are in union with Christ; we are declared to be just; we are adopted into the family. Yes, but what about the problem of sin? We have not suddenly been made perfect. There is still the problem of sin in the life of the believer and the doctrine of sanctification deals with what God does about this.

This doctrine is highly controversial because there are a number of different views and theories about it, more with respect to exactly *how* sanctification takes place, than with respect to *what* it is. The questions are about how it happens, and its extent. There has been considerable controversy, especially for the last two hundred years, and the prime cause was none other than the great John Wesley. John Wesley propounded a theory with regard to sanctification and holiness which he regarded as absolutely vital; he taught it himself, and taught his preachers to preach it. It led to great discussion, and, I am afraid, to acrimonious debate between equally good and equally evangelical Christian people.

Those who are interested in theology and in the history of this matter should read the great debate that went on between, on the one hand, John Wesley and his coadjutor and helper, the saintly John Fletcher of Madeley, and on the other hand, people such as George [p 191] Whitefield, Augustus Toplady and others. That is important, not only historically, but for all who take their Christian faith seriously. The debate began then and it has continued more or less ever since, because John Wesley is, in some ways, the father of the various popular views with regard to sanctification that have been propounded since. The views, for instance, of the Salvation Army come directly from John Wesley. William Booth was a Methodist and he took over Methodist teaching, introducing certain modifications. And the various other holiness movements that came into being both in the nineteenth and in the twentieth centuries, all stem from the teaching of John Wesley.

Now, I am well aware of the fact that there are certain Christian people who, when they hear or read something like that, say at once, 'What does it matter what one believes about it?' They may ask, 'Do you believe that John Wesley was as much a Christian as George Whitefield?' To which my reply is—yes. Indeed, I would even use the reply that was given by George Whitefield on one famous occasion. One of Whitefield's very strong and aggressive supporters went to him one afternoon and said, 'Mr Whitefield, do you think that we shall see Mr Wesley in heaven?' To which Mr Whitefield replied, 'Probably not, he will be in such a high and exalted position that you and I won't see him there.' That is the right way to approach this matter.

Now of course, our salvation is not determined by our view of sanctification, whatever that view may be. But that is no reason for saying that it does not matter what we believe about it. It is always the business of Christians, believers, to study the Scriptures and to arrive at what they regard as the most scriptural understanding of the truth of a doctrine. If you do not do that and if you say that it does not matter at all, that you cannot be bothered, and that these things do not count, then what you are really saying is that truth does not matter. That is often maintained. There are people who say, 'Of course we don't agree with such and such a man's theology, but what does his theology matter, as long as he is able to gather a crowd and to bring people to Christ?'

Now such people are really saying that truth does not matter at all, they are only interested in results. The moment you say that, you are opening the door wide to every conceivable cult. Not only that, you are putting yourself in the dangerous position that if a very plausible teaching should suddenly be presented to you, you will probably [p 192] believe it because you will have no standards whereby to evaluate it. The various heresies and cults that are popular succeed only because Christians have not taken the trouble to

learn their own case. The people who come to our doors selling their books and bringing their theories, know their case, they have been drilled and trained in it and they know exactly what they believe. Shame on us Christian people, if we do not know our own doctrines. If we take up the attitude, 'Why bother if people disagree?' then it will lead inevitably to those results. However, the view of sanctification that I hope to propound to you very definitely does say that though people may be in very serious error in their views of sanctification, ultimately this does not prevent their being sanctified—that will develop as we go on with the argument.

So, then, as we approach this whole problem, let us start again with a definition. What does sanctification mean? Now if you go through your Bible and pick out the terms in the Old Testament and in the New, you will find quite a number, and I will summarise the meaning very briefly. The authorities are not quite agreed about the meaning of the word used in the Old Testament. Some say that it means 'to shine', like a bright light, a shining, while others say that it means 'to cut', 'to separate'. I am very ready to put both meanings together because I think the two aspects do come into the whole question of sanctification. There is a cutting off. There is a separation. Yes, but true sanctification also involves a shining—the sort of thing that was seen on Moses' face after he had been up on the mountain with God. There is a sort of brightness about holiness, something of the *shekinah* glory itself. So both those ideas are there in the Old Testament. When you come to the New Testament, the various words all mean—in the main—the idea of separating.

There are two main meanings to sanctification. The first is: to set apart for God and for His service. This is a great meaning of sanctification in both the Old and New Testaments. It is very interesting to observe that it applies not only to men and women but even to inanimate objects. The mountain on which God gave Moses the Ten Commandments is referred to as the 'holy mount' or the sanctified mount. It had been set apart for this specific purpose, so it became a holy mount. The temple building is referred to as holy, and in it there was the holy place and the holiest of all. The vessels in the temple, the instruments and these things are all again described as being sanctified, set apart, made holy (Ex. 28:29 etc.).

[p 193] There is a double meaning to the idea of being set apart. The first is separation *from* everything that is profane or unclean or impure. Those vessels were never to be used in an ordinary way again. Once they had been sanctified, they had been set apart from ordinary use. But, secondly, it also means, positively, that anything that is sanctified is devoted entirely *to* God, presented to God, offered to God, that He may use it for His own service. Now in that connection it is very interesting to observe that the term 'to sanctify' is actually used about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. You will find it twice in John's Gospel. The first is in John 10:36. Our Lord was arguing with the Jews who were asking Him about His identity and He said, 'Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?' The Father has sanctified me, He says. This means, 'set apart for His own service'. And in John 17:19, He says, 'For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.' And there can be no doubt that there it means that He was setting Himself at the disposal of God, that God may do, in Him and with Him and through Him on the cross, that work which was essential before our sins could be dealt with and we could be forgiven. So in the double sense of separating from and devoting entirely to God, the term is used of inanimate objects and even of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

You will also find that the term 'to sanctify' is very frequently used in that sense about believers. Let me give you some examples. On the road to Damascus, the risen Lord gave the apostle Paul his great commission—you will find the account in Acts 26 especially in verse 18. The Lord told Paul to go to the Gentiles, 'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.' Now that I suggest is this generic use of sanctification, meaning that people are set apart for God.

Or take again 1 Corinthians 6:11 which is a most interesting and important verse. We believe, do we not, that sanctification, in our logical order, should follow justification. And yet this is what you read: 'And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God'. Notice that here sanctification comes before justification, so what

does it mean? It is that the Corinthian Christians were taken out of the world, out of the sinful Corinthian society, and set apart for [p 194] God—washed and sanctified. They had become the people of God, set apart for Him and for His service.

Then you have the same use of it in Hebrews 10:10: 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.' That means—and it can have no other meaning in that verse and in its connection—set apart. Or take again the fourteenth verse, in that chapter: 'For by one offering he hath perfected for ever'—it is the same idea—'them that are sanctified.' By His death upon the cross He has perfected those who are sanctified, and the word there can only mean set apart for God as God's people.

Take another illustration from Peter: 'Elect,' he says, 'according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 1:2). Now there again, sanctify obviously means set apart, taken out of the world, put for God and at God's disposal. And in the same way in 1 Peter 2:9, you find this: 'Ye are ... a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,' and so on. In other words, Peter there applies to the Church, to Christian people, the very term that was used in Exodus 19 of the nation of Israel. The Children of Israel were God's holy nation, a sanctified nation; He had set them apart for Himself. It is equally true of Christian men and women. In that sense we are, all of us, already sanctified, once and for ever, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross.

But sanctification has a second meaning which is not so much a positional as an inward meaning. It does not so much make a statement about us as set apart for God as add that, because of that, something happens within us to make us worthy of our new position. This is an ethical meaning—'to make holy'. Being set apart for God does not *make* us holy; we are *regarded* as holy. But the second meaning describes how we are made holy. It means, therefore, a certain work of purification and cleansing which goes on within us, which makes us conform more and more to the Lord Jesus Christ and which changes us into His image from glory to glory. And that is the meaning which people generally have in mind when they talk about sanctification. It is the common use of the word. If people ask you, 'What do you believe about sanctification? How do you believe one is sanctified?' that is what they probably mean. They are referring to this inward cleansing, this inward purification, this being made conformable to the image of God's dear Son.

[p 195] So then, I suggest to you that this will do as a good definition of sanctification: it is 'that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God and enables him to perform good works.' Let me make that clear: 'It is that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which He delivers the justified sinner'—the one who is already justified—'from the pollution of sin'—not from the guilt any longer, that has happened. Justification has taken care of that. He is declared just and righteous, the guilt has been dealt with. Now we are concerned more about the power and the pollution of sin—'renews his whole nature in the image of God and enables him to perform good works.'

As we saw when we were dealing with justification, a convenient way of putting it, perhaps, would be this: in justification righteousness is imputed to us, put to our account. God, you remember, justifies the ungodly. He does not wait until people are fully sanctified before He justifies them. That, we saw, was the Roman Catholic error. No, God looks at men and women in their sins, and, applying to them the righteousness of Christ, declares them to be just. That is *imputed* righteousness. But in sanctification, we are discussing *imparted* righteousness. Not the righteousness that is put to my account, but the righteousness that is created within me and produced within me. Now that is a great distinction. The Church Fathers used to talk a lot about the difference between imparted and imputed righteousness, and it is a measure of our degradation that these terms are not as familiar to us as they were to them. They were great terms of the seventeenth, eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries. What has gone wrong with us in this century? Why have we lost these great terms and their great meanings?

So sanctification is really God's way of dealing with the problem of sin after our regeneration and justification. But there is just one other thing I must deal with before I leave the question of definition. We

must always be careful to define sanctification not only in terms of our moral state and condition but of our moral state and condition in relationship to God. That is absolutely vital. People can be highly moral but that does not mean that they are sanctified. The word must always carry with it this conception of our relationship to God, our standing in His presence. So sanctification is not morality and purity in and of itself. It is all that in its relationship to God. There is, therefore, an essential difference between the best moral person that the [p 196] world may put forward and the Christian who is being sanctified.

So let us leave definition at that point and come on to the next step. The great question is: How does it take place, this process of purging us and purifying us from the pollution of sin and of making us increasingly conformable to the image of Jesus Christ? And here we come to the heart of the different views and schools of thought, which can be divided into three main groups. There are, first of all, those I would describe as *perfectionist* views, views that in some shape or form teach the possibility of some kind of perfection for the Christian in this world. I do not apologise for that sort of language because I am being strictly accurate. The moment you begin to study these people you find that, though they have different ideas as to what constitutes perfection, they are all concerned about perfection in this world.

Now we cannot go into all the details and the ramifications of the different schools of thought to be found in this first group, but let me try to summarise. There are some who teach that sin is entirely eradicated from the Christian. It is like going to your garden and seeing a weed. You do not merely cut off the top, you get your fork, you push it down and take out the whole weed—roots and all. But when they teach that, these people go on to say that by sanctification they mean that we are living as perfectly as we are capable of living at any given moment. We may, they say, be capable of much more in a year or in ten years' time, but perfection is that you are living as perfectly as you can at this moment. They have a kind of sliding scale of perfection. That was the teaching, for instance, of the famous Charles G. Finney and his great associate, Ezra Mayhem—of the so-called Oberlin School in the United States. That was what they taught and they have many followers.

But John Wesley did not put it quite like that. John Wesley said that Christian perfection means that Christian men and women are not wilfully committing any known sin at any given moment. John Wesley granted that they may be committing sins that they are not aware of, but he very carefully (let us be fair to his teaching) defines it as not being guilty *wilfully* of any known sin. It is a moment by moment state, says Wesley; you may sin the next moment but you are perfect at this moment. And it only applies to known sins. From Wesley's definition and standpoint, if you are sinning ignorantly, it does not matter, that will be revealed to you later, and the moment you see and understand, then you must forsake that sin also, and then you are perfect in that respect. So sanctification [p 197] means some kind of perfection, but not an absolute perfection.

Others talk about sanctification in terms of having a clean heart, the heart has been entirely cleansed from sin, but again they, too, would say known sin and wilful sin. Others put it in yet another way. Here again I am referring to John Wesley who was very fond of describing it as 'perfect love'. He said that Christian people may be guilty of sins of ignorance, things they are not aware of. They are still frail and ignorant in many respects. So, 'How do you call such people perfect?' he was asked. And his response was that if they can say that they love God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, then though they are not actually perfect in life and in practice, they are perfect in love. They are loving God perfectly as far as they can at that moment; with the whole of their being they want to love God and are loving Him. That is perfect love, said Wesley. It may be greater later but at the moment it is perfect. As we have seen, he was very much concerned to emphasise this moment by moment aspect of perfection and sanctification.

Now it is a characteristic of all those perfectionist views that sanctification is something that is to be received and can be received in a moment. It is something that is done to us by God through the Holy Spirit and all we have to do is to desire it, to believe that it is possible, and to exercise faith. We have only to believe that if we ask God for it, He will give it to us. So we can receive it in a moment, in a flash. They are very fond of putting it like this: 'As you received your justification, so you should receive your sanctification.' It is an experience, something that can happen in a moment, completely.

The second group advocates or tells us that men and women are sanctified by means of what is called *the principle of counter-action*. This was the view which became popular in the seventies of the nineteenth century, and it is still popular. Now the people who hold this view do not believe in eradication of sin. They are very clear and explicit about that, and they regard the teaching of eradication as dangerous. So does the Christian just struggle throughout life in defeat? Oh no, they say, there is a new principle. Their great text, the very basis of their teaching, is Romans 8:2: ‘The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.’ ‘Yes,’ they say, ‘sin remains in the believer, but if he looks to Christ, abides in Him and relies upon Him by faith, Christ will keep him from sinning. There is this power of sin within the Christian, yes, but the power of Christ more than counteracts it’—that is where the **[p 198]** counteraction comes in. And large numbers of illustrations are used.

Many of these illustrations came from the Reverend Evan Hopkins. His two favourites were these: first, the poker. There is a poker—it is cold, black and rigid. Yes, but put that poker into a fire and what happens to it? It becomes red, becomes hot and malleable. Take it out of the fire and it again becomes cold, black and rigid. That is the teaching of this school with regard to sanctification. As long as you abide in Christ, you remain, as it were, red, hot and malleable; you are kept free from sin. But if you do not abide in Christ you revert to exactly the state in which you were before.

The other illustration is the one about the lifebelt. They say that the law of gravity causes heavy bodies to sink in water. There is a man in the water and he cannot swim, so he sinks. Ah yes, but now introduce the law of counter-action. Put a lifebelt, inflated with air, round that man and what happens? Well, it counteracts the law that makes him sink, it keeps him afloat. But if the man shuffles out of the lifebelt, the old law comes in and down he goes! He must abide. He must keep on looking and trusting. So, again, whether it be the whole condition or a particular sin, all that a Christian has to do is just confess it and acknowledge it. He has to look to Christ, abide and trust in Him, and rely upon Him, and Christ will keep him victorious. Now, like the perfectionist views, this teaching again says that normally this starts as an experience and then continues as a process. In other words, sanctification is something that is to be received, and can be received in a moment, and all you do then is to abide in that experience.

Then the third and last teaching says that sanctification is a process which starts from the very moment of our regeneration, continues progressively throughout our lives and will only be perfect beyond death. The big thing that differentiates this view from the others is that it does not describe sanctification as an experience which can be received subsequent to justification; it emphasises the fact that the moment we are regenerate, sanctification has started and it goes on and is only complete and entire when our bodies shall ultimately be glorified and delivered from corruption. As Paul says, in Romans 8:23 where he is talking about the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain until now, ‘And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.’ It is only when the body is finally redeemed that our sanctification will be perfect.

[p 199] The book I strongly recommend you to read as an exposition of this teaching is *Holiness* by Bishop Ryle. This book was largely written in order to deal with the various other ideas and theories that I have put before you. Now, as I said at the beginning, let me say again as I close, it is our duty to examine these things, but it is not our duty to examine them in a party spirit, or solely with the idea of defending our own view and criticising another. As I have often said, I am a great debtor to John Wesley. I am even a debtor to John Wesley on his holiness teaching. I do not accept it all, obviously, and there are points at which I would say that it is definitely wrong, but I spend a good deal of my time reading works and books on sanctification and holiness, by and about people who belong to my first group—the perfectionists. And I am glad to testify to the glory of God that whereas I do not believe and have to reject what is perhaps their main emphasis, I read them and they warm my heart, and they encourage and promote the process of sanctification within me, and I thank God for them.

So let us read these books, which are all of them expositions of Scripture, and let us go to the Bible. Let us try to examine them as dispassionately as we can and try to arrive at the truth concerning this matter. If we do it together in that way, our souls will be blessed and enriched, and we will thank God that we have given time to the study of the doctrine of sanctification.

Sanctification—God’s Work and Ours

We have considered the three main views of the doctrine of sanctification and we must keep them in mind as we now seek to approach the subject in a more direct and expository manner. Certain principles are taught quite plainly in the Scripture, and we must test those three views and theories by these principles.

The first great principle found everywhere in the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as in the New, is that sanctification is God’s will for us. There is the great statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, where we are told explicitly, ‘For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.’ That is the starting point and it is fundamental. God’s purpose in doing everything that He did in the Old Testament is ultimately our sanctification. His purpose when He ‘sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law’ (Gal. 4:4) was still our sanctification. When Christ went to the death of the cross, the object was our perfection, as it was in the giving of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, everything God has done about us and our salvation has as its end and object our sanctification.

Now it is absolutely vital that we should grasp that principle. If you want further proof you will find it in John 17:17. Our Lord is about to leave His own, and He is praying to the Father for them, and what does He pray? ‘Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.’ Indeed, He goes further and says in verse 19, ‘And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.’ Now when our Lord says there, ‘I sanctify myself,’ He is saying to His Father, in effect, ‘I am putting myself at your disposal; I am separating myself unto this final work that you have for me to do.’ That is nothing but the death upon the cross. He does that in order that we may be [p 201] sanctified; it is the object which is behind everything. Again, the apostle Paul says to Titus, ‘Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works’ (Tit. 2:14). That is why He died for us on the cross, for that, and for nothing less. There is a hymn which puts it well:

He died that we might be forgiven;

yes, but it does not stop at that:

He died to make us good.

Cecil Frances Alexander

The tendency is to forget the second part, and, as I shall show you in a moment, to associate the death upon the cross only with forgiveness. But the Bible never does that.

So the first principle to grasp is that sanctification is the end of the whole process of salvation. If that is true, then we must recognise that there are certain dangers which must be avoided at all costs. Let me note them. The first great danger is that of isolating these various doctrines and of separating them from one another in a false way. We have often emphasised the fact that nothing is so clear, as you work through the Bible and look at its doctrines, as the way in which they all belong together. They all form one piece. They are not disjointed, dismembered teachings that hang loosely together. There is a vital connection between them all and we have seen that all along.

Now it is right to distinguish them, but there is all the difference in the world between distinguishing between things and separating them. For the purposes of thought, and, indeed, in accordance with the Scripture, we must distinguish justification from sanctification. But that is a very different thing from separating them. And we must never do that because, according to this teaching, they are part of the same process, they are part of God’s one great movement of salvation. Therefore we must never suggest that you can have one without the other; that you can be justified without being sanctified, or only later become sanctified. That is totally unscriptural.

Take, for example, that great statement of Paul’s in Romans, ‘... whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified’ (Rom. 8:30). The Apostle is saying there that this whole process of salvation is one, and that when God starts this work [p 202] in a man or woman, there is a

sense in which the whole work is already complete; they go straight from justification to glorification. So it is very wrong to draw these divisions and distinctions which mean separation. Or take another statement by the Apostle, in 1 Corinthians 1:30: 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' It is the Lord who is made all these things to us, and therefore we must not separate them for this good reason—you cannot divide the Lord Jesus Christ! You are either in Christ or else you are not. If you are a Christian, you are joined to Christ, and all the benefits of Christ are yours.

We saw that very clearly when we were dealing with the doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ, the great doctrine of Romans chapters 5 and 6. Paul says: You were crucified with Him, you died with Him, you were buried with Him, you have risen again with Him, and you are *already* seated in the heavenly places with Him. If we are in Christ, He is made unto us not justification only but sanctification also, and redemption. He is the all and in all, and therefore I suggest that the people who separate justification and sanctification, and say that the two have no essential inherent connection, are guilty of dividing Christ, and we have the right to ask, 'Is Christ divided? (1 Cor. 1:13). That, then, is our first deduction: God's will, God's purpose in the whole of salvation, in everything He has done in His Son and by the Spirit, is our sanctification.

The second danger, therefore, is the danger of thinking in terms of seeking pardon and forgiveness only, and then of imagining that later on we ought to seek our sanctification. 'Ah yes,' people say, 'so and so sought salvation. He believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and his sins were forgiven, but he has not gone on to sanctification yet. He has remained at that first stage of justification and forgiveness.' And they now believe it to be their duty to try to get him to go on to sanctification and to receive that as he received justification.

But, surely, that is utterly false reasoning. People cannot seek forgiveness only, for this good reason: Why do they seek forgiveness? Why should anybody desire it? Well, there can be only one answer to that question. Some people, of course, when they seek forgiveness, are only seeking a feeling of comfort within themselves, but that is not seeking true forgiveness. To seek forgiveness must mean that they have seen something of the holiness of God and the holiness of God's law; they have already seen themselves as sinners. They must have [p 203] hated this thing which has separated them from God, and, therefore, if they are truly seeking forgiveness, they must be anxious to be delivered from that which has made them miserable and made them sin against God, and which has put them into such a dangerous position. Surely that is the basis for seeking forgiveness. I see no meaning in the term 'forgiveness' if it does not mean that. No, no, if you are concerned about forgiveness, you know something about yourself as a hell-deserving sinner.

In dealing with repentance we had to go into the meaning of forgiveness in detail, and we pointed out how in true repentance the whole person is involved; the mind understands this truth, the heart feels it. We emphasised, in passing, that, until comparatively recently, repentance was associated with weakness and with people being broken down and sometimes crying out in agony as they failed to find peace. That is the biblical repentance and throughout the centuries that has been the Church's teaching about repentance. If men and women are not aware of all these things, there is no true content to their use of the term forgiveness. But if forgiveness includes all that, it is already the beginning of sanctification. The moment we see something of the sinfulness of sin, and long to be separated from it, and to be nearer to God, and to enjoy God, that in itself is sanctification, that is to be separated unto God.

Then, in the third place, there is obviously, therefore, a very real danger of a false evangelism which is concerned only about giving people some kind of temporary relief and release, and does not press upon them the vital importance of sanctification. An evangelism which stops at forgiveness is not biblical evangelism because the heart of all preaching is that the essence of sin is to be separated from God, and if we preach reconciliation truly, we must be preaching sanctification.

So as our basic conception we must know that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price. That is Paul's argument. He teaches sanctification in terms of the death upon the cross: 'Know ye not that ... ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6:19–20). In preaching sanctification

the Apostle does not only preach the Holy Spirit, he is always preaching the cross at the same time. These things are linked together. In his early evangelism among the Thessalonians, for instance, the effect was that these people ‘turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God’ (1 Thess. 1:9). To serve God is sanctification and so that was Paul’s first [p 204] message in Thessalonica. So the end of all evangelism should be to reconcile men and women to God, and to separate them unto Him. Again, we need to remember that old concept of doing a thorough ‘law work’ in presenting Christ as Saviour. These things must always go together and sanctification is a part of the message of evangelism.

Let me put it, finally, like this. The whole trouble with regard to sanctification arises from our fatal tendency to start with ourselves instead of with God. We think of ourselves and our problems, our sins and our needs, and we have those things in our mind when we begin to talk about sanctification. But there is the whole error. The apostle Peter, in preaching sanctification, adopts the exact opposite procedure. This is how he puts it: ‘Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as *obedient children*’—it is your relationship to God that determines it—‘... as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy—why?—‘for I am holy’ (1 Pet. 1:13–16).

Now the idea has somehow gained currency that meetings and conventions in which holiness is preached are clinics where people should go because they are being bothered by some particular sin. They have a sin which they cannot get rid of, so they are encouraged to go to this ‘clinic’ which will deliver them of their problem. But that is not how the Bible puts it. There is one reason, and one reason only, why we should all be sanctified and holy, and it is this: not that we may be happy, nor that we may get rid of our problems, but because God is holy, because we are God’s people and because Christ has died for us, and purchased us. We do not belong to ourselves. We have no right to live a sinful life.

That, then, is the way in which we should start facing this subject of sanctification. Salvation is God’s work from beginning to end, and therefore there can be no gaps, no hiatus. It is something that is started by God, continued by God and perfected by God Himself. The moment, therefore, that we are regenerate and united to the Lord Jesus Christ, the process of sanctification has already started. The moment I receive the divine nature, the moment I am born again, something has come into me which is going to separate me from sin. Take that statement of James which is sometimes not properly understood because of our translations. ‘Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?’ (Jas. 4:5). Now [p 205] the margin of the Revised Version very rightly puts that like this: ‘Do you not know that the Spirit that God has given you, that is in you, is lusting even to the point of envy, to wean you from the world and its spirit and to God?’ That is it. So the moment I am born again and have received the Holy Spirit, this process of separating me has already started, and I cannot be regenerate without the process of sanctification having already started to work within me. The conflict between the flesh and the Spirit has already begun and that is the fight to separate me from the world and unto God, in every part and in every step.

That, then, brings us to the second great principle: What is the agent in sanctification? If that is the process, if that is God’s will, if that is what all salvation is tending unto, how does it take place? How does sanctification proceed within us? Now here again we must be careful. We have seen, in looking at a number of these doctrines, that in some of them God alone acts. In regeneration, for instance, we do nothing, it is entirely the action of God. In justification, likewise, we do nothing at all; justification is entirely the action of God in pronouncing us to be just and righteous. The same applies to our adoption. We have nothing to do with our adoption, it is God’s declaration, God’s action. But, on the other hand, when we were considering repentance and faith, we pointed out that though these again are started by the Holy Spirit, we have our part to play. *We* must confess our sins, and forsake them. We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we cannot do so without the initial movement of God—it is started by Him—but then we have to express that belief. And it is exactly the same with sanctification.

The classic text to describe our active participation is found in the epistle to the Philippians, chapter 2: ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure’ (vv. 12–13). Now there the balance is presented to us perfectly. So when we are discussing the agency in sanctification, when we are asking, ‘How is this work of sanctification carried on

in us?' we must start by saying that it is primarily the action of God; it is God who works in us both to will and to do.

The Scripture is quite clear about this and in a very remarkable manner. Sanctification in the Scripture is attributed to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Let me give you the texts. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 teaches us that it is the Father's work: 'And the very God [p 206] of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Then in the same way in Hebrews there is that great statement: 'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, *make you perfect* in every good work to do his will ...' (Heb. 13:20-21). It is the God of peace who is going to do this. It is the Father. It is He, who brought the Lord Jesus, His Son, from the dead, who will make us perfect.

But in exactly the same way the Scriptures tell us that sanctification is the work of the Son. And have you noticed how often, in working through these doctrines, we have seen how the same work is attributed to the three blessed Persons? I know of nothing so uplifting as the realisation of that great truth that the three blessed Persons in the Trinity have co-operated in order that a worm such as I might be rescued and redeemed, and made perfect, to stand in the presence of God in the Judgment. Here is a text about the Son: 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word' (Eph. 5:25-26). He died in order that He might sanctify the Church. And in the same way, as I have already reminded you, in Titus 2:14 we read that He 'gave himself for us'. Why? Not merely that we might have our sins forgiven, not merely that we might escape hell, not merely that our conscience might be put at rest. No. 'Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.'

But, in exactly the same way, sanctification is also the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and *by the Spirit of our God*' (1 Cor. 6:11). And there are various other references to the Spirit's work in separating us: 'God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth' (2 Thess. 2:13). While, therefore, we can say that sanctification is the work of the three Persons in the Trinity, it is especially, of course, the work of the third Person, the Holy Spirit, because, as we have seen already, it is He who mediates Christ to us; it is He who applies the work of Christ to us; it is He who forms Christ in us; it is He who joins us to Christ.

We can never emphasise too strongly that sanctification is first of all, and primarily, the work of God in us, through and by the Holy [p 207] Spirit. Therefore it is thoroughly unscriptural to say that as a believer, as a Christian, you can be without sanctification and decide, yourself, to go in for it! That is impossible. It is God's work; it is His intent, His purpose; it is something He is doing in all whom He has separated unto Himself. Our Lord died for us in order that this might happen and it is inconceivable that it should not happen in any for whom He has paid the price with His own blood. Therefore we start with that, and it must be emphasised. Then we go on to the second part of Paul's statement in Philippians 2:12-13: 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' That is why we are told, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' Be careful what you are doing; realise who you are; realise the meaning of the 'fear and trembling'.

Now here, once more, we come to a vital point of difference between justification and sanctification. In justification, as I have reminded you, we do nothing because we cannot. It is the declaratory act of God. But here, we are called to activity. This again, then, is crucial in this whole doctrine of sanctification. Many people find themselves in trouble at this point, especially those at the two extremes. Some people seem to think that once men and women are born again, the activity of God in them ceases. Because God has given them a new nature, they say, they have nothing to do now but to exercise the new nature, and they do that by reading the Scriptures and understanding and applying them. In connection with their sanctification they do everything themselves. Now I have already shown you that that is wrong. Sanctification is God's work in us. The first move, the motive, the force, all is this power of God working in us 'both to will and to do'.

Yes, but in trying to avoid the one extreme, some go right to the other, and the second school says that we have nothing at all to do except look passively to Jesus and abide in Him, and then all the work is done in us and for us. I reminded you of that in the last lecture when I mentioned the illustration of the poker and the man with the lifebelt around him, both of which give the impression that we have nothing to do at all, that the work is done entirely by the Lord, as we look to Him. And the answer to that is Philippians 2:12–13: ‘Work out your own salvation ... for it is God which worketh in you.’

But these friends sometimes tell us that surely in John 15 our Lord teaches the selfsame idea, that we do nothing, but look to Him. John 15 gives us the parable, the picture, of the vine and the branches: ‘I [p 208] am the vine, and ye are the branches’ (v. 5), and this is interpreted as meaning that the branch does nothing at all, that the work is done entirely by the tree, and that the branch is just there to show the fruit. But that, surely, is a profound misunderstanding of our Lord’s picture. The branch in a tree is not inactive. It is not like a hollow tube which is inert and has no life in it. The branch is full of life. Of course, the branch can do nothing if it does not receive the sap that comes up from the tree; yes, that is absolutely essential. But, given the sap, the branch is full of vitality and life. It draws things from the air; it sends things back into the air. Every leaf of a branch is very active.

So you see the danger of illustrations, how easily they can be misunderstood. But the Scripture itself is perfectly clear about this: ‘Work out your own salvation.’ You could not do that if God did not work in you first, but He does work in you in order that you may work out. God works in my will, He works the will to act, and He enables the action. It is ‘God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure,’ but I must do the willing, and the doing.

There are a number of statements in the Scriptures that say exactly the same thing and surely this is something that ought to be perfectly clear to all of us. Take Romans 6, for instance, where there is a collection of these phrases. ‘Reckon yourselves’, says Paul; ‘Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God ...’ (Rom. 6:11). That is something that I have to do; nobody can ‘reckon this’ for me. I have to indulge in that activity. The Holy Spirit working in me leads me to this recognition, but I am exhorted to do the reckoning. It is an appeal to me; it is a part of sanctification. Then listen to Paul putting this negatively: ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body’ (v. 12). *You* must not let sin reign in *you*. It is an exhortation to *you*. Paul also puts this positively as he goes on to say, ‘Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God ... and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God’ (v. 13). We must yield the members of our body; it is a positive thing that we must do.

Again, Paul says, in Romans 8: ‘... If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live’ (v. 13). We must mortify the deeds of the body; yes, you will notice, through the Spirit. Without the Spirit we cannot do it. That was the error of monasticism and that is the error of all morality. But having received the Spirit, and with the Spirit working in us, then through the Spirit, we must mortify the deeds of our body. Or listen to Paul again in Colossians 3:5: [p 209] ‘Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.’ We must do that. There are other phrases: ‘Stand fast’ (1 Cor. 16:15); ‘Fight’ (1 Tim. 6:12)—Paul even exhorts us to fight! That is not a very passive thing, is it? Then he says, to Timothy specifically, ‘Flee also youthful lusts’ (2 Tim. 2:22)—He is calling upon Timothy to flee, not to wait to be delivered, he must do something. And in 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul says, ‘But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness.’ Timothy had to seek after it, to strive after it. We are told to put off the old man and put on the new (Eph. 4:22, 24).

But I sometimes think that the most important text of all is 2 Corinthians 7:1: ‘Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, *let us cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.’ Is there any possible alternative exposition of that statement? All these terms point in the same direction. Indeed, as I have said earlier, if what I am saying is not true, then none of these New Testament epistles need ever have been written. If all we have to do to be sanctified is to ‘let go and let God’, to surrender ourselves and look to Jesus, then the apostles have wasted a great deal of ink and of time and energy in arguing with us about doctrine, in saying, ‘Therefore, in the light of that, now then, apply it; do this, don’t do that, cleanse yourselves.’ Why should they have said all that is we need only surrender, wait, look and abide?

No, let us be careful lest we wrest the Scriptures, if not to our destruction, at any rate to our confusion. The Scriptures plainly teach us that God is working in us because He has saved us; but He is working in us in order that we may work it out, and those are the ways in which we do it. What we really have to do is this reckoning, this understanding, this application, this mortifying, and so on—this cleansing. But there is the great balance in the Scripture—primarily, initially, vitally, all-importantly, sanctification is the work of God by the Spirit. As ‘new born babes’, as ‘dearly beloved’, as ‘children of God’, we are exhorted to be holy because the One at work in us is holy, and His whole purpose in redemption is that we might indeed be His children, worthy of the name.

20

The Mighty Process of the Holy Spirit

We have seen that sanctification is primarily the work of God, but that we also have our part to play and now, having said that, we can come to what is, in many ways, the most interesting aspect of this question of sanctification, and that is the method or the mode in which and by which this takes place within us. Of course, it is at this point that the controversy between the various schools to which I have referred has been most acute. Perhaps the most convenient way to look at this subject is to ask three questions.

First, is sanctification something that is to be received? Now, there are many who hold the view that it is, and they often put it like this: 'As you have received your justification, so receive your sanctification;' and they use different illustrations. There was a teacher, famous in the early part of this century, who used to say, 'You have a purse in your hand and there are two golden sovereigns inside. First you pick out a golden sovereign, that's your justification. Then,' he said, 'you can go on and pick out the other golden sovereign, that's your sanctification. And the tragedy is that so many Christians only pick out the first sovereign and don't pick out the second.'

Others put it like this: I am standing with a coin on both my palms, and I say to you, 'Come along and take.' So many simply take the one from the right hand, which is justification, but the preaching of sanctification is that as you have taken the first coin, so you take the second. You have received your justification by faith, now receive your sanctification by faith in the same way.

Thus it is taught that sanctification can be accepted like that, in one act. Now obviously those who say this must have certain Scriptures which appear, at any rate to them, to justify that kind of teaching, and [p 211] the verse which they are very fond of quoting is in Acts, where our Lord is giving His commission to His great servant, Paul, on the road to Damascus. Our Lord tells Paul that He wants him to go and preach to the people and to the Gentiles, 'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me' (Acts 26:18). 'There you are,' they say; 'sanctified by faith!'

And that seems to them to be the end of all controversy and discussion. But surely when you look at that verse, if you have borne in mind our earlier point about the twofold meaning of sanctification, then you must come to the conclusion that 'sanctified' is obviously used in the first sense of being set apart. It is not the inward process of cleansing and purification, but the setting apart. You remember that we saw that the mountain on which God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses is called the 'holy mount'. Also, Peter, in his first epistle, introduces himself by saying that he is writing to those who are 'Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 1:2). There sanctification comes before belief. And, as we saw, when Paul writes to the Corinthians and says, 'And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified ...' (1 Cor. 6:11) he puts sanctification before justification.

Now in all those instances it means 'set apart'. And surely that is what it means in Acts 26. Paul is told to preach to the Gentiles and to tell them that if they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they shall have their inheritance with all others who have been set apart by the Holy Spirit for God, by faith in Jesus Christ. Now I think the more you read that twenty-sixth chapter of Acts, you will come to the conclusion that the meaning of that term, 'sanctified by faith', is that Gentiles have been set apart for the inheritance. But even if you do not agree with that, I would still say that obviously everything in the Christian life, ultimately, is by faith. 'We walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. 5:7). So, in a very general sense, everything is by faith, but in Acts 26 in particular, I suggest that sanctification means this 'setting apart'.

The people who hold this view are also fond of quoting the first epistle of John, especially chapter 1 verse 7, where we are told that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, and chapter 3 verse 8 and 9. We cannot stay with this, but what we really have there is a [p 212] picture of the Christian walking in

the light in fellowship with God. Yes, but the Christian is worried by this, and says, 'I like this idea of walking with God in the light, but what if I should fall into sin? What happens to me then?'

'Well,' says John in effect, 'what happens is that the fellowship is in a sense broken, but if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. While we are walking with Him in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. So you needn't be troubled.' The problem which is being considered in 1 John is the problem of the defilement which we undergo as we are walking in fellowship with God and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And John is concerned to show us how that defilement is removed, so we need not be downcast and feel that we have sinned against the light and that we cannot go on any further.

Indeed, I always feel that the first verse of chapter 2 clinches this in a very definite manner: 'My little children,' John says, 'these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And', he goes on, 'if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' In other words, John says that he is writing in order to teach them not to sin. He is not telling them that they can receive something and never sin again. No, no, he is exhorting them not to sin, but if they do sin, he says, there is the answer: Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation.

But perhaps the favourite verse of all the friends who hold this particular view is Romans 8:1-2: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' They interpret that by saying that it is here that the principle of counteraction comes in, that there are two laws. In me there is the law of sin and death, dragging me down, causing me to sin. 'Ah yes,' they say, 'but it's all right, another law has come into being, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And as long as I look to Him, and abide in Him, this new law will keep me from falling to that first law.' You remember the illustrations about the poker and the lifebelt.

That is how Romans 8:2 is interpreted. This, of course, is really crucial. Romans 8:2 is a most important verse and the interpretation I have just described is a very serious misrepresentation of it. So what does this verse really say? Paul writes, 'There is therefore now no **[p 213]** condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.' Why? 'For'—here is the answer—'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' Paul is here recapitulating something that he has already told us several times in the two previous chapters. Here it is, first of all, in the sixth chapter: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid,' says Paul. 'How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?' (Rom. 6:1-2). We are dead unto sin. Now there was a time when we were not. Every man or woman born into this world, as a result of the fall of Adam and as a result of the inheritance of original sin, is under the dominion of sin. Sin rules, governs and controls the natural person. Men and women may not be aware of that, they may not even believe in such a category as sin. Nevertheless they are slaves of sin. They cannot help themselves. Sin is their master. But in those verses, Paul says that we are in Christ and we have died to sin.

That is the first statement, but let me take you to a second, in verse 18 of chapter 6. 'Being then,' says Paul, 'made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.' That means, '*you have been made free*', or, '*you were made free*'. It is something that has happened and that has happened once and for all. Christians, says Paul, are people who have been made free from sin. What does he mean by that? Well, he cannot possibly mean that we are sinless and perfect because we are not and we know we are not. No, he just means the same thing again. We are free from sin in the sense that sin is no longer our master. We are not under the law or the dominion of sin. Paul has already put that in the fourteenth verse when he says, 'sin shall not have dominion over you', and he goes on repeating it in this most interesting and extraordinary manner.

Then again he says it in the twentieth verse: 'For when ye were the servants of sin'—which means the slaves of sin—'ye were free from righteousness.' Notice Paul's contrasts. When we were servants of sin, we were free from righteousness, but now we are the slaves of righteousness and we are free from sin. This is all going to help us to understand Romans 8:2, but come along to the seventh chapter and to some

very important verses: 4, 5 and 6. 'Wherefore, my brethren,' Paul says, 'ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ,' and 'are become' there means 'have become'; it is the Greek aorist tense which means 'once and for ever'; it is final.

In his argument Paul has used the illustration of the woman married to her husband. Of course, he says, as long as the husband is [p 214] alive, the woman is bound to him, she is under his law. But if the husband dies, she is at liberty to marry another man. If she did that while the husband was alive she would be an adulteress, but if the husband is dead, the law no longer applies to her; she is absolutely free, and she can marry again. Now, says Paul, in exactly the same way, you also have become 'dead to the law by the body of Christ' (v. 4). Paul is not talking of some subsequent experience that people get after they have been justified. No, he says in effect: When you were justified by the body and the death of Christ and His rising again and His righteousness, you have become dead to the law so that 'ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.' Paul is back again to his favourite doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ. As the woman is in union with her husband and they have children (that is the fruit) so a Christian is joined to Christ and they bear fruit together to God's glory. 'For when we were in the flesh,' he continues, 'the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.' How clear it is when you go back and follow his argument right through. So let us look at Romans 8:2 in the light of all this.

Paul says, 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' Now let us be clear about this; it is still this same aorist tense. 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has, once and for ever and finally, set me free, liberated me, from the law of sin and death.' What is 'the law of sin and death'? It is that law to which Paul has been referring at great length. The 'law of sin' is sin dominating the life of unbelievers, mastering and controlling them. Every one of us is born under that particular law. But now Paul tells us that as Christians we are no longer in that position. We have died with Christ, we have risen with Him and that is 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus', which has come into us, the life of Christ. Therefore, Paul says, because we have this life with Christ, we have finished with that dominion of sin under which we formerly lived.

In other words, the Apostle is still here talking about this great doctrine of his which he started dealing with in the middle of Romans 5, the doctrine of the union of the believer with the Lord Jesus Christ. If that is so, how wrong, therefore, how seriously wrong, it is to say that [p 215] there are many Christians who are yet to come to the position of Romans 8:2. 'Oh yes,' maintain the proponents of this view, 'they are forgiven and they are justified, but as yet they know nothing about this wonderful thing, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus setting them free.' They say that this verse is really saying that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus goes on setting me free from the law of sin and death. But that is not what Paul says, it is an aorist: 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *hath made* me free.' It has happened, he is looking back. An event has taken place, once and for ever, with an absolute finality. The moment I am in Christ, I have finished with the law of sin and death. It is not something I can go on to as second experience. I am not a Christian at all unless this is true of me. That is the Apostle's teaching.

So you see once more how serious it is to separate justification and sanctification, and this verse, of all verses, does not lend any countenance to that. Paul is saying something which is inevitably true of every single Christian. Joined to Christ, the new Husband, means that you have finished with the old. You are no longer under the dominion of sin or of Satan or under the law, but you are under grace. In Romans 8:1-2 Paul is summing it all up once more, and that is why 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'

Having tried to deal with these Scriptures that are so often abused in support of that argument, let me remind you of some other reasons for saying that sanctification is not something that is to be received. We saw last time, did we not, that great emphasis given to our part in sanctification, to what you and I have to do. What, as we have indicated, is the point of the mighty arguments of Paul and the apostles in their letters if sanctification is something that I am to receive? Why the exhortations?

I have already given you many quotations from the apostle Paul, so now let me give you one from the apostle Peter: 'Dearly beloved,' says Peter, 'I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul' (1 Pet. 2:11). Do you notice what he says? We do not receive our sanctification and are then delivered from these things. No, he tells us to abstain from them and to keep ourselves from them. And the tragedy is that so many people are spending their lives waiting to receive something, and in the meantime they are not abstaining from these fleshly lusts.

Take another statement from Paul: 'Let him that stole steal no **[p 216]** more' (Eph. 4:28). That is what he is to do. He is not to wait to receive something, he is commanded to give up stealing. What can be more specific than that? And people who are guilty of foolish talking and jesting and all these other unseemly things are *not to do them* (Eph. 5:4). 'Be not conformed to this world' (Rom. 12:2). You do not wait to receive something; if up to this moment you have been conforming to the world, you must stop.

People have often come to me about this and said, 'You know, I've been trying so hard, but I can't get this experience.' To which the reply is that the Scripture commands you to abstain: 'Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded' (Jas. 4:8). And I repeat that these injunctions are quite pointless and a sheer waste of ink if sanctification is something that I can receive. If it is, we would surely be told, 'You need not worry about this question of sin, you can receive your sanctification in one act, and all you do then is to maintain it and abide in it. But that is most certainly not the New Testament teaching. No, in every single New Testament epistle there is all this great doctrine and the ethical appeal and exhortation.

So we have dealt with our first question: Is sanctification something that is to be received? Now let us turn to the second: Is sanctification an experience? Again, many teach that it is. And at this point the argument is generally to tell a number of stories. There are large numbers of stories about people who have had marvellous experiences, of people, for instance, who had a bad temper, or something like that. They struggled with it for years and could not get rid of it, and at last they came to some great crisis. So they went into their rooms and there they fought it out with God and had this marvellous experience and never again lost their temper. Similar stories are told about people who have had a great struggle giving up smoking, and alcohol, and so on.

Now, it behoves us to examine these experiences carefully and with real sympathy. Of course, I accept the experiences without any hesitation at all. Thank God, I am able to testify to some such experiences myself in my own life. So what of them? Well here is my answer. First and foremost, there is no evidence at all in the New Testament that that kind of experience means sanctification. It may be a part of sanctification, it may greatly aid sanctification, but it is not sanctification in and of itself. As I have just been pointing out, if that is the way in which all our problems are to be solved, what is the point of the New Testament epistles? Their whole assumption is the opposite of that.

[p 217] But there is something else which is perhaps more serious. During the course of my ministerial experience I have had to deal with large numbers of people who have come to me and said that they have heard the teaching about the experience of being delivered from all sin and they say, 'I've sought it and I've prayed for it. I read about the man who prayed about his temper, and I have a terrible temper, and I'm always going down with it and I'm ashamed of myself. I've surrendered myself and prayed to the Lord to do for me what he did for that man, but it doesn't happen to me.' There are many in that position with sins of many different types. Now surely we are entitled to say that if that is God's way, then it must happen to all and there would be no cases of failure.

'Ah yes,' say the other people, 'but the trouble is there's an incomplete surrender somewhere.'

But that is not an answer. There are honest souls who have tried to surrender and to make themselves willing and, as far as they know, they are absolutely willing for anything, and yet they cannot get this experience. That is a fact that should surely engage our attention. If an experience is God's way, it is for all and not only for some. Another argument I would suggest is that if it works like that with regard to one sin, why should it not work for every sin? Why, therefore, should we not all be sinless and absolutely perfect? If you can get rid of a temper like that, well, why not immediately arrive at a state of sinless

perfection? And yet I am sure that we would not claim to have reached that state. So we must examine this question of the experience very carefully.

So my last statement at this point would be that there are other people who can testify to similar experiences, who can tell you how they suddenly lost that temper of theirs, or this lust and craving for drink, in a flash, who are not Christians at all. It has come about by some other teaching, through one of the cults or something like that. There are many such instances. At the risk of being misunderstood, I would say that one of the most dramatic changes I have ever known in an individual was in the case of a Christian Scientist who found deliverance from the particular thing that got her down. In one meeting she was delivered from a morbid anxiety, and I can testify to that fact, but it had nothing to do with Christianity at all. In biographies you will sometimes come across similar stories of sudden and unexpected deliverance. So deliverance can have psychological causes, quite apart from the further suggestion that it may even be some kind of spiritist manifestation.

[p 218] So let us consider some principles on this question of experiences. First, God may grant sudden deliverance in this way from certain sins—or He may not. I knew two men who were members of the same church. Both had been terrible drunkards and both became saints in the Church of God. The one man always used to testify that from the night of his conversion the taste for strong drink had been taken right out of his life. It never worried him again. He could pass a public house as easily as he could pass any other building. The other man, who was as great a saint, and who had equally given up drink, often told us that he knew what it was at times to have a most awful struggle as he passed public houses but, thank God, God always enabled him to walk past. Two saints, both delivered from drink. The taste goes in one, it does not go in the other. You see how dangerous it is to generalise from experiences. We must not base our doctrine on experiences but on the teaching of the word of God.

Secondly, sanctification is not just the problem of a particular sin or even of particular sins but is a question of my total relationship to God. I may be delivered from certain sins and yet my sanctification may be very small and immature. Indeed, this other teaching which we have been considering involves us in the position that at one moment I may be sanctified completely and then by one act of sin I lose my sanctification. Then I have to get it back. According to that view, sanctification is something that comes and goes. It is not a process that goes on continuously but is something variable that I keep on losing and then regaining.

But the teaching of the Scripture is that 'We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). Sanctification is a growth, a development; it is a going forward. But it seems to me that the main trouble with this teaching about experience is that it confuses two things that are different, and the two things are these various experiences that we do get in the Christian life, and the grace of God and sanctification.

Sanctification is not an experience, it is a condition. It is my relationship to God: I am 'changed into the same image [of Jesus Christ] from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). Sanctification involves experiences and is helped by them, but in itself it is not an experience. May I, with great daring, venture upon an illustration, though illustrations are always liable to misunderstanding. I suggest to you that the relationship between experiences and sanctification is the relationship between a **[p 219]** field in which you have sown oats or barley or wheat, and the rain and sunshine. The farmer has ploughed the earth, he has harrowed it, and sown the seed; he has then rolled it and, as far as he is concerned, he has finished for the time being. Then the seed begins to germinate and to grow and the crop makes its appearance.

Then there is, perhaps, a spell of cold, grey weather. The farmer looks at the field every day and there seems to be no change at all. The crop is not any higher one day than the previous day. Yet the whole time the life is there and it is moving, very slowly perhaps, but it is going on. Suddenly the weather becomes finer and the sun begins to shine. Then there is a most delightful shower of rain followed by another burst of glorious sunshine. And the farmer goes back and looks at his field the next morning and says, 'I can almost see it growing.'

You see the illustration? Sanctification itself is that life, that process of growth and development which starts the moment we are saved, the moment we are justified, the moment we are regenerated. There may

be times when it is very small and you cannot see any change but then you get some blessed experience. God manifests Himself and His love to you. Now people foolishly call that experience sanctification. But it is not. It is like the shower of rain or the burst of sunshine. It stimulates and promotes sanctification but it is not sanctification itself. And it is there, I think, that you get this terrible error of confusing these two things that are so essentially different. The experiences are not the process of growth, but they do help and stimulate it.

Now experiences can, of course, be sudden, they can be dramatic. If you like, you can get many second special blessings. I do not hesitate to say that. But sanctification is not a 'second blessing'. People may have undergone a great emotional upheaval when they first believed in Christ; they may have had nothing like that for years. Then they get another experience, a second experience. And the more they experience the Lord the more they are concerned about obeying His word and loving Him in practice, and that promotes our sanctification. But I repeat, the experience is not the sanctification.

We must be clear about all these things. People may suddenly come to a realisation of aspects of truth, and as the result of that realisation, something may happen in their lives. But they must not say that until that point they were not sanctified, because they were, being sanctified from the moment of regeneration. But of course if they realise a truth like this, it promotes their sanctification. They seem to jump on in their sanctification just as that field of wheat seemed to [p 220] sprout up while you looked at it, but that is not the initiation of sanctification. And thank God that this is the truth because, as we know, feelings are variable, experiences come and go, and if my sanctification is to be equated with, or to be regarded as synonymous with my experiences, then there are times when one would doubt whether one is being sanctified or not.

Then the third question is: Is sanctification something that happens suddenly? Obviously this follows logically from all that we have been considering. The people who believe that it is an experience to be received, believe it is sudden. But if you do not believe that, you will see from all the considerations that I have put before you, that sanctification is clearly not something that happens suddenly. What are the Scripture terms here? 'You are born again', you are 'babes in Christ', as Paul says to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:1). John talks about 'children', 'young men' and 'fathers' (1 John 2). These are the scriptural terms, and they indicate growth, you do not suddenly jump from birth to adulthood. No, you go almost imperceptibly from one stage to another. That is sanctification, according to the Scriptures. You grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

Now people are very fond of analogies from the Old Testament and quite right, so let me use one. We would all agree that the history of the Children of Israel is a perfect picture of the salvation of a soul. The People of Israel were delivered out of Egypt, once and for ever, and the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea. But would you like to tell me that the troubles of the Israelites ended at that point? Not at all; they were even taken right into Canaan, but they had their troubles there in Canaan, they were in the sanctified position, but they still had enemies to fight, they had problems and difficulties. It is like that in the Christian life. But this is God's method everywhere and there is nothing more glorious to contemplate than the uniformity of the principle by which God works in every realm. Does he not work like that in nature? Our Lord used the picture of the farmer sowing the seed into the ground and then going home and sleeping and rising night and day. And he did not know anything about it, apparently, but the seed began to grow and went on growing (Mark 4:26-29). Such, our Lord says, is the kingdom of heaven.

Let us put certain questions here. If sanctification is meant to happen suddenly, why does it not? God could have made us all absolutely sinless and perfect at once if He had desired to do so. There is nothing to stop Him; with God nothing is impossible. He could have made us [p 221] perfect and entire the moment we believed, but God obviously has not chosen to do that as we know from experience. And the New Testament epistles teach us the same thing. Why do you think that Satan was not destroyed the moment our Lord rose from the grave? Why is he allowed to continue? That is God's method, you see. He could have destroyed Satan at the time of the cross as easily as He will destroy him at the end. But He has not chosen to do so. These things show clearly God's method and God's manner.

Why has God not abolished death altogether? He will do it one day. Why do Christian people have to die? Why has God not abolished it at the beginning? The only answer is that He has not chosen to do so, and it is exactly the same with our sanctification. God's method of sanctification, as we have seen and as I hope to show still more clearly, is this process which starts from the moment of regeneration. And it goes on and on; every experience we get stimulates it, and we are changed from glory into glory. We are advancing and developing. We are to be more sanctified now than we were a year ago and it will go on and on until finally, in glory, we shall be perfect, without spot and without blemish.

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Sanctification in Romans 6 to 8

Having dealt with the various theories and teachings and certain of the problems, we now come to a positive exposition of the biblical doctrine of sanctification. Our Lord prayed for His disciples, 'Sanctify them through [or in] thy truth: thy word is truth' (John 17:17). Now that is clearly an indication of the method of sanctification as it is taught in the Scripture. The question arises at once: What truth is this? And our Lord answers the question: 'Thy word is truth.' What word? The whole of the word, everything in the Bible ministers to our sanctification. You cannot read truly about God Himself, in His being and His Person, without its promoting your sanctification. The doctrine of God, the doctrine of sin, the law of God, the doctrine of punishment, of judgment and of hell—all that is truth and points in the direction of sanctification; it is the whole truth.

But, while that is perfectly true, it is also true to say that there are certain statements in Scripture and certain sections of it in which this great doctrine concerning sanctification is dealt with in a very explicit and specific manner. And in many ways the most striking illustration of that, what we may well call the *locus classicus* of biblical teaching in respect to sanctification, is undoubtedly chapters 6, 7 and 8 of the epistle to the Romans. Now I want to emphasise that this is not the only place where sanctification is dealt with. It is to be found everywhere, but these chapters deal with it in an explicit manner. And they do so, of course, because Paul, having dealt in the first five chapters with the great doctrine of justification, takes up what he imagines may be a false deduction drawn from that by certain of the members of the church at Rome. Indeed, he did not require much imagination to do this, because many people were drawing that very false [p 223] deduction from the Apostle's teaching, They charged him with being guilty of *antinomianism* which means that the doctrine of justification says that because you are saved by Christ, it does not matter what you do. And the Apostle writes these chapters in order to refute that terrible suggestion, which he dismisses with a sense of horror and the words, 'God forbid!'

That is the point at which we have arrived and I want now to give you a general analysis of these three chapters in Romans. It can be nothing more than that because there is no time, obviously, to deal fully with chapters 6, 7 and 8 of Romans in one address; so we must be content with this general outline of the teaching. The first thing, therefore, which we must do is to realise exactly what Paul's argument is, and we can put it like this: the Apostle is here out to show the utter impossibility—he puts it as strongly as that—of a Christian's continuing in sin; and he says that it is impossible because of the whole nature and character of Christian salvation. Paul puts it in that question: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!' That is it. 'How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?' (Rom. 6:1–2). That is the theme. Indeed, we could say that the theme of Romans 6, 7 and 8 is to denounce, with horror, the tendency of people to separate justification from sanctification; to say that if you think you can stop at justification, you are doing something which the Apostle believes is so terrible that he can say nothing about it but, 'God forbid' that anybody should think such a thing or ever draw such a deduction. So you see the vital importance of these great chapters.

The argument as a whole is stated and summarised in chapter 6. Paul then works it out in greater detail in chapters 7 and 8. I do want to emphasise that chapter 8 does not introduce a new principle; the whole argument is stated in chapter 6. What you get in chapters 7 and 8 is simply greater detail. That is a vital matter because as we have seen, there are people who say that as a Christian you can stay in chapters 6 and 7 without going on to chapter 8, and that is really an extremely dangerous error. Let me give you my evidence for making such a categorical statement. The Apostle says something in 8:5–9 which I think will substantiate it:

They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal [p 224] mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh

cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

You see what that means? In chapter 8 Paul is not describing some special Christian who has had some second blessing, but any Christian, every Christian. 'If any man,' he says, 'have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.' If you have not got the Spirit of Christ in you, says Paul, you are just not a Christian at all. And he says of Christian people that they are not carnal; they are not in the flesh; they are in the Spirit. Before conversion they were in the flesh, but the moment they were converted, they were no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit. Is it conceivable that Paul can say of a man who is a Christian, 'To be carnally minded is death ... because the carnal mind is enmity against God'? That cannot be true of any sort of Christian; from the moment of our rebirth and regeneration we are united with Christ and we are in the Spirit. That is the vital point.

So let me repeat: Romans chapter 8 is a description of *all* Christians and not merely certain Christians who have gone on to some second blessing or some further experience. Paul is not introducing anything new but recapitulating and explaining more fully what he has already said in chapter 6. Now that, to me, is a most vital foundation. From what we have considered in previous lectures, you will see that it is because people have not realised this that they have gone astray in their understanding of sanctification. But surely Romans 8:5–9 ought to settle this question once and for ever. So you must no longer divide Christians up into those who are spiritual Christians and those who are not. All Christians are spiritual, of necessity, by definition; the moment we are born again we are spiritual. We have received the Holy Spirit; we are united to Christ; the nature of God is in us and we are partakers of the divine nature.

Now having put it like that, in general, to give you a summary of the whole teaching, let us look at it in a little more detail. In those three chapters, what is Paul's argument—because it is an argument—on the question of sanctification? To answer that, we must start away back with the doctrine of sin. The Apostle himself has done that in the second half of chapter 5 where he teaches that we were all in Adam and because we were all in Adam, we all fell with him and have all [p 225] reaped the full consequences of his sin. And the consequences of that sin are that men and women are dominated and controlled by sin, and Satan. In an earlier lecture, we went into the consequences of the fall. We now have this sinful nature. At the fall we lost our alignment with God, so that instead of controlling the body, and the bodily parts, by our spirit which is in tune with God, our whole life is dominated by the body and the sinful principle that controls it.

That is what sin has done. Before the fall, man and woman worked in a perfectly harmonious manner, they had all their instincts, the hunger instinct, the sex instinct and all these things. They were all there, yes, but as the man and the woman were perfect and in the right relationship to God, their instincts did not constitute any problem at all but were subservient to their highest and best interests. But with the fall, that balance was completely upset and men and women became the victims of their own bodies. They became governed by what Paul calls 'the desires of the flesh and of the mind' (Eph. 2:3). They became creatures of lust, dominated by sin and Satan. That is the biblical teaching. They suffered in the whole of their being and are now in a condition of confusion and of riot.

But in Jesus Christ there is salvation. That is what Paul is saying in the second half of that fifth chapter of Romans in that magnificent statement: 'But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (v. 20). So, here is the salvation. But what sort of a salvation? Is it merely forgiveness of sins? And the answer is an eternal 'No!' That is exactly what Paul begins to say at the beginning of chapter 6. He imagines some people saying something like this: 'This is rather good, all our sins are covered by Christ. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." It doesn't matter, therefore, how much we sin. Indeed, we might even argue that the more we sin the more grace will abound. I know my sins are forgiven, so it doesn't matter what I do, I'm in Christ, I'm safe, I can live any sort of life.'

'God forbid,' says the Apostle in verse 2. That is what he is denouncing. Why? Because our salvation in Christ is not partial, it is an entire, a complete salvation. And in this great passage in chapters 6, 7 and 8, he sets out to work out that theme and prove it.

So the great text, in my opinion, is Romans 6:14: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' Observe what Paul says. He does not say that sin ought not to have dominion over you. He says, 'Sin *shall not* have dominion over you' (v. 14). It will not be allowed. Because you are not under law but [p 226] under grace, sin shall not have dominion over you and he shows us how that comes to pass. Fundamentally, the principle is our union with Christ. We dealt with that doctrine of the union earlier, and that is why it must be taken before we come to sanctification. If you read again the second half of chapter 5, you will see that the argument is that as we were in Adam so we are in Christ. We have reaped all the consequences of what Adam did; we have reaped all the consequences of what Christ has done. That is the parallel.

What does this mean? Well, we are joined to Him in every respect. We are not only joined to the Lord Jesus Christ in some respects, we are joined to Him entirely; you cannot divide Christ. As we have seen, we have been crucified with Him—you will find it all in the sixth chapter—we have died with Him, we have been buried with Him, planted in the likeness of His death and we have risen with Him. Turn also to Ephesians 2:6: 'And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus'—at this very moment. Yes, or to put it in terms of 1 Corinthians 1:30, 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us'—what?—'wisdom, and righteousness'—but you do not stop there—'wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' Christ is already made all that unto us who are Christians. Can you imagine anything therefore more dangerous or unscriptural than to say that, to some Christians, Christ is only justification? 'He is not sanctification to them yet,' people say, 'they'll go on to that.' But the Scripture says the exact opposite! He is made all these things to us. You cannot divide Christ and we are in Christ, joined to Christ, we have a whole Christ, always. So this is what we must grasp.

What does that lead to? Well, the Apostle's own deductions are these. Because of our union with Christ, and because we have been crucified and have died and been buried and have risen with Him, He says: You are 'dead to the law' (Rom. 7:4). The law cannot touch you. Christ has died, He is the end of the law once and for ever for sin. So the law has nothing more to say to me by way of condemnation. Yes, but it does not stop there. The Apostle tells us that not only are we dead to the law but we are also, and equally, dead to sin. 'God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin ...?' (Rom. 6:2). Or, 'How shall we that have died to sin ...?' It is as definite as that: the tense is aorist, the death has happened once and for all. We are not *dying* to sin, we *are dead*, we *have died* to sin. Paul repeats that many times: 'Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body [p 227] of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin' (v. 6). Our old self has been crucified, was crucified. It has happened. 'For he that is dead is freed from sin' (v. 7). And that is the Christian. 'Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness' (v. 18). But now, 'being made free from sin'—which means, having now therefore been made free from sin—'and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life' (v. 22). Then Paul puts it as the form of an appeal: 'Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord' (v. 11).

So, then, we are not only dead to the law, we are also dead to sin. As far as we are concerned, Paul says, sin is no more. To prove that, in the next chapter Paul has the great argument of the woman married to her husband who is free the moment her husband dies. Paul argues this in the sixth chapter by saying that a slave is owned by a master, but if another master comes and buys the slave, then he does not belong to the first, but to the second. So not only are we dead to sin, but, more than that, we are risen with Christ. And that means that Christ's life is our life. 'Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life' (v. 4). In verse 5, it is the same thing, 'For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.' And then in verse 8: 'Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.' That is really the present tense: we *are* living with Him. This is true of us already. You find this also in verses 11 and 13: 'Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' And in verse 13 Paul says, 'Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.' We have risen with Christ and therefore we are in this new life.

And, as I have already indicated, in chapter 7 Paul says, in effect, 'In a sense you were married to the law, but not any longer because the law, as far as you are concerned, is dead.'

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

We are married to Christ and we ought to bring forth the fruit of a good and a sanctified life.

[p 228] That, then, is Paul's fundamental statement. As the result of our union with Christ, we are dead to sin and alive unto God. The life of Christ is in us and that is the position of every Christian.

'Well,' says someone, 'does that mean, then, that we are completely sinless and perfect? Has Christ done this to the whole self? Am I entirely finished with sin in every shape and form?'

The answer Paul gives is: 'No. All that I have just been saying is true and true of our spirits. Our spirits are already entirely delivered from sin. I, as a spirit, and as a spiritual being, am dead to sin. I have finished with it once and for ever, but that is not true of my body.' So you see the argument? The result of the fall of Adam was that the entire person has been involved, my spirit and my body. In our Christian salvation at this moment Christ has redeemed my spirit perfectly; that is the 'new self'; but my body still remains under the thralldom of sin. I am dead to sin, I am finished with it, but my body is still under its dominion.

Let me give you the evidence. First of all in chapter 6. Paul says in verse 6: 'Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that [in order that] the body of sin might be destroyed ...' The old self has been crucified, it is finished with. Yes, in order that this body of sin might be destroyed—but that has not yet happened. But look at verse 12. In verse 11 Paul says in effect, 'You yourself have reckoned yourself dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God.' Then, verse 12: 'Let not sin therefore reign [as it has been doing] in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.' But go on to verse 13: 'Neither yield ye your members'—that is to say, my instincts and my limbs, my faculties and all I am—'as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.' No, rather, Paul tells us 'Yield ... your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.'

And then there is the final statement in the nineteenth verse, where Paul says, 'I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.' That is the evidence in chapter 6 to the effect that though my spirit is emancipated and redeemed my body still is not.

So let us turn now to chapter 7. Paul says in verse 16, 'If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.' Then verse 17: 'Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.' You see, it is not I, I am redeemed, it is sin that dwells in me. **[p 229]** Verse 18 says, 'For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing'—he does not say that in *me* there is no good thing, not, it is, 'in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.' Then again in verse 20 Paul says: 'Now if I do that I would not, it is not more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me'—the same thing, you see. But go on to verse 23: 'But I see another law in my members'—not in me, in my members—warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.' That is what happens. Unless I understand this doctrine, I will allow myself to be governed by that sin again. But I need not, because the sin is in my members, not in me.

Then in verse 24: 'Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?' It is a logical conclusion, is it not? Paul has been saying in effect, 'This is my position; I am saved and redeemed, yes, but I am still in this body and this body is still under the dominion of sin and is trying to drag me down. Who shall deliver me out of this body? How can I be perfectly emancipated?' That is his question. And indeed he puts it again in the last part of verse 25: 'So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.' That is the evidence in chapter 7.

Now let me give you the evidence in chapter 8. First of all it is in verse 10, one of the most important verses of all: 'And if Christ be in you, the body'—and he means the body; he does not mean the flesh but the physical frame, the *soma*—'the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of

righteousness.’ He has just said, ‘But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you’—that is your position as a Christian, what is true of you? It is this—‘the body is dead [dead spiritually] because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.’ You see the distinction? Then in verse 13, Paul says it again: ‘For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.’ He does not say you are to mortify *yourself*; he says you are to mortify the deeds of your body, the place in which sin is dwelling; you shall live if you do that.

And then there is the great verse towards the end of the chapter, summing it all up: verse 23. Paul is talking about the whole creation, groaning and travailing in pain together until now. Then: ‘And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption’—[p 230] what is that? Here is the answer—‘to wit, the redemption of our body.’ You see what he is saying? Here I am as a Christian, my spirit is already redeemed, but my body is not. What I am waiting for is the day which is coming when my body shall be redeemed as well as my spirit. Because of sin and the fall of Adam I have gone down—spirit and body. But Christ has come in. He has already saved my spirit; the body is not yet redeemed and I am waiting for the adoption, the redemption of my body.

‘What, then, is our position?’ you ask. Does that therefore mean that as Christians we are condemned to a life of hopeless misery and failure in this world? Are we just to go on struggling vainly and being down and out, as it were, in wretchedness and misery? To which the answer is that yes, you are condemned to that if you are relying only upon yourself and your own ability and energy to conform to God’s law. Yes, you are condemned to that if you draw a separation between justification and sanctification. Yes, you are condemned if you say that a Christian can have his sins forgiven but nothing more. But the answer of the Scripture a thousand times over is that that is not our position!

Now turn to the meaning of the great statement in Romans 7:7–25 about which people have argued so often. Does it describe a person unredeemed altogether, or one who is redeemed but not yet fully sanctified? The whole point of that passage is just this. Paul has been saying in the first part of the chapter that we are no longer under the law. We are like the woman whose first husband has died, leaving her free to be married to another. We are no longer tied up with the law because Christ has put an end to it through His body. We are now married to Christ and have finished with the law in that sense. ‘But,’ says someone, ‘are you saying then that there is no value in the law of God? Are you saying that the law of God is absolutely useless and that there is no worth in it at all?’ ‘God forbid!’ says Paul. The law itself is all right, but if you think that it can either justify you or sanctify you, you are making a big mistake. If you are relying for ultimate deliverance from sin on your own attempts to carry out that law, then you are indeed doomed.

And then Paul puts it in his typical dramatic way. He says in effect, ‘You’re leaving me in this sort of position: as a Christian I have now seen the value of the law and I want to keep it; but this body of mine is dragging me down; this sin that remains in my body is making that impossible. And if that is the whole truth, then I am a failure, I am a [p 231] wretched man. But that is not the position,’ says Paul. You notice how he puts it. He makes this statement: ‘Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?’ And immediately he answers his own question: ‘I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ His summary in chapter 6 has already answered the question. I am not condemned to that wretchedness because of my union with Christ; because of my union with Christ, sin shall not have dominion over me. It will not be allowed to and indeed it does not.

So, then, Paul has answered the question, first and foremost, in chapter 6:14, but you notice how he likes to repeat it. Having said it there, he says it again in chapter 7:25: ‘I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord.’ He then goes on to say it in a most extraordinary way in chapter 8:10–11: ‘If Christ be in you, the body is dead [still] because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.’ Then, ‘But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.’ Now that not only refers to the resurrection of saints at His coming, it also refers to something that is already happening in these mortal bodies; the process is going on already. What a wonderful statement!

Paul then repeats this again in much the same way in verses 15–17. He says, ‘For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.’ You must not be cast down; you must not say that this is a weary pilgrimage and all is against you and you are constantly defeated, not at all! ‘Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.’ The ultimate result is certain.

And then, I repeat, Paul finally says it again in verse 23: ‘We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption’—it is coming!—‘the redemption of our body.’ So we are not doomed to a sense of failure and frustration. We are not struggling vainly and hopelessly and helplessly. This great process is proceeding because we are in Christ. How does this happen? The Lord Jesus Christ is in us. If we are Christians, He is in us and He is working in us by His Holy Spirit, and, as the result of this working, He has already delivered our spirits and He is in the process of delivering even our bodies, and finally they will be perfectly delivered.

How does the process go on? Philippians 2:12–13 gives the answer: **[p 232]** ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do ...’ The Spirit is in us and we are led by Him. He works upon our wills; He creates desires after holiness; He reveals sin to us in all its foulness and ugliness and creates aspirations after purity and the life of God. Not only that. He gives us strength and power, enabling us to do what we now want to do. What else? Well, as Paul tells us in Romans 8:14: ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.’ And that is true, again, of every single Christian.

How does that happen? How does His leading take place within us? And what does He lead us to? Well, He leads us in many ways, but He leads us particularly through the truth. It is He who is the author of the truth and He leads us to it and gives us an understanding of it. And as He does so, we are being sanctified. And the truth, as I have already outlined, is that our spirits are already redeemed, but the problem remains in this body. We are to see that even that eventually will be delivered. And in the meantime, Paul shows us what to do: ‘Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God ...’ (6:11). He gives us this assurance and certainty of ultimate victory. I no longer feel defeated, I know that I am on the victorious side and that I must just go on. Then he appeals to me. He says, ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body’ (6:12). And I feel that is a perfectly fair appeal and I am going to put it into practice. He says: In view of all this, do not yield your members ‘as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin’, but yield them as ‘instruments of righteousness unto God’. ‘Quite right,’ I say.

And so Paul goes on to make this great appeal to me, to refuse to allow my unredeemed body to dominate me as it used to. I must realise that I am a child of God, destined for glory, and I must not allow my body to influence me. There is a process which goes on and on and on and is not complete while I am still in this life. Sin remains in the body. But, thank God, the day is coming when the process will be complete. I must quote Romans 8:23 once again because it is one of the most glorious verses in Scripture: ‘And not only they, but ourselves also ... groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption ...’ A day is coming when my very body shall be entirely delivered from sin in every shape and form. He shall change my vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body (Phil. 3:21). There is a day coming when this process of redemption started in me by Christ, which has already delivered me as a spiritual being and has made me **[p 233]** dead to sin, there is a day when my body shall be equally dead to sin and I shall be perfect and entire, faultless and blameless without spot and blemish, standing face to face with God.

‘Beloved,’ says John, who agrees entirely with Paul, ‘now are we the sons of God’—now—‘and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2). And we shall be like Him in that not only will our spirits then be like Him and partaking of His nature and reflecting His image, but our bodies also shall be as glorified as His body; we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. That is what is coming and it is coming for certain. What of it, therefore? Well, I am still in this life and in this world, I shall still have to wage this battle against the sin that is in my body. So John puts it like this: ‘Every man that hath this hope in himself purifieth himself’—*he* does it—‘even as he is pure’ (1 John 3:3). ‘I keep under my body’ (1 Cor. 9:27), says Paul: again *he* does it. He does not just passively look to Christ. I mortify my ‘members which are upon the earth’ (Col. 3:5). That

is the argument. Given all this truth, this power of the Spirit working in me, I am exhorted to do that, I want to do that, and that is sanctification.

So we must, of necessity, reject all talk about eradication of sin, all talk of being delivered entirely from sin in this life. We reject it in the name of the Scripture. We reject equally talk of the principle of counteraction, because that does not say enough about me. It does not tell me that I, spiritually, am already delivered and that the problem is only in the flesh and that that is a problem which I have to face. It draws a false distinction between a Christian who may only be in the seventh chapter of Romans with one who is in the eighth chapter. It does not realise that every Christian is in the eighth chapter of Romans because if the Spirit of Christ is not in you, you are none of His.

We see sanctification as a part of a great and glorious plan: Christ the redemption; the believer joined to Christ; and from the moment of rebirth, regeneration and union, this mighty process begins which eventually will lead to a perfected redemption and salvation, including even the body, which, hitherto and until we die and are raised again, still remains under the dominion of sin. But as I realise this glorious truth I should master it and increasingly conquer it so that there may be development and growth in my sanctification.

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Baptism and Filling

We must now consider aspects of the biblical teaching concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which, hitherto, we have not been able to deal with; and, it seems to me, the most convenient approach is this: there are certain terms with regard to the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the believer which we have touched on in passing, but were not able to go into, in detail, then, and we will look at these now.

They are most important terms, and, in a sense, because they are important, they are not easy. Indeed, I might even say that they are difficult and that they have often led not only to confusion but to a good deal of discussion and disputation. As I have often pointed out before, you always find that when a doctrine is vital, there are generally difficulties, for the obvious reason that the devil, the adversary of our souls, realising the centrality and the importance of the doctrine, concentrates his attention upon it. We saw that in the case of the atonement and the person of our Lord, so it is not surprising if he does it at this point.

The first term, then, is the term *baptism*, the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Now the difficulties, I feel, generally arise because on all sides we are all a little too prone to be dogmatic. The confusion certainly arises because of that. You will find that equally saintly Christians look at these matters and do not say quite the same thing. That is inevitable with certain aspects of truth, but, when that happens, it behoves us not to be over-dogmatic. We should tread carefully, and with reverence and godly fear. Of course, to some people there does not seem to be any difficulty and you hear them speaking so glibly. They say, 'Of course, to me there is no problem; one baptism—many fillings, there it is.' Now to speak [p 235] like that about such a solemn and sacred subject is almost to deny the total doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is not a question of how easily and conveniently to our own satisfaction we can classify these terms; the vital question is: What do these terms represent and what do we know about them experientially?

Let me remind you again that my whole object in going through these biblical doctrines is not simply or primarily to enlarge my own knowledge or yours, certainly not in an intellectual sense. I am concerned about these things for one reason only, and that is that a deep and a real experience of the power of salvation is dependent upon a knowledge of these doctrines—and not a mere intellectual or theoretical knowledge. Anybody who stops at that is courting trouble and asking for disaster. This knowledge is essential on condition that we approach it in the right way, and realise that it is something that will enrich our experience. And that is particularly true over a question like the one we are now considering.

So let us start like this: Where are these terms used, how are they used, and by whom? Well, the term 'baptism' is used by John the Baptist. You will find it, for instance, in Luke 3:16–17 and its parallel passages. We are told about the people who listened to the preaching of John at the Jordan, 'They mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.' And John, realising what they were thinking, turned upon them and said,

I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

John predicted it. But our Lord Himself also used the same expression. In Acts 1:5 you will find, 'For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.' And He said that ten days before the Day of Pentecost.

Then a number of other terms are used which obviously refer to the same thing, although not all would agree with that statement. For instance, in Romans 6, the Apostle says, 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?' It is very difficult to think that that is a reference to water baptism, because surely baptism in water does not baptise us into Christ's [p 236] death. It is by the Holy Spirit we are baptised into Christ and into His death.

And then there is that great passage in 1 Corinthians 12:13: 'For by one Spirit,' says Paul, 'are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles ...' In Galatians 3:27 you get this: 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.' And in Ephesians 4:5: 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism,' which is undoubtedly a reference to the baptism by the Holy Spirit, our baptism into Christ.

That, then, is the actual use of the word *baptise* in connection with the Holy Spirit. But, it is important for us to bear in mind that certain other terms are used, which obviously refer to the same thing. The terms seem to be interchangeable as though more or less synonymous. We are told, for instance, about the Holy Spirit being poured out. That is in the prophecy of Joel which was quoted by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:17. In Acts 8:16 you will find the statement that the Holy Ghost had not yet 'fallen' upon the Samaritans. Then there is the question that the Apostle Paul asked the disciples at Ephesus: 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' (Acts 19:2). And Peter, justifying his action in admitting Cornelius and other Gentiles into the Christian Church, said, 'The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning' (Acts 11:15). Peter's argument was that he saw very clearly that the same thing had happened to Cornelius and his household that had happened to him and the other apostles, the hundred and twenty in the upper room, and to others on the Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. When I saw that, he said, 'What was I, that I could withstand God?' (Acts 11:15-17). He could not refuse to baptise them, he said, because the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them.

It seems to me, therefore, that all these terms clearly point to the same thing and, therefore, we face the question: What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Now there are some, as we have seen, who say that there is really no difficulty about this at all. They say it is simply a reference to regeneration and nothing else. It is what happens to people when they are regenerated and incorporated into Christ, as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12:13: 'By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.' You cannot be a Christian without being a member of that body and you are baptised into that body by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they say, this baptism of the Holy Spirit is simply regeneration.

But for myself I simply cannot accept that explanation, and this is where we come directly to grips with the difficulty. I cannot accept [p 237] that because if I were to believe that, I should have to believe that the disciples and the apostles were not regenerate until the Day of Pentecost—a supposition which seems to me to be quite untenable. In the same way, of course, you would have to say that not a single Old Testament saint had eternal life or was a child of God. But we have seen very plain teaching of the Scripture to the effect that they were regenerate and that all of us when we become regenerate become children of Abraham. We have seen, too, that nothing happens to us apart from them and that we are sharers in the same blessing, because there is only one great covenant, this covenant of salvation and redemption.

We would also have to say that the Samaritans, to whom the evangelist Philip had preached, were not regenerate until Peter and John went down to them. As you read the eighth chapter of Acts, you will find that Philip evangelised in Samaria, and many believed and were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we are told that they did not receive the Holy Spirit until the advent of Peter and John who came down and prayed for them and laid their hands upon them so that they received or were baptised by the Holy Spirit. But it seems to me that the whole chapter denies that supposition. They were regenerate, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. And the same thing, of course, can be argued, in a sense, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch who was spoken to by Philip. So I cannot accept the idea that baptism is simply a reference to regeneration.

What, then, is it? Well, it is clear that this is what John the Baptist and our Lord had both predicted. This is what Peter calls 'the promise of the Father', a term that is often used. 'Therefore,' says Peter, 'being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear' (Acts 2:33). And the term is used elsewhere 'the promise of my Father' (Luke 24:49). This was something to which the Children of Israel had been taught to look forward, it is the fulfilment of that promise.

What, then, is it? Well, when we were dealing with this doctrine of the Holy Spirit right at the very beginning, I emphasised that what happened on the Day of Pentecost was primarily that the Christian

Church was instituted and proclaimed as the body of Christ. There were believers, there were regenerate persons—yes. But they only became the body of Christ at Pentecost when they were baptised into the one body by the Holy Spirit, by the one Spirit. And that is undoubtedly the primary meaning of Pentecost.

[p 238] But it seems to me that we must not stop at that. If that is what it is in its essence, there is also the subsidiary meaning. It includes also the consciousness of that fact. I say that for this reason: go back again to the question put by the apostle Paul to those people at Ephesus: ‘Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?’ Now the fact that he asked that question implies that it is a question one can answer, that people know when they have received the Holy Spirit—whether they have or whether they have not. But then the Apostle put almost exactly the same question to the Galatians: ‘Received ye the Spirit,’ he writes, ‘by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?’ (Gal. 3:2). In effect, Paul was saying to the Galatians, ‘You’ve received the Holy Spirit and you know that; now did you receive the Holy Spirit as the result of your works of righteousness, works under the law, or by the hearing of faith?’ They knew that they had received the Spirit, otherwise Paul’s question was pointless. Indeed the whole teaching about the sealing and the earnest of the Spirit must lead in the same direction. The Apostle also refers to ‘ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:23); we know that we have received them.

What, therefore, do I mean when I say that this baptism includes the consciousness of being baptised into the body of Christ? It is at this point that the confusion tends to come in, because some friends would confine this only to certain gifts of the Spirit and they say the one and only proof that we have received the Spirit is that we manifest these gifts. They would base that on 1 Corinthians 12, but that very chapter itself teaches that all do not have the same gifts, one person has one gift and one another. So we must never say that unless we have one particular gift we have never been baptised with the Holy Spirit or have never received the Spirit. That very chapter denies that. It asks the question, ‘Do all speak with tongues? Do all prophesy? Have all the gifts of healing?’ and so on, and the answer is obviously ‘No’.

But the danger is to think of the baptism of the Holy Spirit only in terms of gifts rather than in terms of something much more important, which is this: *the* mark, ultimately, and proof of whether we have received the Spirit or not is surely something that happens in the realm of our spiritual experience. You cannot read the New Testament accounts of the people to whom the Spirit came, these people upon whom He fell, or who received as the Galatian Christians and all these others had done, without realising that the result was that **[p 239]** their whole spirit was kindled. The Lord Jesus Christ became real to them in a way that He had never been before. The Lord Jesus Christ manifested Himself to them spiritually, and the result was a great love for Christ, shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Now this, surely, is something which should cause us to pause for a moment and meditate very deeply and very seriously. This is an experience, as I understand this teaching, which is the birthright of every Christian. ‘For the promise,’ says the apostle Peter, ‘is unto you’—and not only unto you but—‘to your children, and to all that are afar off’ (Acts 2:39). It is not confined just to these people on the Day of Pentecost but is offered to and promised to all Christian people. And in its essence it means that we are conscious of the incoming, as it were, of the Spirit of God and are given a sense of the glory of God and the reality of His being, the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we love Him. That is why these New Testament writers can say a thing like this about the Christians: ‘Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory’ (1 Pet. 1:8). And they did. They rejoiced in Him, they gloried in Him, they accounted it an honour to suffer for His name’s sake. For Him they would suffer any persecution; they would even be turned out of their homes and their families. Why? Oh, not simply because they had a head knowledge of certain doctrines or truths. No, but because the Lord Jesus Christ had become so real to them and so dear to them and so lovely in their sight, that He was their all in all.

And that, as you read these accounts, is the invariable result of this baptism of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, you will find that this is something to which the saints of the centuries have testified. Everybody remembers the story of how this happened to John Wesley in Aldersgate Street in London in 1738, but many people have never heard of it as it happened in a still more striking manner to George Whitefield before that. We have heard of it in the case of Moody, walking down the street in New York City one afternoon, when suddenly he became aware of the glory of God in such an overwhelming manner that

he felt that even his strong body was on the point of being crushed, and he held up his hands and asked God to stop. It is true of Finney and Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd. It is something to which many ordinary Christians, whose names we do not know, have testified and for which they have thanked God: this sense of the glory of God, the reality of the Lord; this love towards Him; [p 240] this indescribable experience of these things.

A definition, therefore, which I would put to your consideration is something like this: the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the initial experience of glory and the reality and the love of the Father and of the Son. Yes, you may have many further experiences of that but the first experience, I would suggest, is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The saintly John Fletcher of Madeley put it like this: 'Every Christian should have his Pentecost.'

'This is life eternal,' our Lord prayed, 'that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). And it is only the Spirit who can enable us to know that. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, then, is the difference between believing these things, accepting the teaching, exercising faith—that is something that we all know, and without the Holy Spirit we cannot even do that, as we have seen—and having a consciousness and experience of these truths in a striking and signal manner. The first experience of that, I am suggesting, is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit falling upon you, or receiving the Spirit. It is this remarkable and unusual experience which is described so frequently in the book of Acts and which, as we see clearly from the epistles, must have been the possession of the members of the early Christian Church.

Now there is no essential difference between the Church today and that early Church, and you cannot read the New Testament account of the early Church without seeing that these were spiritual people, people with a spiritual reality. They were not just formal Church members, there was a living Spirit, and they knew in whom they had believed, and they rejoiced in these things. Without any hesitation you could put the question to them, 'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' (Gal. 3:2). What if I put that question to you at this moment? Can you answer it? This is the experience which is for you and for your children and for them that are afar off: this blessed knowledge of the reality of God and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, the spiritual manifestation of the Son of God in the heart of the believer.

Let us then consider briefly the second term which always goes with this term and which, in a sense, is complementary to it. It is the term *filling*. You notice that after that great event on the morning of Pentecost, we are told this: 'And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues ...' That is Acts 2:4, and if you go on to Acts 4:31 you will find that it was repeated: 'And when [p 241] they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.' Who were they? The disciples, the apostles, the same people. They were filled on the Day of Pentecost and they were filled just a few days later in exactly the same way. And we also have another instance in Acts 13:9, where the apostle Paul is dealing with Elymas the sorcerer. We are told: 'Then Saul ... filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him.'

The other use of the term 'filling' is found in Ephesians 5:18, where we are told, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.' And then you will find references to it in Acts 6:3–5: 'Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business'—the appointment of the deacons in the Church—'... And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.'

So the question which arises is: What does it mean to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit? Clearly, there are two things, at any rate, which obviously go with this term. It is something that happens which gives authority and power and ability for service and witness. The apostles were given it there at the very beginning, and the result was that they began to speak with other tongues, and Peter, filled with the Spirit, preached his sermon. Then again, after they had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. And when Paul was confronted by the opposition of that clever man, the magician Elymas, he was filled especially with the Spirit in order to pronounce a judgment, and the

judgment fell upon the man. So it is clear that the filling with the Spirit happens for the sake of service; it gives us power and authority for service.

Let me emphasise this. This filling is an absolute necessity for true service. Even our Lord Himself did not enter upon His ministry until the Holy Spirit had descended upon Him. He even told the disciples, whom He had been training for three years, who had been with Him in the inner circle, who had seen His miracles and heard all His words, who had seen Him dead and buried and risen again, even these exceptional men with their exceptional opportunities, He told to stay where they were, not to start upon their ministry, not to attempt to witness to Him, until they had received the power which the Holy Spirit would give them.

This is something, therefore, which is vital to our witness. It was [p 242] the whole secret of the ministry of the apostle Paul. He did not preach with enticing words of human wisdom, but preached, he said, 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor. 2:4). He was filled with the Spirit for his task. Is this not something which causes us all to pause? Whatever the form of our ministry, it is only of value while we are filled with the power of the Spirit. So we should realise the necessity of seeking this filling of the Spirit and of power before we attempt any task, whatever it may be.

Let me put it like this: there is all the difference in the world between being a witness and being an advocate. Men and women can be advocates of these things without the Holy Spirit. I mean that they can have an understanding of the doctrine; they can receive the truth, and can present it, argue for it and defend it. Yes, they are acting as advocates. But primarily, as Christians, we are called upon to be witnesses, to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as the Saviour of the world, as our own Saviour, as the Saviour of all who put their faith and trust in Him. And it is only the Holy Spirit who can enable us to do that. You can address people and act as advocates for the truth but you will not convince anybody. If, however, you are filled with the Spirit, and are witnessing to the truth which is true in your life, by the power of the Spirit that is made efficacious. So this filling is essential to all our Christian service.

But also it is equally clear that the infilling of the Spirit is essential to true Christian quality in our life. That is why we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. It is a command to every single Christian: 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18). We are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit. And this is commanded in order that our graces may grow, in order that the fruit of the Spirit may develop in us and may be evident to all. It is as we are filled with this life that the fruit and the graces of this life will be manifest. Indeed, the filling of the Spirit is essential to a true act of worship. Did you notice how Paul uses that commandment of his in that very connection? He says, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit'—and then he goes on at once—'speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

So the way to test whether we are filled with the Spirit is to ask: Are we full of thankfulness? Are we full of praise? Do we sing to ourselves [p 243] and to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs? Do we make melody in our hearts? Do we praise God when we are alone? Do we delight in praising Him with others? Do we delight in praising Him in public as well as in private? Are we full of the spirit of praise, of thanksgiving, of worship and adoration? It is an inevitable consequence of being filled with the Spirit. This is something that can happen many times. The baptism, I suggest, is the initial experience, the filling is an experience that can often be repeated.

So there are those two great terms: to be baptised with the Spirit and to be filled with the Spirit. Surely, no subject is more important for us all than just this. What is a revival? It is God pouring out His Spirit. It is this tremendous filling that happens to numbers of people at the same time. You need not wait for a revival to get it, each of us is individually commanded to seek it, and to have it, and indeed to make sure that it is there. But at times of revival God, as it were, fills a number of people together, they almost describe it as the Spirit *falling* upon them. That is a revival, and that is the greatest need of the Church today. And it is only as you and I, as individuals, know the reality of these things, and know their power and their glory, and are concerned about being always filled with the Spirit, that we shall not only thank

God but also pray to Him for revival and ask Him to come upon the Church again, as He has come in ages past, and fan the smouldering embers into a mighty flame of life and power. It is the greatest need of all, and it is only as we understand the teaching of the Scriptures with regard to these blessed matters that we truly enter into these things and become intercessors and pleaders with God to revive His work. May He open our eyes by His Spirit to the truth of the baptism of the Spirit and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

23

Further Reflections on the Baptism of the Spirit

We have begun our consideration of certain terms that are used in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and with which we have not hitherto dealt. We gave an outline of the biblical teaching with respect to the baptism with the Holy Spirit and then briefly considered the doctrine concerning the filling with the Holy Spirit, and we drew a distinction between the two.

We now come back to the same subject in order to try to give a fuller exposition. Let me preface my remarks by repeating that it is very difficult teaching, and it is because of the difficulties that are inherent in this matter that there are different points of view and different schools of thought. We have already seen this with other doctrines, so it does not surprise us. If these things could be put simply and plainly there would never have been any difficulty about them. In many ways I suppose that this is the most difficult of all the doctrines because it is particularly liable to exaggeration, and people tend to go off at tangents. That was why I put in a little plea earlier that we should try to forget labels and view the statements of the Scripture as dispassionately and with as open a mind as we are capable of commanding.

As we continue, let me repeat that plea. It is essential for this reason: these labels and experiences which we may have had or have encountered in the past tend to drive us to extremes. We are all creatures of extremes. It is most difficult to avoid going either to one extreme or the other. It always seems to be easier to be at an extreme, does it not? It seems clear cut, as people say; you know where you are, [p 245] you are either here or there! But that is not always right, especially when your extreme has gone beyond the Scripture, or when you have been driven to an extreme in a reaction against another extreme.

Now with regard to this particular doctrine, we all know that there have been excesses. There have been people who have attributed experiences of the baptism of the Spirit to the Spirit, and we have known that what they were claiming as the baptism has sometimes been nothing but animal spirits, and sometimes even evil spirits, because accompanying the great claim there has sometimes been a most unworthy life, in plain contradiction of the Scripture. This doctrine, because it touches with a subject that is experiential, is particularly liable to that kind of excess or violence and that has happened so many times in the history of the Church. The danger then, of course, that at once arises is that in our desire to avoid those excesses and those false claims, we go right over to the other side. We pass the truth, which is somewhere there in the middle, and are again at a non-scriptural extreme. And I feel that this has been happening during this present century. In their fear of the excesses and the riotous emotionalism that have so often been mistaken for a true work of the Spirit, there are many Christian people, it seems to me, who have been guilty of quenching the Spirit.

There is a classic way of putting this whole point: it all happened in the seventeenth century, in connection with Puritanism. Puritanism, which started as one school of thought, divided up into two schools. On the one hand, you had George Fox and the Quakers, and on the other you had some of those great Puritan teachers such as John Owen, and Dr Thomas Goodwin in London. Now looking back, and reading the story in the light of the Scriptures, I have no doubt that both parties were guilty of going a little too far in the right direction. George Fox was most certainly calling attention to something vital but he went too far. He almost went to the point of saying that the Scriptures did not matter, that it was only this 'inner light' and the Spirit within that mattered, and the result of that has been that modern Quakerism—the Society of Friends—is almost entirely non-doctrinal and, indeed, at times almost reaches the point at which you would query whether it is even Christian. It is a vague general benevolence and a good spirit.

But, equally, let us admit that the other school of thought represented by those great men was animated by a fear of the excesses of the Quakers. It was in constant danger of becoming only intellectual [p 246] and of developing a kind of new Protestant scholasticism which lost the life and the Spirit.

For those who are interested in biographies, the outstanding contribution of the mighty Jonathan Edwards of America was that he combined both schools. He held on to and insisted upon the doctrinal

emphasis of the great Puritan leaders, but also was as alive to the work of the Spirit experientially as were the Quakers. He did not go entirely to one or the other extreme, but kept both together, and that seems to me to be the teaching of the Bible itself.

So let us remember that we must not think in terms of slogans or certain things we once knew or certain terms and epithets. Let us be careful lest we go to an excess of riot and of carnality in the name of the Spirit, but let us be equally careful lest we quench the Spirit and rob ourselves of something that God in Christ intends for us.

Bearing that in mind, let us come back and try to make certain definitions. First of all we must emphasise that what we considered in the last lecture is *in addition to everything we have learned previously about the work of the Holy Spirit*—the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. This experience, let me repeat, is not regeneration. In Romans 8:9, the apostle Paul says, ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.’ You cannot be a Christian at all without having the Holy Spirit. So I was not referring to that; I dealt with it in an earlier lecture. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit convicts; it is He who give us this new life, brings us regeneration and unites us to Christ.

Take, again, the ‘spiritual man’ whom Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 2 where he contrasts him with the ‘natural man’. That man has obviously received the Spirit, otherwise he could not understand these ‘things that are freely given us of God’ (v. 2); he is a Christian. And then I have emphasised that verse where Paul says that ‘By one spirit [or, in one spirit] are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles’ (1 Cor. 12:13). There is one other piece of evidence which is of tremendous importance, and it is a statement in the Gospel of John. Our Lord is with the disciples in the upper room and, we are told, ‘Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost’ (John 20:21–22).

Now that, remember, was in the upper room. But going on to Acts 1:4–5, we read, ‘And, being assembled together with them, [Jesus] [p 247] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.’ Now He said that to them after He had breathed upon them and said to them, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost.’ So it is not the receiving of the Holy Ghost we are talking about; it is not regeneration; it is not the *receiving* of the Holy Ghost. Here are men who were regenerate and had received the Holy Spirit as Christ breathed upon them and still He said to them, ‘Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.’ And it happened ten days later.

So I trust that we are all perfectly clear about this. I am not saying that without this particular experience that I am dealing with now you are not a Christian. You can be a Christian, these disciples were Christians, and others have been Christians, it is not that. Let me make this equally plain also: I am not saying that there must however always be a gap between becoming a Christian and this experience; they may happen together and have often done so, but sometimes they do not. So let us keep them distinct.

Then my second statement is that I am also not dealing with sanctification. We dealt with the doctrine of Sanctification in four lectures and it is vitally important that we should not confuse the two. As I understand the situation, nothing has done greater damage during the last seventy years than the constant confusion between sanctification and this experience of the baptism of the Spirit with which we are dealing. It has been prolific of misunderstanding as people have talked, as we saw, about receiving their sanctification in one experience. To start with, they have regarded sanctification as an experience which seems to me to be entirely wrong, and this has always been due to the fact that they have confused sanctification with this baptism. Sanctification, as we have seen, is a process that begins the moment we are regenerate; it begins, indeed, the moment we are justified. You cannot be justified without the process of sanctification having already started.

We saw that still more plainly when we were studying the doctrine of the union of the believer with Christ. If you are joined to Christ, if you are in Christ, then all the benefits of Christ are yours, and this process of sanctification has begun. I repeat, sanctification is *not* an experience, whereas this baptism to

which I am calling attention is essentially an experience, so we must sharply differentiate between [p 248] them. Experiences help sanctification but they are not an essential part of it. So I am not talking about any so-called 'second blessing' in terms of sanctification or anything like that. Only indirectly has it anything to do with sanctification.

And, in the same way, I must point out again that this experience is not identical and must not be identified with the filling of the Spirit, because, according to the teaching of the apostle Paul, you remember, in Ephesians 5:18, we should *always* be filled with the Spirit: 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit'—which means, 'go on being, keep on being, filled with the Spirit'. But what I am trying to describe is not a perpetual condition; it is something much more special than that, something unique. We have also seen that the filling with the Spirit often happens for a special service, for some special task allotted to the children of God.

So, having made those negative statements in order to clear the position, you may well ask me, 'What is this, then, of which you are speaking?' My reply would be that it is precisely what our Lord was speaking about in John 14, and especially in John 14:21: 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.' That seems to me to be the key verse. I am talking about these spiritual manifestations of the Lord Jesus Christ to His own. He does not do it to the world, but to His own. It is something beyond assurance. We have dealt with assurance earlier, so it is not that. I am presupposing assurance, I am suggesting that men and women may be believers and regenerate and have assurance of salvation, and still they have not known this spiritual manifestation of Christ.

Now that is perhaps the simplest and clearest way in which I can put it. But it might also be of some help if I gave you some of the great classic examples of this remarkable experience which the Lord promises in John 14:21. Take, for instance, a Puritan called John Flavel. He was not one of the so-called 'greatest' Puritans. He was rather a quiet man, a man who was used of God in a small sphere, in a very striking way. But this is something that happened to John Flavel: he was alone on a journey, his mind greatly occupied with self-examination and prayer, and thus describes what befell him.

In all that day's journey he neither met, overtook, nor was overtaken by any. Thus, going on his way, his thoughts began to swell and rise higher [p 249] and higher like the waters in Ezekiel's vision, 'til at last they became an overwhelming flood. Such was the intention of his mind, such the ravishing tastes of heavenly joys and such the full assurance of his interest therein, that he utterly lost all sight and sense of this world and all the concerns thereof. And for some hours he knew no more where he was than if he had been in a deep sleep upon his bed.

Arriving in great exhaustion at a certain spring, he sat down and washed, earnestly desiring, if it was God's pleasure, that this might be his parting place from this world. Death had the most amiable face in his eye that ever he beheld, except the face of Jesus Christ which made it so. And he does not remember, though he believed himself dying, that he ever thought of his dear wife or children or any earthly concernment.

On reaching his inn, the influence still continued, banishing sleep, still the joy of the Lord overflowed him and he seemed to be an inhabitant of the other world. But within a few hours he was sensible of the ebbing of the tide and, before night, though there was a heavenly serenity and sweet peace upon his spirit which continued long with him, yet the transports of joy were over and the fine edge of his delight blunted. He, many years after, called that day one of the days of heaven and professed he understood more of the life of heaven by it than by all the books he ever read or discourses he ever entertained about it.

That is it.

But let me give you another example. Let us go from John Flavel to Jonathan Edwards. Now Jonathan Edwards was probably one of the greatest minds—I say it advisedly—that the world has ever known. He is certainly the greatest brain America has ever produced, a brilliant, outstanding philosopher, the last man in the world to be carried away by false emotionalism. Indeed, he wrote a great treatise on the subject, called *The Religious Affections*, to teach people how to differentiate between the work of the Spirit and the carnality that often simulates the work of the Spirit. So Jonathan Edwards was the last man who was likely to go astray at this point. This is what he says:

As I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that was for me extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God as mediator between God and man and His wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. The grace that appeared so calm and sweet appeared also great above the heavens, the person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent and an excellency great enough to swallow up all [p 250] thoughts and conceptions, which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour, which kept me a greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated, to lie in the dust and be to be full of Christ alone, to love Him with a holy and a pure love, to trust in Him, to live upon Him, to serve Him, and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity.

That is Jonathan Edwards.

Then, from Jonathan Edwards we come to a very different man—D. L. Moody, who was not a great brain, not a great philosopher, not a genius in any sense of the term. He always described himself as a very ordinary man, and he was right. But he experienced exactly the same thing. He said:

I can myself go back almost twelve years and remember two holy women who used to come to my meetings. It was delightful to see them there, for when I began to preach, I could tell from the expression on their faces that they were praying for me. At the close of the Sabbath service they would say to me, 'We have been praying for you.' I said, 'Why do you not pray for the people?' They answered, 'You need power.' 'I need power?' I said to myself, 'I thought I had power.'

I had a large Sabbath school and a large congregation in Chicago. There were some conversions at the time and I was, in a sense, satisfied. But right along the two godly women kept praying for me and their earnest talk about the anointing for special service set me thinking. I asked them to come and talk to me and we got down on our knees. They poured out their hearts that I might receive the anointing of the Holy Ghost and there came a great hunger into my soul, I knew not what it was. I began to cry as never before, the hunger increased. I really felt that I did not want to live any longer if I could not have this power for service. I kept on crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York, oh what a day, I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke to fourteen years. I can only say, God revealed Himself to me and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went out preaching again, the sermons were no different and I did not present any new truths and yet hundreds were converted. I would not be placed back where I was before that blessed experience.

A similar thing happened to the great Baptist preacher, Christmas Evans; it happened to Wesley; it happened to Whitefield.

[p 251] 'Ah, but,' you may say, 'all those men were great preachers and evidently it is something that is intended for men and women who are to perform striking service.' But I have told you that in the case of John Flavel that was not the case, and there are others—large numbers of ordinary people—who can testify to exactly the same thing.

Indeed, we are told specifically in the Scriptures, are we not, that this is something which all Christians should experience. You remember what the apostle Peter said on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem? When the people cried out and said, 'What shall we do?', Peter replied and said, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call' (Acts 2:38–39). That statement means that it is an experience which is meant to be quite universal among Christian people.

So what is it? Well, I cannot, let me repeat, identify this with being filled with the Spirit because these men who looked back to this one great occasion were filled with the Spirit many times afterwards. I would describe it like this: it is the initial experience of the filling or, perhaps, it is an exceptionally outstanding experience of it. It is something they describe as being 'poured forth'—the very terms of Scripture. Finney says that in his case it came wave after wave upon him—a pouring out. It is something unusual, when, say all these people, they seem to be almost lifted up to the heavens. They knew what it was to be filled many times afterwards, but this was something unique and special. It is an occasion in which the reality of divine things becomes plain, in a way that it has never been before and, in a sense, never is again, so that they can

look back to it; it stands out in all its glory. And, therefore, this is something which we should seek. But so many, because of their fear of the excesses, have never even sought it and have felt that it is wrong and dangerous to seek it and thereby they have put themselves out of the category that includes these great men of God whose experiences we have just been considering.

Furthermore, this is not something which (according to the current phrase) you 'believe that you have received by faith'. People say, 'You go to the Scripture, you read it, you believe it—yes. Well, ask God for it, then accept it by faith, and you believe that you've had it. Don't worry,' they say, 'about your feelings at all. You take it by faith and believe you've got it.'

[p 252] But that seems to me to be a complete denial of this teaching. When this baptism happens you do not have to persuade yourself that you have received it, you *know* that you have received it. When God sheds abroad His love in your heart by the Holy Spirit, you do not have to say, 'Yes I've received it by faith.' Love is always love and when you love a person you do not have to persuade yourself that you love, you know that you do, your feelings are engaged. And when God sheds His love abroad in your heart, you feel it and know it, and, like those men, you say, 'God was pouring it into me and I knew it was there and my heart went out in love to Him.'

This has been something which has often been missing from spiritual experience. But if you do love the Lord your God you cannot help knowing it. You say that though you have not seen Him yet you love Him. As Peter writes, 'In whom ... though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Pet. 1:8), feeling is engaged. But we have been so afraid of emotionalism that we have cut out emotion. So people today do not seem to know what it is to have a sense of sin and sorrow for sin. There are people today who are Christians, who have never wept because of their sinfulness. They say, 'Of course, I don't believe in emotionalism.'

But there must be emotion! If you have seen the plague of your heart and know what sin is, you will feel it, you will bemoan it and you will weep like a Jonathan Edwards, and like all the saints. And your love for Christ will not be light and glib but your heart will be moved; your feelings will be engaged; a profound emotion will sweep through your being. It happened to the apostle Paul; it happened to these people in the New Testament; it happened to those men whose experiences we have quoted and they are but representative of thousands of others.

Do we know something about this? This is a lecture on biblical doctrine and some people seem to think that that means it is as dry as dust. But it is preaching! I am simply asking you whether you know anything about the reality of Christ and have you felt your heart going out to Him in a love that you cannot understand and that has amazed you? As Christian people, we have no right to stop at anything less than that. If we really knew Him we would love Him like this. Has He manifested Himself to you?

But beware of the counterfeit. Beware lest Satan come in and, as you seek this, try to pass to you something that is not the true experience. How do we recognise that? Here is the final test, always. **[p 253]** Seek not an experience, but seek Him, seek to know Him, seek to realise His presence, seek to love Him. Seek to die to yourself and everything else, that you may live entirely in Him and for Him and give yourself entirely to Him. If He is at the centre, you will be safe. But if you are simply seeking an experience; if you are looking for thrills and excitement, then you are opening the door to the counterfeit—and probably you will receive it.

Let me try to help you at this point by quoting something else. Here is a man who again had this very experience. He writes,

You, entertaining a certain conception of the Spirit, ask for the Spirit. And suppose that His influences will all correspond with the conception that you have formed. You expect Him, for instance, to be to you a Spirit of consolation and compass you about with the ambrosial airs of Paradise. You understand that He is to lift you up into a super mundane ethereal sphere where poetic visions of the islands of the blest shall come flashing upon you, upon the right hand and upon the left. But the Spirit is truth and He must come in His own true character or not at all. You have solicited His ministrations and they are not withheld, but how surprised you are when He takes you by the hand and you prepare for a rapturous ascent into the empyrean to find that He has taken you by the hand for the purpose of conducting you down into some deep dark dungeon-like chambers of imagery. In vain you shudder and

draw back; you only discover thereby what an iron grasp He has. He bids you look upon those hideous images and observe how they body-forth the great features of you past life.

One abominable statue is named *selfishness* and its lofty pedestal is completely carved with inscriptions of dates. You look at those dates, your guide constrains you to and you are appalled to find that what you regarded as the most beautiful and consecrated hours of your past life are there, even there.

There is a repulsive image also called *covetousness* and you say boldly, 'I am sure that no date of mine is inscribed there.' Alas, there are many and some that you thought golden, connecting you with heaven. Anger, wrath, malice. See how the odious monsters seem to wink at you from their seats as at a well-known comrade. How the picture of your past life is made ugly on their pedestals.

You look *unbelief* in the face and, frowning, tell him that you know him not. Whatever your faults, you have never been an unbeliever. The Spirit constrains you to observe that unbelief claims, and justly claims, the whole of your past life. A profound humiliation and a piercing sorrow possess your heart.

At least, you say, standing opposite the image of *falsehood*, 'I am no liar. I hate all falsehood with a perfect hatred.' The Spirit of God points you to [p 254] the fatal evidence. You examine the dates and you see that some of them refer even to your seasons of prayer. At length, altogether humbled, dispirited and conscience stricken, you acknowledge that here in these damp subterranean galleries and in the midst of these abominable images is your true home. You will remember with shame the ideas with which you had greeted the Spirit and you fall at His feet, confessing all your folly. There, in that condition, does He raise you and lead you out into the open air beneath the blessed canopy of heaven and you find a chariot in which you may, unforbidden, take your place beside the Spirit and visit the places of joy that are above the earth.

There it is. The work of the Spirit is always humbling and humiliating. It brings us to the end of self, it reveals sin to us. We want to have the power of the Spirit as we are, and the great experiences, but we shall not have them that way. We must submit entirely to Him and He takes us through those galleries first; and when we feel utterly hopeless, He then, as we are told here, provides this amazing chariot for us which takes us to the very heavens and gives us this glorious experience of the reality of the Son of God, the manifestation of Christ according to His promise, which moves us and grips us to the depths of our being and we are lost in a sense of wonder, love and praise.

24

The Sealing and the Earnest

We come now to something which follows very naturally and logically, and indeed quite inevitably, from all that we have been saying. We come to the next term which is the term concerning the *sealing* of the Spirit. This term is used three times in the Scriptures. First of all in 2 Corinthians 1:21–22: ‘Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also *sealed* us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.’

Then you get it again in Ephesians 1:13: ‘In whom’—that is to say, in the Lord Jesus Christ—‘ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that holy Spirit of promise.’ And indeed, we should go on to verse 14: ‘Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.’

And then the third reference is Ephesians 4:30, which is about grieving the Spirit: ‘Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption.’ This is clearly a most important bit of teaching.

Each time, the context shows us the extreme practical importance of understanding exactly what is meant by sealing. The best approach, and the way that has been adopted by most teachers considering this doctrine, is to ask the question: What are the normal functions and purposes of a *seal*? What does it signify? Why is it used? And the answer is that a seal has three main functions. The first is to authenticate or to certify something. Very frequently in the past a man would put his own personal seal on a document, and that certified that this document really was his document and said what it [p 256] purported to say. The word is used like that in the Scriptures. We are told that the person who believes the gospel ‘hath set to his seal that God is true’ (John 3:33). He is not one who denies it, he does not make out that God is a liar, argues the apostle John. On the contrary, he has set his seal to it. That is his way of authenticating it.

But of course a seal was also used, and still is used, to indicate ownership. You put your seal on a packet and thereby it is known to be your packet. If you deposit something in a bank or a safe deposit, sealing wax is generally put on it and you write your signature across it. This seal shows that it is your property and nobody is to open it but yourself.

And, thirdly, as I have already partly hinted, a seal also makes whatever is sealed secure. It is a form of safeguard. The seal ensures that nobody can interfere with the contents. The seal must not be broken, and when we go to collect our property, the proof that it has not been tampered with is that the seal is still intact.

Now there can be no doubt at all but that the specific teaching of these three portions of Scripture which we are considering is with regard to the Holy Spirit in the believer. First and foremost, therefore, the Holy Spirit Himself is the authentication or the certification of the fact that we are indeed God’s people. The Scriptures talk about our being God’s own particular possession, translated in the Authorised [King James] Version as ‘a peculiar people’ (1 Pet. 2:9; Tit. 2:14).

Christians, in other words, are people who have been chosen by God; the claim made for them is that God has set them apart and has granted them all these blessings, that they are a unique people. And the authentication for that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now it is very important for us to work that out. Our unique position is surely something that should not only be evident to us but to other people. The seal of the Holy Spirit is God’s way of authenticating to others the fact that we are Christians. Now this obviously becomes important from a practical standpoint. I repeat that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, producing the fruit of the Spirit, that certifies to other people that we really are Christians.

It is possible for someone to make a profession of Christianity, it is possible to give a mental or an intellectual assent to the truth and to certain propositions and teachings of Scripture, but merely to do that

does not prove that one is of necessity a Christian. But the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is proof, because, when He is present, it means that God, through Christ, has given Him to us. He has been given to **[p 257]** us, He is resident within us and working within us, because we are God's people. He is not given to anybody else; He is not given to the world. Our Lord Himself taught the disciples that before His death. He is only given to those who belong to God. So the Holy Spirit as a seal manifests the fact to others, as well as to ourselves, that we are Christian people.

But then, going on to the second meaning of this term, the idea of property speaks very particularly to us as Christians. But it also makes a proclamation to all. In this connection, it is interesting to read Revelation 3:12: the message to the church at Philadelphia: 'I will write upon him my new name.' It is undoubtedly the same thing, put in a slightly different way.

But here, as I said, the message comes especially to *us*. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee to us that we really are God's people and God's property. That is another way of talking about the assurance of salvation and you remember that in chapter 5, where we were dealing with that aspect of the truth, we were at great pains to emphasise that a part of our assurance, and in my opinion the most important part, is the testimony of the Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

How does He do it? Well, one of the ways is to do what we were talking about in the last lecture. You remember how the Puritan John Flavel put it? He said that he learned more of this precious truth in those hours when he was there, not knowing whether he was in the body or out of it, than he had done in all his years of reading and of studying. When the Lord Jesus Christ was made real to him in the astounding way that he described, that was the ultimate authentication. It was the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit. It need not always be as dramatic as that. It is something which, in a sense, cannot be put into words, but we are conscious that the Holy Spirit Himself is witnessing to and with our spirits that we are the children of God.

That, then, is how we know that we are the property of God. And then the third thing is that the sealing of the Spirit makes our salvation secure to us. This is a very wonderful thought—the fact that we know that the Holy Spirit is in us is a perfect guarantee of our ultimate salvation or—to use another scriptural term—of our redemption: 'Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30). Redemption means the ultimate consummation, including glorification itself. 'We,' says the **[p 258]** apostle Paul again, in Romans 8:23, are 'waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' That is something that is yet to come; the redemption is the complete, final salvation when we shall be perfect in body as well as in spirit, the entire, the whole person. Now then, the fact that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit is a guarantee that that is going to happen to us. God has given us this guarantee. He has put the seal of the Spirit—the Spirit as the seal—on us and in us, in order that we may have this blessed certainty that 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38–39). There is no such thing as falling from grace in that ultimate sense. If we have the Holy Spirit, if we have received the Spirit, He is an absolute guarantee of our final perseverance, our ultimate security, and nothing and no one can pluck us out of the hands of God. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us as a seal is that guarantee to us.

So, in the light of all this, how can the Holy Spirit be a seal if we do not know it experientially? How can it be of value as a seal to us if it is only something that we have to accept and believe by faith, with the experiential aspect entirely absent? The whole point of the seal, according to the teaching of Scripture, is that I may *know* this, that I may enjoy it, that I may have the assurance and this blessed security of my ultimate complete redemption and perfection.

That, then, is something of this teaching concerning the sealing of the Spirit, but with this is coupled another term, which is the *earnest* of the Spirit. There are three references to this in the Bible; the first is in 2 Corinthians 1:22, 'Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' The second is Ephesians 1:13–14—a most important statement—'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that

holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.'

The third reference is in 2 Corinthians 5:5 which read, 'Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.' The context of that verse is this: 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (v. 1). It is again this blessed assurance that if [p 259] the whole creation, and our bodies, dissolved and collapsed we would be all right. And how do we know that? 'Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God' (v. 5). Well, that is good, but there is still more: '... who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.'

Now what does the Scripture mean by talking about the *earnest* of the Spirit? Well, an earnest is a part of the price that you pay for something. When you make a purchase you put down a deposit—that is the earnest. It means that you are contracting there that you will pay the rest; you are putting it down on account; it is a first instalment, paid as a kind of security. Therefore, an earnest is not only a first instalment, it is also a pledge. It is a pledge that you will follow on what you have already paid with something more.

This is surely one of the most glorious things anywhere in the Scripture, and the teaching is that God, again, has given us the Holy Spirit as an earnest, if you like, as a first instalment. Yes, let us use again the language which the apostle Paul uses in Romans 8:23. He says, 'Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' It is the same thought. The Holy Spirit, therefore, has been given to us by God in order that we might have some kind of an idea as to what awaits us when we arrive in glory. God has given us the firstfruits. The ancient people used to have a festival in connection with the firstfruits. It was the beginning of the harvest, just something to taste, something to assure them of what was coming, a foretaste. There is something wonderful about all this, and it is the function of the Holy Spirit.

So you see the importance of this further term. The term *earnest* in the first two quotations in the Scriptures we quoted is combined with the word *pledge*. A pledge or seal is not actually used in 2 Corinthians 5:5, but, as I have shown you, the whole context communicates it. It is interesting that these two ideas go together and you see how important it was to emphasise the teaching about the seal of the Spirit. You will notice how Paul puts it in Ephesians 1. We are told 'In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession' (Eph. 1:13–14). So our salvation is not complete in one way, but it will be complete, and we are given the Spirit in order that we might not only know that for certain, but that we might even begin to experience it. And all that we experience in this life, in a spiritual sense, is but a firstfruit, or a foretaste, something on account, [p 260] a kind of instalment from God in order that we might know what is coming for us.

Now, obviously, if this is not experiential what is the value of it at all? What is the point of the Apostle's teaching? Surely the whole purpose is to encourage us and comfort us. He says in effect, 'Look here, you may find that life is hard and difficult and trying, and you may say, as the Hebrew Christians were obviously tempted to say, "Well, what is there in it after all?" And the answer is that what you are experiencing already as the result of the Spirit is but a foretaste, it is but a sample, a kind of firstfruits, of the tremendous heritage that God is preparing for you.' 'Eye hath not seen,' Paul says elsewhere, 'nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit'—we know these things—'for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God' (1 Cor. 2:9–10). 'We have received,' says the Apostle, 'not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God' (1 Cor. 2:12). That is the seal, says Paul, which is, incidentally, also the earnest; the two things go together.

So if I have to accept the seal by faith without any experience, and, I suppose, I do the same with the earnest, then I have no comfort at all. How tragic it is that, in our fear of the extravagances and excesses, we should even have to go to the length of denying the plain teaching of Scripture. So, again, I do not

hesitate to put this question: Do you know that you have received the Spirit? I am not asking you whether you believe by faith that the Spirit is in you. I am arguing again on the basis of Scripture that when the Holy Spirit is in us we cannot help knowing it. His presence will be felt, His presence *is* felt. And as He works within us, warning us, urging us forward, enlightening us, we are aware of these things; and as He gives us those seasons of special blessing, as He moves our heart and gives us glimpses of our Lord, we know it and we rejoice in it. Our hearts are moved. It is experiential, and the emotions must be involved, the whole person is involved, the mind, the heart and the will. It is not some extravagant ecstasy. No, a true experience of the Holy Spirit leads to conduct and behaviour and action—the will and the intellect and the heart—and let us not leave any one of them out. And let us never imagine that we are being unusually spiritual because we can say, ‘I felt nothing, but I went on in faith.’ My friends—you *should* feel.

And I would emphasise again that unless the Holy Spirit has moved [**p 261**] you, and unless you know what it is to desire to sing and to praise God, and to burst forth into these hymns with the Apostle, then you should be ashamed of yourself as a Christian. And you should seek that knowledge which will lead you to sing and to praise and with other Christians to make melody in your heart to God for His wonderful salvation. Have you tasted of the heavenly gift? Have you known something of the foretaste of the firstfruits? Do you know already something of the joy that will be yours, unmixed, and without limit when you find yourself in glory? Those, it seems to me, are the inevitable lessons from a consideration of the biblical teaching with regard to the Holy Spirit as a seal and as an earnest.

Let me be still more practical. How are we to enjoy these things? And if there is somebody who says, ‘I don’t know much of what you’re talking about, but I would like to,’ then the instruction is perfectly clear. Here are the further terms: there are certain things we must avoid doing. The first is that we must avoid *quenching* the Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 you read these words: ‘Quench not the Spirit.’ This is something that should be interpreted very carefully and taken in its context, which is this: ‘Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.’—then—‘Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good’ (1 Thess. 5:16–21). Now we know what to ‘quench’ is. It is to put a damper on, to fight against, to discourage. So quenching the Spirit is something, alas, about which we must all know something in experience. It means tending to argue instead of responding; it means putting up questions and queries. Quenching the Spirit may not only be done in private, but in a gathering, in a church service, in any fellowship of Christian people.

Again, this terrible fear comes in of that which is wrong, and it is right to be fearful of that because here, in the very context, we are told at one and the same time not to quench the Spirit, but also to ‘prove all things’ and only to ‘hold fast that which is good’. There are some people who think that to avoid quenching the Spirit, you must put your intellect out of action, that you must stop thinking, stop examining, that you must let yourself go and be carried away. They think that the more you are carried away, the more certain you are that you have not been quenching the Spirit. But that is unscriptural. While you are not to quench the Spirit, you are also to prove all things, and there certain things that the evil spirits might suggest as being the [**p 262**] actions of the Holy Spirit, which are condemned in the Scriptures. So if you find you have an impulse or feel moved to do something which is prohibited in the Bible, you can be certain that it is not the leading of the Holy Spirit. You take the word and the Spirit together.

So you must be very careful not to quench the Spirit, you must not go beyond the teaching of the Scripture in any respect, but while remaining scriptural, you must always be open, and sensitive. You must realise that there are evil spirits and since every spirit is not of God you must test the spirits. There is a spirit of antichrist; there is an evil spirit abroad in the world and we must be careful. He can transform himself into an angel of light. He can be so marvellous as almost to deceive the very elect, says the Son of God Himself (Matt. 24:24).

So there we are as Christians; we must not quench, but at the same time we must not abandon ourselves, without thought, without discrimination and without scrutiny, to those other powers that may be seeking to control us. But with the word and the Spirit this is gloriously possible and, indeed, it is not even difficult.

That, then, is one thing we must avoid—quenching the Spirit. The other thing we must avoid is what is called *grieving the Spirit*. ‘Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption’ (Eph. 4:30). There are many ways in which we can grieve the Spirit: to forget Him and to ignore Him; to neglect His word, in particular; doubt and unbelief concerning Him and His purposes and His desires for us; the assertion of self in every form. He wants to control us and if we want to control ourselves, we grieve Him. Sin, of course, of every kind, any sin, grieves Him. He is holy, He is compared to a dove, and He is sensitive, as the very term ‘grieve’ suggests. Failure to do His will after He has made it clear, therefore, grieves Him. To be more interested in experiences and power rather than in Him, obviously grieves Him. Nothing is more insulting to a person than to give the impression that you are really not interested in him or her but simply in what you can get out of them. It is very grievous and we tend to do that. We want an experience, or we want power, and we give the impression we do not want Him, and that is grieving. Indeed, I can sum it up by saying that any respect in which the Lord Jesus Christ is not at the centre, and our all and in all, is grievous to the Spirit. He has come to glorify Him and any failure on our part to do that is grievous to the Spirit.

So we must not quench the Spirit and we must not grieve Him; let us be clear about this. We are not told that if we do grieve Him, He [p 263] will leave us—thank God, we are not told that. The little child who grieves his mother or father does not find that the father or mother abandons him, ceases to have any interest or any concern in him. No, the father or mother is grieved by the action of the child but the relationship is not broken and the parent does not go away and leave the child to fight its own battle and to get on with it as best it can. Thank God that though grieved, the Holy Spirit remains. Then if you go on to the fifth chapter of Ephesians, where, if you remember, we saw that Paul teaches us to be filled with the Spirit, you will find that it is in the context of the most practical exhortations. Paul tells us not to steal and not to be guilty of foolish jesting and talking. He says that no evil communications must come out of our mouths, we must be kind and tender-hearted and gentle and so on—by failing to do all these things we are grieving the Spirit. Read Ephesians 4 and 5 and there you will be told very clearly what you must avoid in order not to grieve or quench the Spirit.

To put this teaching positively, we must be *led by* the Spirit. We must *walk in* the Spirit. And this means that we realise the relationship between us and we must live our lives and walk through this world realising that we are in the presence of the Spirit. We must each realise that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), in fact, and that He is always within us, and we must be ready to follow His injunctions. We must be ready to listen to Him. We must be ready to do what He prompts and leads us to do. He always wants us to read the Scripture—it is His word and it is the means He uses to build us up that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. And if we refuse to do that, then again, we are not being led by Him and we are grieving Him. But if we listen to Him, we will come to the word and will study it, meditate upon it and pray over it—and He leads us to prayer. He is there prompting us; He is working in us ‘both to will and to do’ (Phil. 2:13). And as we realise that and respond to it we shall find more and more that we know that we have been sealed by the Spirit and that the Spirit is indeed the earnest of our inheritance.

What an amazing thing it is that God, having purchased us by the precious blood of Christ, as it were, gives us that kind of title deed, that earnest. He says: Here you are; this is a proof of it. You will experience this now, but it is nothing in comparison with what you are going to experience when this purchased possession is finally and fully redeemed.

If we only look at these things in that way, we shall go on our way [p 264] rejoicing. And not only shall we not quench or grieve the Spirit, we shall enjoy His holy presence, and above all we shall know the Lord more and more, and better and better, and our love for Him will become greater and greater. That is always the ultimate test of the reality of the work of the Spirit and our possession of the Spirit. The final certain test, always, is not what I have felt, not some thrill I have had, but my relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, my love for Him, especially and my knowledge of Him and the reality of my relationship to Him.

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The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In our consideration of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we come now to the subject of spiritual gifts. Again, like most aspects of this doctrine, it is a difficult subject which has given rise to much dispute. Many prefer to ignore it altogether, yet it is a definite part of biblical teaching. The classic passage on the subject is 1 Corinthians 12—and there are certain gifts which are characteristic of the receiving of the Spirit.

Now there are some principles which stand out clearly in the biblical teaching. The first is that the spiritual gifts must be differentiated from natural gifts. We all have natural gifts, but the spiritual gift, which any one of us may possess, is something separate from and entirely different from this. It is a gift that is given directly to us by the Holy Spirit. Let us go further and say that it does not even mean the heightening of a natural gift. Some people have fallen into that error. They have thought that what a spiritual gift really means is that a person's natural gift is taken hold of by the Holy Spirit and heightened or made more vivid so that it therefore becomes a spiritual gift. But that is not what the Scripture would have us believe. A spiritual gift is something new, something different.

Here is a definition given in a well-known Greek lexicon, and up to a point the definition is helpful. Spiritual gifts are described as 'Extraordinary powers distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the Church of Christ; the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating in their souls by the Holy Spirit.' This definition highlights the fact that these gifts are new and special and are given to us directly by the Holy Spirit. They are called the *charismata* and people refer to 'charismatic gifts'.

[p 266] Then the second principle, and a very important one, is that these gifts are bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit in a sovereign manner. This is emphasised very clearly in 1 Corinthians 12; notice verse 11, for instance: 'But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.' As *He* will. It is He who decides and not us. He decides what particular gift to give to a particular person. And I wonder whether we are going too far when we say that the idea of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the dispensing of these gifts carries implicitly not only the *which* and the *to whom* but also the *when*; that it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit, in His sovereign power as one of the three Persons in the blessed holy Trinity, not only to decide what person and what gift, but also when to give particular gifts, to withhold them if He chooses and to give them if He chooses. He is Lord. It is very important to bear this in mind. As we have seen, His sovereignty is brought out in verse 11, but verse 7 enforces the same point: 'But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.' It is a gift, it is given, it is something that comes entirely from the Holy Spirit.

Then we go on to a third principle clearly taught in this chapter, which is that each Christian is given, and has, therefore, some gift: 'But the manifestation of the Spirit is given *to every man* to profit withal' (v. 7). Verse 11 says it again: 'But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to *every man severally* as He will.' The clear implication there is that every single Christian is given some particular gift. Indeed, it seems to me that the analogy which the Apostle uses in this chapter concerning the nature of the Church is a perfect analogy of the human frame—the body, of necessity, carries this idea that there is a special function for every member of the Christian Church. You notice that Paul says further on that some are important, some unimportant; some comely, some less comely and so on. But, he says, all these are necessary for the body. Some seem to be more feeble, but they are essential and every single part, however apparently small and insignificant, has its place and position in the body and is enabled to function by the Holy Spirit. So that from this we deduce that every true member of the body of Christ, every true Christian who has been baptised into the body of Christ by this one Spirit, has some particular spiritual gift.

Then the fourth principle taught in 1 Corinthians 12, obviously, is that the gifts differ in value. 'For the body is not one member,' Paul says, 'but many' (v. 14). And still more explicitly in verse 28: 'And **[p 267]** God hath set some in the church, first [you notice] apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after

that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.' And, as we have just seen, Paul compares the various parts in these words: 'Nay, much more those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness' (vv. 22–23). And Paul goes on to say that 'God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked' (v. 24).

So there again we have definite teaching that the gifts differ in value, but if you go on to chapter 14 you will find that Paul says it still more explicitly in verse 5: 'I would,' he says, 'that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.' And, again, in the famous statement in verses 18 and 19 he says, 'I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.' And notice, as I shall emphasise later, the position which he always allots to the gift of tongues in his various lists. Obviously it is done quite intentionally.

The fifth principle is that all or any gifts must always be used in love. That is the great message of the thirteenth chapter: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal' (1 Cor. 13:1). Paul is most concerned to emphasise that whatever the gift, it must be used in love, which, indeed, entitles us to say that you should never estimate or judge a person's spirituality solely in terms of the gifts that are possessed. These two things do not always run parallel. A man or woman may have a remarkable gift and yet may be failing in certain respects, so you cannot always equate these things.

Now there is teaching in Scripture which says that eventually such people will be deprived of their gift but it is equally clear that for a while their gift may be very much greater than their spiritual condition. Another way of putting this truth is to say that you will often find in the history of the Church, and especially perhaps in the history of revivals, that God has chosen men and women with few natural gifts and has given them some remarkable spiritual gifts. I repeat, on both counts we must never be quick to make deductions about people solely on the basis of the gift that they possess. There are these other **[p 268]** factors that have to be brought into consideration. So all the gifts must be used in love. Ultimately they are of no value to us and we shall not profit by them unless we use them in love. The gift may be used, as God could use people like Cyrus and others in the Old Testament, but it does not necessarily tell us anything about the state of the soul.

The last general principle is that there are those who would say that unless we have possessed or manifested a particular gift, we have never been baptised by the Spirit or have never known any fulness of the Spirit. Now I suggest to you that any reading of these three chapters (1 Corinthians 12–14) gives the lie direct to any such teaching. There is not a single gift mentioned here of which we are told that it must be present, rather, the whole suggestion is that one person has one gift and another a different gift, and you never know which gift a person will have. But there is no universal gift which is a *sine qua non*. To teach that is to be utterly unscriptural, indeed it is a denial of the very thing that the Apostle is concerned to say in chapter 12, especially in view of his elaboration of his doctrine in the analogy of the human body.

Those, then, are the general principles about which most people agree, but now there is another problem, which is certainly more controversial, especially, perhaps, at the present time. Are these gifts, and are all these gifts, meant for the Christian Church at all times? What do we have in this chapter? Have we a description here of what was true only of the early Church or is it to be equally true of the Church today? Were these gifts temporary or are they permanent? Can you apply any of these principles to all of the gifts or do you have to subdivide them? Now these are very debatable questions and you will know that there are authorities on both sides, as is invariably the case with these difficult matters, but I suggest to you humbly that in this world we cannot arrive at any finality with regard to these questions. So here, as so often, dogmatism should be avoided and we must approach the Scriptures with as little prejudice as possible as we try to consider what they teach. Again there are certain statements that I should like to put to you for your consideration.

First of all, there are certain scriptural statements which seem to me to throw light on this problem. For instance, in Ephesians 2:20 the apostle Paul talks about the Christian Church being 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.' The term, you notice, is the *foundation* of the [p 269] apostles and prophets. Now, surely that term foundation does suggest something that is once and for all. You lay a foundation once, and once only, and then you erect the building on it. By definition, a foundation is something that does not continue. It is laid and there it is, that is the end of the foundation.

The apostles and prophets, then, are the foundation which clearly suggests that they are not to be repeated, but that they were special men at the origin of the Christian Church. Surely it is not difficult to understand this when you come to think of it. These were the men who were there to teach and to preach and to instruct the Christian people before the New Testament canon came into being, before the Gospels and epistles were written. We so often tend to forget that. We do not remember that, putting it at a minimum, there were twenty years when there were Christian people and members of Christian churches without a New Testament. They were dependent upon the oral teaching and instruction of the apostles and prophets who were inspired and authoritative and spoke without error.

But, surely, once the documents had come into being, the necessity for that was no longer there. Having had the testimony and the teaching of the apostles and prophets, which we have in our New Testament documents, we have the foundation and nothing further is required. So there is, in that sense, no further necessity for apostles and prophets. And, as a matter of fact, it is very interesting to observe that the people in the early Church did not claim that they themselves were apostles and prophets; they all pointed back to the original ones. When the Church came to define the New Testament canon, the big test that was always applied, as we saw at the beginning of these lectures, was this test of apostolicity. Could a writing that was put forward be traced to an apostle, or, if not to an apostle, to the direct influence of an apostle?

I always think that Hebrews 2 is interesting at this point. We read in verses 3 and 4, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?' Now surely the suggestion there is this: 'I am calling attention,' says the writer, in effect, 'to this great salvation; and you must not neglect it for certain reasons. It first began to be spoken by the Lord Himself and it was confirmed to us by them that heard it—that is to say the apostles. God bore them [p 270] (the apostles) witness, with the signs and wonders ...'—the suggestion being, surely, that these particular gifts and manifestations were given to them in order to attest their apostolic authority and, therefore, having had that, and having had their teaching as we have it here, there is no further need for such gifts.

Now that seems to me to be the argument of Hebrews 2:3–4. There are some who would even say that this is taught in 1 Corinthians 13:8 where we read, 'Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' Some authorities say that in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul was prophesying that these things would end. But I cannot accept that. I think he is referring to something much beyond this, to the ultimate glory when we shall see face to face, when love alone will be left, and even faith and hope will be turned into sight. But there are other scriptural statements that suggest that these gifts were only temporary for the foundation of the Church—speaking generally.

Then we come on to a second point which is that it is really important to notice what happened after the days of the apostles—the fact is that these gifts did disappear. Some would dispute that but you will find that it really can be established. If you trace the sources right back, it is clear that these gifts did cease after the days of the apostles. However, some would say that that was due to the fact that the Church became less spiritual, and that the trouble today is that the Church is so unspiritual that the gifts are not given and are not being manifested. To which, there seems to me to be a very clear and obvious answer, which is this: the gifts (as I have emphasised) are bestowed by the Spirit in a sovereign manner, irrespective of us. It is His prerogative.

But there is a still more powerful argument. If the argument is that low spirituality means an absence of gifts and high spirituality means the presence of gifts, then how do you think it ever came to pass that there were any gifts in the church at Corinth, which is surely one of the least spiritual of all the New Testament churches? There were excesses, there were abuses, indeed, the whole church was in a most pathetic condition and yet the gifts were very much in evidence there. It seems to me that this one epistle on its own is sufficient to prove that we must never use such an argument.

Furthermore, there is the argument of history. You will find that revivals generally came when spiritual life was at a very low ebb. [p 271] When some of the saints had almost given up hope, then the power descended. That is why people who think that they can prepare or work up a revival are so unscriptural and unhistorical. It is when everything seems to be going the other way that God visits the Church with revival and reawakening. So that, again, is an important consideration as you try to come to a conclusion about this matter.

Then I would add this further comment, that if we do believe that these gifts (or most of them) were for the apostolic era only, it does not mean for a moment that no miracles have taken place since. It merely means that the gift of miracles is withdrawn. If you say that the gift of healing has been withdrawn that does not mean that you would therefore have to say that no person has ever been healed as the result of the prayers of Christian people. Clearly throughout the history of the Church miracles have taken place.

In other words, we must get this clear in our minds—we are discussing these special gifts that were given to attest the authority of the apostles—these special gifts given at the beginning. But God, being God, can work a miracle whenever He likes and wherever He likes, and He can answer prayer in an unusual manner whenever He chooses to do so. So to say that the gifts were only for that period, is not to deny the possibility of miracles now, nor the possibility of marvellous answers to prayer, and things which clearly belong to the supernatural realm.

So you will see by this that my own tendency is to say that at any rate certain of these gifts were temporary, but I want to go on to suggest that there are other gifts which obviously are permanent. I cannot make a sweeping statement about this—all or none—not at all! I want to try to show you that some gifts were temporary but other gifts have continued ever since, and are in evidence today. So I would suggest this subdivision.

First of all, temporary gifts. What are they? Well, first and foremost—the gift of apostleship. The apostles are not repeated but were once and for all. So the gift necessary to make a man an apostle is no longer present. The same applies to the gift of prophecy. What is this gift of prophecy about which we read in the New Testament? Well, as in the Old Testament, it means two things. It means a *forthtelling*, a conveying of truth from God to people. It means that someone is divinely inspired to become the vehicle and the channel of communicating a revelation or a teaching to people. It also means *foretelling*.

Now it is quite clear that the New Testament prophets exercised [p 272] their gift in both those respects but, as we have seen, that was obviously necessary before we had our New Testament canon. However, it is no longer necessary and that is why we take our stand upon the position that throughout the centuries there has been no additional revelation.

So if any man has ever claimed at any time, or does today, that he has got some further revelation, we reject that claim. That is why, for instance, we will not accept the authoritative claims of the Roman Catholic Church. That Church claims that she has been receiving revelation exactly as the apostles and prophets did, that she is as inspired as they were, that certain truth has been revealed to her since the end of the canon. That is why the Church has promulgated its doctrine of the immaculate conception and, more recently, the assumption of the Virgin Mary, and so on. It is claimed, you see, that the bishops are the continuation of the apostles and that there is inspiration today as there was then. So you see the importance of having certain clear distinctions in mind—the gift of prophecy, like the gift of apostleship, was temporary and ceased when it was no longer necessary.

I would also put into this same category the gift of healing. Now, again, do not misunderstand me. I am talking about the gift of healing, by which I understand that certain people had been given a gift by the

Holy Spirit whereby they themselves could directly heal people. It does not mean that they prayed for them and that as the result of their prayers the patient was healed. It means that they literally, actually, directly and immediately healed the patient. That is what the gift of healing means and I suggest that it was a temporary gift. Now I know that cases are reported in which people today seem to have a healing gift. Yes, you will find some are spiritualists and some do not even claim to be spiritualists or Christians, but say they have some healing power. Now I am not disputing phenomena, but I am asserting that the Holy Spirit's gift of healing is something that ceased with the apostles.

And the same applies to the gift of miracles. I have said, you remember, that miracles have taken place since the time of the apostles, but that is a very different thing from the gift of miracles, which obviously the apostles Peter and Paul possessed. They were given a commission and the ability to exercise the gift of miracles wherever they were. That is a gift which has disappeared. Again, the Roman Catholic Church will tell you that it still has the gift, but we have [p 273] other explanations for their supposed miracles. Again, I am not disputing the possibility of a miracle, I am merely asserting that the *gift* of miracles ended with the apostles.

And it is the same with the gift of discerning spirits and the gift of tongues. Now this gift of tongues often leads to trouble and to confusion. We are told about this gift of tongues in the second, the tenth and the nineteenth chapters of Acts and then it is dealt with in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14. The great question debated throughout the centuries is this: Do the three chapters in Acts refer to the same thing as the three chapters in 1 Corinthians? Now one school of thought differentiates between Acts and 1 Corinthians. There are those who say that in the book of Acts the apostles and others were literally speaking in other languages, not Greek or Aramaic, but, perhaps, Latin or some of the dialects and languages of the various peoples who were gathered together at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Whereas it is said that in 1 Corinthians Paul is referring to some sort of ecstatic utterance which is not a language at all but sounds and words uttered without understanding by the person taken up by the Holy Spirit.

But, again speaking for myself, I find it very difficult to accept that view because I find that the terms which are used in Acts and in 1 Corinthians are precisely the same and it seems to me to be unnecessary to postulate two different meanings if one will account for it all. 'But,' someone may say, 'we are told that on the Day of Pentecost, everyone heard the apostles speaking in their own language.' Of course. That seems to me to be a part of the miracle that took place. In other words, I suggest that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the people who were listening were enabled to hear in their own language though their own language was not being spoken. Now at least fifteen different dialects were spoken by those people at Jerusalem at that time, and it seems to me to be quite incredible that if these fifteen different languages were being spoken at the same time in these conditions, the people who were standing by and listening could each one differentiate not only his own language, but could clearly follow what was being said. It seems impossible. But it is quite possible that the apostles were speaking in some kind of speech and the Holy Spirit, as it were, conveyed that speech to all these people as if it were coming in their own tongue and they understood what was being said. They understood these men telling forth these wonderful works of God.

So I suggest that the difference between the tongues in Acts and [p 274] 1 Corinthians is simply that it was done in all its perfection and glory on the Day of Pentecost, in the house of Cornelius and in Ephesus. However, in Corinth there was this difference, that sometimes the man speaking did not himself know what he was saying, and the ability to understand it was not conveyed to others except by an occasional interpreter. Of course it was not conveyed to everyone at Jerusalem, because there were some who thought that these men were filled with a new wine, you remember. Not everyone was given the ability to understand, but in Corinth there were these interpreters who were able to explain the meaning.

Another point is that the gift of tongues is not meant for all. The Apostle asks, 'Do all speak with tongues?' (1 Cor. 12:30). And the answer is, of course, 'No, all do not speak in tongues, all do not have the gifts of healing, all do not interpret,' and so on. And you will notice that Paul always puts the gift of tongues last in his list. In chapter 14 he is at great pains to say that everything must be done 'decently and in order', for God is not the author of confusion (vv. 40, 33). So if you meet people who say they speak in tongues, or if you have been at a meeting where this is claimed and if there was disorder and confusion,

then you are entitled to say, in terms of the scriptural teaching, that whatever else it may have been, it was not the gift of tongues as described in the church at Corinth. The Apostle always emphasises the order and the control which must be exercised. This is a difficult subject, but if we constantly heed the injunctions and the warnings and the teaching of the Scripture we shall be saved from much trouble.

Now let me suggest to you a list of the permanent gifts in 1 Corinthians 12: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, the ability to teach, the gift of ministering and helps, the gift of administrations and governments, the ability that deacons and elders and others have, the gift of evangelism, the gift for the pastorate, the gift of exhortation and the gift mentioned in verse 9 (which is often a cause of confusion) the gift of faith. People have often stumbled at that—what does it mean? The simple answer is that, as we saw earlier, the gift of faith mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 is obviously the kind of gift that was given to men such as George Müller or Hudson Taylor. Both these men founded a work in which they relied upon God alone to provide the money and their material needs. George Müller founded homes for children in need and Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission—now the Overseas Missionary [p 275] Fellowship. It is not the gift of believing in Christ because every Christian has that, whereas every Christian does not have the gift of faith mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12. This special gift of faith enables people to trust God in the way those men and others have done, and God, by that means and through them, manifests His glory and power.

Then as we come to the end of our consideration of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, there is one further question that we must consider. Though not really a part of the doctrine, it is an issue that troubles many friends: it is the great problem of what is called ‘the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’. So for their sake and to help them let me add this. You will find this in Matthew 12:31–32 and in the corresponding places in Mark 3 and Luke 11.

Now I can deal with this subject very, very simply. What is this blasphemy or sin against the Holy Spirit? Christian people are often troubled that they are guilty of it. The answer is this: If you are troubled about it, you can be absolutely certain that you are not guilty of it. Look at it as it is described in those passages. See it in Hebrews 6:4–6 and 10:26. See it also in 1 John 5 where the apostle John says, ‘There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.’ These passages mean that a man or woman may deliberately reject Christ and glory in that rejection, perhaps even attributing the powers of Christ to Beelzebub or to a devil as the Pharisees did when they said, ‘This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils’ (Matt. 12:24). The people, therefore, who are guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit not only do not believe in Christ, they do not want to believe in Him; they ridicule Him; they treat Him with scorn and derision; they turn their backs upon Him and dismiss Him.

So if you are worried that you have sinned against the Holy Spirit and you want to be right with God and with Christ and feel that you have sinned yourself out of the relationship, if you are groaning because you are out of the relationship and not in it, then not only are you *not* guilty of the sin against the Holy Spirit, you are as far removed from it as a person can ever be. These other people are happy, they are gloating in it; they are glorying in it; they are proud of themselves and of their rejection. You are the exact opposite. It grieves you and troubles you and you would give anything to know Him and to be right with Him. My dear friends, do not listen to the lie of the devil who is trying to depress you and to rob you of your joy. [p 276] Turn upon him and say, ‘My very desire to know Him and to be right with Him is a proof that I have not committed a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.’

And if you do so, I can assure you that you will find deliverance. You will find peace, and the joy of the Lord and of salvation will be restored unto you. And then turn to God and thank Him for the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

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**GREAT DOCTRINES
OF THE BIBLE**

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THE CHURCH AND THE LAST THINGS
D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

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[Page iii]**Preface**

On Friday evenings after the war, Dr Lloyd-Jones held discussion meetings in one of the halls in Westminster Chapel in London. The subjects of these discussions were practical issues in the Christian life and the meetings were attended by many people. The questions which arose demanded a knowledge of biblical teaching of all kinds; often, too, a matter of doctrine would arise which the Doctor would deal with, usually in his summing up at the end of the discussion. It was partly as a result of this, partly, too, because the numbers were becoming too large for the hall, and, perhaps even more, because so many people were asking him about the biblical doctrines, that he felt it right to move the 'Friday night meeting' into the Chapel itself and to give a series of lectures on those great subjects. He did this from 1952 to 1955 and after that he began his magisterial series on the epistle to the Romans which continued until his retirement in 1968. The doctrine lectures were very much appreciated by the large congregations who heard them and, over the years, many have borne testimony to the way in which their Christian lives have been strengthened by them.

Later, the Doctor himself felt happier about preaching doctrines as a part of regular exposition—'If people want to know about a particular doctrine, they can find it in the doctrine text books,' he once said. But the great strength of his doctrinal studies is that they are not arid text-book lectures. He was, above all, a preacher and this shines through in all of them. He was also a pastor and wanted men and women to share his sense of wonder and his gratitude to God for the mighty facts of the gospel; so his language is clear and not encumbered by complex academic phraseology. Like Tyndale, he wanted the truth **[Page iv]** to be in words 'understood of the people'. Also he did not want the teaching to remain in the head only, so there is an application in each lecture to make sure that the heart and will are touched also. The glory of God was his greatest motive in giving these lectures.

Those who know the preaching and the books of Dr Lloyd-Jones will realise, on reading the lectures, that his views on a few subjects developed over the years and that his emphases may not always have been the same. But this is all part of the richness of his ministry as it has been of the ministry of many of the great preachers of the past. However on the essential, fundamental truths of the Word of God, there is no change and his trumpet does not give an uncertain sound.

We have had one difficulty in preparing these lectures for publication. They were delivered in the early days of tape recording so that in a few places the words have been difficult to decipher and a few tapes are missing. Also, only a very few of the lectures were taken down in shorthand so in one or two cases we have neither a tape nor a manuscript. Fortunately, however, the Doctor kept his very full notes on all the lectures so we have used them, though, of course, it means that these chapters are not as full as the others.

The Doctor's tapes are distributed by the Martyn Lloyd-Jones Recordings Trust and, of all his tapes, by far the largest number of requests is for these doctrine lectures. The lack of knowledge of the vital truths of the Christian faith is greater now than ever before—certainly greater than it was in the 1950s—so it is our prayer that God would use and bless these lectures again to our strengthening and to His glory.

The Editors

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The Church

We have now arrived at number 60 in our study of biblical doctrines, so this is perhaps a good point at which to remind you of the various steps and stages through which we have passed. Having started with our consideration of man in this world, and having seen the futility of trusting only to our own understanding, we came to see, as people have ever done, the need of a revelation. God has given us that revelation: it is a revelation of Himself in His word. Then, having considered what the word tells us about God, we went on to consider what it tells us about men and women and their needs, and the cause of their needs—that introduced the doctrine of sin. That leads to the need of salvation which we considered in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then in the application of all that to us by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Now we come to a new section: new simply in the sense that we recognise certain divisions for the sake of convenience of thought, but obviously new in no other sense. Also, we should notice again the marvellous way in which each one of these doctrines leads to the next, quite inevitably. Truth is one and God's purpose is a whole, so that as we finish dealing with one doctrine we are, of necessity, introducing the next.

In the last lecture, we were considering together the teaching of the Bible concerning spiritual gifts. We considered how God gives to the Church apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers, who have the necessary gifts. And we saw that various other special gifts are given to Christian people, both temporary gifts for the early Christians, and other gifts which are more permanent and are given to all Christians at all times. But in all these cases we observed that the gifts were given **[Page 2]** to the Church and to members of the Church. And in that way we come, by an inevitable logic and by the force of truth itself, to a consideration of the biblical doctrine of the nature of the Church.

Now this doctrine is very often entirely omitted in books that deal with biblical doctrines, though it is difficult to discover why. This is most regrettable, because if we really are concerned to deal with the doctrines that appear in the Bible itself, then we must deal with the doctrine of the Church. Most of the New Testament epistles were written to a church and their teaching is much about the Church. So it is not enough to consider the doctrines of the Bible that deal with our more personal and individual needs and experiences. So much in the New Testament would not be devoted to truths concerning the Church unless this were something that is vital. The very character of Scripture itself compels us to deal with this doctrine.

Another reason, surely, is the great prominence that this doctrine has had in the history of the Church herself. Take, for example, the history of Britain. Standing out prominently is the whole question of the nature of the Church. We see this in the Protestant Reformation—one of those great turning points which everybody knows something about—and in all that happened in the seventeenth century, including certain aspects of the Civil War. Now you cannot look at those things, even from the secular standpoint, without seeing that the doctrine is rather important. Our fathers regarded it as of such vital importance that they were prepared to undergo very great hardships and to suffer the loss of almost all things because of their concern about the doctrine of the nature of the Church. To them it was not something that could be regarded with indifference. Whatever the persecution, even at the risk of their lives, many of them founded conventicles and insisted upon meeting together. So if we had no other reason for considering this doctrine, we should be compelled to study it out of respect for the names and for the greatness of our distant forefathers. People do not suffer like that for truth and for a cause if it is an indifferent matter.

And then, of course, there is another reason which drives us to consider this question, and that is the great prominence which is being given at the present time to the Christian Church in connection with what goes by the name of the ecumenical movement. The religious papers devote a great deal of space to this and it is being said by the exponents of ecumenism that the particular function of the Church in the twentieth century is to call attention to the nature of the Church. So if we want to enter into discussion

with such people, and to be able **[Page 3]** to take an intelligent interest in these discussions, it behoves us to know something about this New Testament doctrine.

But, further, there is a reason which, in a sense, is far more important than all the others put together. I suspect that it is the failure of evangelical people, particularly during the last sixty to seventy years, to take seriously the biblical teaching concerning the nature of the Church, that accounts for most of the problems that we are confronting at the present time. For some reason or another, our immediate fathers and grandfathers felt that it was sufficient to form movements and they did not think in terms of the Church, with the result that evangelical witness is diluted among the great denominations and evangelical Christian people only meet together in movements instead of in Churches. So from that standpoint this is a highly important subject. If we have a deep concern about the evangelical message and its vital importance in the world today, then we are compelled to consider the doctrine of the Church.

Now as we approach the biblical teaching concerning the nature of the Church, let me also make my usual introductory remark. This is a highly controversial subject—practically all of the doctrines have been so, have they not? But history alone assures us that this is perhaps the most controversial of all. And yet it is sheer cowardice to avoid dealing with a subject simply because it is controversial. Whatever our upbringing or background, whatever our prejudices, we must endeavour to consider, with as open a mind as possible, what the Scriptures have to tell us. Let us all try to do that, praying that God will deliver us from the prejudices from which we all tend to suffer.

Let us come, therefore, to certain preliminary words of definition. The first question we must deal with is this: What is the relationship of the Church to the kingdom of God? In the Bible we find teaching about the kingdom and teaching about the Church. Among Christian people there is often a great deal of confusion about these two subjects. This is very largely because of the way in which the Roman Catholic Church identifies the two. In Roman Catholic teaching the Church *is* the kingdom of God, and Roman Catholics are absolutely consistent in the way in which they work that out, claiming the right to rule and to dominate the whole of life in every respect. And you remember how, in the Middle Ages, the Roman Church used to rule kings and lords and princes and countries and powers, on the grounds that because she was the kingdom of God, she was supreme. And that idea has somehow tended to persist.

[Page 4] So we must be clear about the relationship of the Church and the kingdom. What is the kingdom of God? Well, it is best defined as the *rule* of God. The kingdom of God is present wherever God is reigning. That was why our Lord was able to say that because of His activity and His works, 'the kingdom of God is within you' (Lk. 17:21). 'If I,' He said, 'with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you' (Lk. 11:20). So if we regard the kingdom of God as the rule and the reign of God, the kingdom was here when our Lord was here in person. It is present now wherever the Lord Jesus Christ is acknowledged as Lord. But it is to come with a greater fulness when everybody and everything will have to acknowledge His lordship. So we can say that the kingdom has come, the kingdom is among us, and the kingdom is yet to come.

What, then, is the relationship of the Church to the kingdom? Surely it is this: the Church is an *expression* of the kingdom but is not to be equated with it. The kingdom of God is wider and bigger than the Church. In the Church, where the Church is truly the Church, the lordship of Christ is acknowledged and recognised and He dwells there. So the kingdom is there at that point. So the Church is a part of the kingdom, but only a part. God's kingdom is much wider than the Church. He rules in places outside the Church, places where He is not acknowledged, because all things are in His hand and history is in His hand. So the Church is not co-extensive with the kingdom.

Now let us look at some of the terms that are used. The Greek word which is translated 'church' is the term *ekklesia*, and *ekklesia* means 'those who are called out', not necessarily called out of the world, but called out of society for some particular function or purpose; they are 'called together'. We can translate *ekklesia* by the word 'assembly'. In the Scriptures *ekklesia* is not confined to a spiritual assembly. If you read the account in Acts 19 of the extraordinary meeting that took place in the city of Ephesus, a meeting which almost became a riot, you will find that the town clerk calls it an assembly, an *ekklesia*, by which he means that a number of people had come together. In the same way, in his speech in Acts 7 Stephen refers

to Moses being in 'the church in the wilderness' (v. 38). So the children of Israel were a church, a gathering, an assembly, of God's people. They were the *ekklesia*, the church in the Old Testament. That is the fundamental meaning of the word 'church'.

Now our word 'church'—or the word they use in Scotland, the 'kirk'—and all the cognate terms and names, carry a slightly different **[Page 5]** meaning. We use the word to mean that we belong to the Lord. Our word 'church' comes from the Greek word *kurios*, which means 'lord'—it has the same derivation as the words kaiser and Caesar. It is important that we should remember that, because we must put these two meanings together: the Church consists of those people who belong to the Lord, who are gathered together.

But let us go a step further. Let us consider certain statements in the Scriptures which are made about the Church, and these are really important. In the Bible, the word *ekklesia*, when it is applied to Christians, is generally used with regard to a local gathering. Now the distinction I am making is the difference between the Church thought of as a *general* idea and the church thought of as a *local* and *particular* idea. The term that is almost invariably used in the Scriptures carries this local meaning. For instance, in Romans 16, when Paul sends his greetings to Aquila and Priscilla, he makes a reference to 'the church that is in their house' (v. 5). A number of Christians met together in the house of Aquila and Priscilla and the apostle Paul does not hesitate to call that local gathering a church. He is not thinking in terms of the modern ecumenical ideal, according to which *the Church* is the great thing.

Then, also, Paul addresses his epistles to, for instance, 'the church of God which is at Corinth'. He writes the Galatian epistle to 'the churches of Galatia' (Gal. 1:12), not 'the Church of Galatia'. Paul is not thinking of one unit divided into local branches, but of the churches, a number of these units, in Galatia. This is a most significant and important point.

Now if you go through the Scriptures you will find that is the usual apostolic way of handling the subject. But we do have to notice that there are some two or three instances where the word 'church' is used rather than 'churches' and one of them is rather interesting. It is to be found in Acts 9:31. There is a difference here between the Authorised [King James] Version and the Revised Version. The Authorised Version reads, 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified.' But the Revised Version has the singular, 'church', and this is undoubtedly the better translation. Yes, but even then, we must remember that the reference is almost certainly to the members of the church at Jerusalem who had been scattered abroad as a result of the persecution. So that probably Luke was not referring to the idea of 'the Church' as distinct from 'the churches', but was thinking of the one church scattered abroad in various places and at peace. However, this is not a vital point. Again, **[Page 6]** in 1 Corinthians 12:28 we read, 'And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets.' Paul does not say that God set them 'in the churches', but 'in the church'.

Then there is one other way in which the term 'church' is used. In certain passages, like those great passages in the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul is obviously thinking of the Church as including not only those who are on earth but also those who are in heaven. At the end of the first chapter he says, 'And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:22–23). Similarly, further on in the epistle, he says, 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known *by the church* the manifold wisdom of God' (Eph. 3:10). And Paul writes the same again in Ephesians 5:23–32.

So far, then, we have seen that, generally speaking, the term *ekklesia* is used in the plural and the writers are obviously thinking of individual churches, but in a few instances there is a larger conception when the term 'the Church' is used.

Then, next, we must consider the various pictures or illustrations which are used in order to teach the doctrine concerning the Church, and there are quite a number of very interesting ones. The first is the analogy of a body. In several of the New Testament epistles we are told that the Church is the 'body of Christ'. The classic example, of course, is in 1 Corinthians 12, but we find it also in Romans 12, in Ephesians 4 and in other places.

Another picture is of the Church as a temple or as a building, and the apostle Paul compares himself to a wise master builder (1 Cor. 3:10). In Ephesians 2:20 he talks about the Church being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, so he thinks of it there as a building that is being erected.

Then in Ephesians 5 Paul refers to the Church as the bride of Christ and that image reappears in the book of Revelation.

Yet another concept is that of an empire. In Ephesians 2 Paul talks about our being ‘fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God’ (v. 19). That was obviously an analogy that came readily to the mind of the apostle. He was probably a prisoner in Rome at the time he wrote that epistle, and was thinking of this good Roman Empire. He felt that there was something about the Empire that was analogous to the Church, with all the parts scattered abroad and yet with a central unity. **[Page 7]**

To use another term, we can speak, as has been done throughout the centuries, of the ‘Church militant’ and the ‘Church triumphant’: the Church on earth is fighting for her life, for doctrine, for everything; the Church that is beyond the veil, rejoicing and triumphant. Take, for instance, the great way in which that is put in Hebrews 12:22–24.

So then, taking all these ideas together, what is our conclusion? Clearly, the Church is spiritual and invisible. All the instances I have given you of the word used in the singular suggest something which cannot be seen but has a reality as a spiritual entity. But at the same time, the Church is also visible and can be seen externally and can be described as existing in Corinth or in Rome or in some other particular place. It is very important that we should bear those two things in mind. The invisible has local manifestations.

A good analogy here is the soul. You cannot see people’s souls, but you know that each person has a soul and expresses that fact through the body, through behaviour and life, the invisible manifesting itself through the visible. And that is obviously true of the Christian Church. Apart from local churches there is such a thing as *the Church*. The body of Christ is an entity, it is a real and a living thing.

It is very important that we should draw these distinctions because, in the light of what I have been saying, I can go on to add this: you cannot be a Christian without being a member of the Church, spiritual and invisible. It is impossible. All Christians are members of the body of Christ. But you can be a member of the Church without being a member of a visible part of the Church—though you should be. You can be the one without the other. It is possible, too, to be a member of the visible, external manifestation of the Church and not to be a member of the invisible, spiritual Church. Thus you can see that this scriptural distinction between the universal Church, which is His body, and its visible, local manifestations, is rather important.

So then, to sum up, the usual meaning of ‘church’ given in the Scriptures is of a local gathering of saints where the presence and the lordship of Christ is recognised. But over and above that, in the local churches, all those people who are truly born again and spiritual are also members of the unseen spiritual Church, the true body of Christ. That, as I have said, is something which is of very great importance if we are to understand the present discussion about the Church. So we come now to the next question, that of the unity of the Church. And this is the great topic of today. **[Page 8]**

Now here, surely, certain things can be said without any fear of contradiction. If we are to be guided by the scriptural teaching, then we must agree at once that the unity that the Scripture is interested in is *spiritual* unity. How often John 17 is misquoted! People just tear a phrase right out of its context. ‘That they all may be one,’ they say, quoting verse 21, and they leave it at that. They insist also that division in the Church is the greatest sin of all. Now, of course, we all agree that division is regrettable; schism is certainly sin. Yes, but when that is interpreted as meaning that anybody who calls himself a Christian, no matter what the shape or form, is someone with whom we should be in absolute unity in every respect, then that is a contradiction of what John 17 teaches.

John 17 surely makes the character of this unity quite plain and clear. Our Lord’s terms are these: ‘As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ... And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one’ (vv. 21–22). That is all spiritual. Our Lord is

talking of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and those who are in Christ, who are in the Father and the Son, and He has already told us certain things about these people. He says, 'For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me' (v. 8). So our Lord's words about unity are only applicable to people who believe that particular doctrine, and if people tell me that they are Christians but say that Jesus was only a man, then I have no unity with them. I do not belong to them. They may call themselves Christians, but if they have not believed and accepted this, there is no basis for unity. It is *spiritual* unity.

Then in Ephesians 4:3 Paul talks about 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. That great twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians makes the same point. If the analogy of the body is to be at all right, there must be an essential, organic, spiritual unity. Parts cannot work harmoniously if they do not belong to one another, if they do not have the same life in them, if the same blood is not flowing through them. Again in Ephesians Paul says, 'For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father' (Eph. 2:18). So the first thing to emphasise is the Spirit: the unity is *spiritual*. It is not a mere amalgamation of a number of organisations or a mere paper agreement. Nor is it a coalition of people who disagree, but have come together for the **[Page 9]** sake of some common purpose. That is not what I find in the Scriptures. This unity is something mystical, something spiritual; it is vital; it is a community of life.

But the second principle is equally clear in the Scriptures, and that is that unity must be based on doctrine; it must be *doctrinal*. I have shown you that already from John 17. Our Lord says, 'Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee and they have believed that thou didst send me' (John 17:7-8). Now the 'words' referred to by our Lord mean the words about His being the only begotten Son of God. They are words about the incarnation, about the Word being made flesh. They are words in which He claims, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58). They are words that teach His miraculous coming into the world, the virgin birth. They refer to His miracles, because He Himself refers to His miracles (John 14:11), to the supernatural, to the purpose of His death—giving His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28)—and the words that He has spoken about the Person of the Holy Spirit, and so on. And yet we are asked to enter into some great unity with people who deny His unique deity, who do not believe that He is the only begotten Son of God, who do not believe the virgin birth and do not believe that He ever worked a miracle—they say that miracles are impossible and that they are folklore. They do not believe in the substitutionary atonement or in the Person of the Holy Spirit. They pick out this one statement: 'that they all may be one' and forget all this rich doctrinal teaching that has preceded it. To talk about unity with such people is a denial of John 17.

But John 17 is not the only example of this truth that unity must be based on doctrine. In Acts 2:42 we are told that immediately after the Day of Pentecost, 'They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.' Scripture is verbally inspired. Words count, and the place and the position of words in a verse are of tremendous importance. We are not told that the first believers continued steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship and doctrine. No, it was in 'the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers'. In other words, before there can be fellowship there must be community of doctrine. Fellowship is based upon the same faith, the same truth, the same understanding. If you mean one thing when you speak of Christ and someone else with you **[Page 10]** means another, can you have real fellowship? How can you both go through the same Person to God, if one thinks He is only a man, and the other says, 'No, no, He is the eternal substance made flesh'? There must be community of belief, otherwise you are unhappy about the other man and doubtful as to what he means by his terms. Acts 2:42 has apostles' doctrine, then fellowship, but today fellowship is put first. It is said, 'Let's all get together. We can then decide about matters of belief.' But we cannot have fellowship apart from this unity of doctrine.

There is an even stronger statement in John's second epistle: 'If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds' (2 John 10-11). That is from John, the apostle of love. The significance he attaches to doctrine and to truth is so great that he says, in effect, 'You mustn't receive the man into

your house because if you do you're encouraging him. If you give him a meal and send him on his journey you are encouraging his false doctrine. Don't do it.' And if you read John's first epistle, you will find that all along he is concerned about the same thing. There were certain people, he says, these antichrists and their followers, who 'went out from us'. They were among us but they have gone out. Evidently they were not of us (1 John 2:19). And that is on a point of doctrine, remember—doctrine is essential and vital to true fellowship.

So when we are discussing the question of the unity of the Church, we must always put in the foremost positions the spiritual and the doctrinal character of the unity. It is never a very difficult thing to get a coalition of people who believe nothing in particular. But that is not unity. Unity is something positive. It is not people coming together because nobody cares very much what is said or believed. Unity is a life, it is a power, an enthusiasm. It is people welded together by what they have in common. And, supremely, that is true in the Church of God.

If you go back through the long history of the Church, you will find that it has often counted most, and has been most used by God, when there have been just a handful of people who were agreed in spirit and in doctrine. God took hold of them and used them and did mighty things through them. But when there was only one Church in the whole of western Europe, what did she lead to? The Dark Ages. And yet it seems to me that this great lesson of history is being entirely forgotten and ignored at this present time. I say these things not because **[Page 11]** I am animated by any controversial spirit, but because I have a zeal for the truth as I find it in the Scriptures, and regard it as tragic to note the way in which Scripture is being twisted and perverted in the interests of a unity which is not a unity.

Finally, what is the relationship of the Church to the state? Here, again, is a highly controversial subject. The Roman Catholic idea was that the Church was the state and controlled everything in the state and, as I reminded you at the beginning, the Church did that. At the opposite extreme is the so-called 'Erastian' view, an idea first propounded by a man called Erastus, who, I regret to say, was a medical man. I feel I must, on some occasion, give you the history of the unfortunate interventions of medical men in the doctrinal history of the Church! Erastus, unfortunately, was the man who started the pernicious doctrine that the Church is a branch of the state. Now that is, of course, the view in England with regard to the Anglican Church. The Church of England is Erastian and most of the Lutheran Churches take the same view. The Lutheran Church in Germany was Erastian and I think that a very good case can be made out for saying that perhaps we would never have heard of Hitler were it not for the Erastianism of the Lutheran Church in Germany. However, that is a debatable point.

Erastianism, I repeat, is the belief that the Church is a kind of department of state, and that it is ruled and governed by the state, so that the head of the state appoints bishops and other dignitaries and functionaries in the Church. In England in 1928 there was a great controversy in the House of Commons over the proposed new Prayer Book. The Church had decided to have it but Parliament was able to turn it down. You may say that it was a very good thing that Parliament had that authority! From one standpoint, yes, but from another standpoint, no, because that is a weapon which can work both ways. In 1928 it happened to be right, but what if Parliament suddenly decided to do the wrong thing? It still has the power to do so, let us never forget that.

There, then, are the Roman Catholic and the Erastian views of Church and state. But over against these, surely, we must agree, if we go carefully through the Scriptures, that there is a third view which can be described as 'the two estates'. People who hold this view believe that God owns everything. God is the Lord of the universe, as well as the Lord of the Church. God has ordained the state: 'The powers that be,' says Paul, 'are ordained of God' (Rom. 13:1). Magistrates **[Page 12]** and other types of rulers were not made by man but were ordained by God. Yes, but there is this other estate, the Church, and the two exist side by side. The one does not control the other. They are both separate and they are both under God.

That, I suggest to you, is the picture given by the New Testament. There is no indication at all of anything coming anywhere near a state Church. The first believers were independent of governments. They met under the lordship and in the presence of Christ. And outside was the great state to which they belonged. While still citizens of that state, they had entered into a realm which, in a sense, had nothing at

all to do with the state. And throughout the centuries that has been the Reformed view of the relationship between the state and the Church.

In exactly the same way, we cannot find in the Scriptures such a thing as a 'national' Church, surely quite the reverse. Paul writes, 'There is neither Greek nor Jew ... Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free' (Col. 3:11). The Church is something different, consisting of those people who have been born again and have spiritual life, who are, as we have seen, members of the mystical body of Christ, and gather together in their local assembly—church— call it what you will, with Christ as the head. Differences in nationality, along with social and racial distinctions, are immaterial and should never be mentioned in connection with the Church. To add these qualifications is surely to be guilty of something that is not scriptural. The Church is, in that sense, one, and her people are the same everywhere.

We know historically how national Churches have arisen in various countries. But if we are concerned about the scriptural view, then I repeat that I, for one, cannot find anything corresponding to such a condition referred to anywhere in the pages of the Scriptures. It is no argument to say that the nation of Israel was the church in the Old Testament. That was so at that time, but now, 'The kingdom of God,' Christ said to the Jews, 'shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof' (Matt. 4:43). So what is left? It is the Church, as Peter proves in chapter 2 of his first epistle, where he applies to the Church the words that were spoken to the nation of Israel. The Church is now supra-national; she has her people in all nations. She consists of God's people who live on earth in various states but are also citizens of that kingdom which is not of this world.

2

The Marks and Government of the Church

Our next subject as we continue with the doctrine of the Church is what is generally called the *marks* of the Church, or the characteristics of the Church. What is the Church here for? What does she do when she shows that she is the Church? That is an important question, and a number of answers have been given.

The usual Protestant teaching is that there are three main marks of the Church. The first is *the preaching of the word*. That is the primary business of the Christian Church: she was created and called into being for that purpose. The preaching of the word is done in two main respects. The word is preached in the Church for the upbuilding and the establishing of the saints, the believers. They come together, as we saw, in fellowship. The Church is a fellowship of those who are believers in Christ and recognise His headship and His lordship, and the word is preached in order that they may be strengthened in the faith.

The New Testament epistles were written to believers with that definite object in view, and the apostles and the prophets had the same purpose in their preaching. When men and women were converted it was but the beginning. They had been born as babes in Christ, and they needed instruction; they needed to be warned against error and safeguarded against heresy. So the Church is essential to believers.

The second object of preaching, of course, is evangelisation. It is the particular task of the Christian Church to preach to those who are not believers. Our Lord, in His high priestly prayer in John 17, says quite [Page 14] specifically that as the Father had sent Him into the world, so He was sending His immediate followers and those who should believe on Him through them. They were sent into the world as He was. He came bearing the message of the kingdom and we are sent bearing the same message. It is part of the work of the Church to preach the gospel to those who are outside in order that they may be convinced and convicted of their sin, and that they may be led to a living, vital faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That, then, is the first mark of the Church—preaching the word.

The second mark and characteristic of the Church is the true administration of the sacraments. Now I shall not stop with this now because I propose to deal with the doctrine of the sacraments on its own. But I must mention it now because it is one of the marks of the Church. The Church is a place where the sacraments are rightly and truly administered in connection with the preaching of the word.

The third mark of the Church, and the one I am most anxious to emphasise, because it is so sadly neglected, is the exercise of discipline. Now if we had asked at the beginning: ‘What are the three essential marks of the Church?’, I wonder how many would have mentioned the exercise of discipline? There is no doubt at all but that this doctrine is grievously neglected. Indeed, if I were asked to explain why it is that things are as they are in the Church; if I were asked to explain why statistics show the dwindling numbers, the lack of power and the lack of influence upon men and women; if I were asked to explain why it is that so many churches seem to be incapable of sustaining the cause without resorting to whist drives and dances and things like that; if I were asked to explain why it is that the Church is in such a parlous condition, I should have to say that the ultimate cause is the failure to exercise discipline.

When did you last hear any reference from a Christian pulpit to the subject of discipline? How often have you heard sermons or addresses on the subject? The word has almost gone right out of existence and what it stands for and represents has fallen into disuse. And unfortunately, not only is discipline neglected, but there are numbers of people who would even try to justify the neglect, and it is because of this that I want to go fairly fully into the subject.

Now it is on scriptural grounds that I suggest that discipline should be exercised. Take the passage in Matthew 18, beginning at verse 15: ‘Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast [Page 15] gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to

hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican' (vv. 15–17). Those are the words of our Lord Himself.

Then, again, in Romans 16:17 we read: 'Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.' Discipline is the whole theme of 1 Corinthians 5, which ends with these words: 'Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.' Nothing could be more explicit than that. We have it again in 2 Corinthians 2, especially verses 5 to 10, where Paul talks about receiving back a man who had been disciplined; and, again, in 2 Thessalonians 3, where he gives instructions as to what should be done with members of the church who are living disorderly lives. Then in Titus 3:10 there is this explicit command: 'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.' This teaching is also to be found, as we saw in the last lecture, in 2 John 10. And, of course, in the various letters to the individual churches in the book of Revelation there are exhortations on the exercise of discipline.

But, in spite of that, there are those who often try to justify the absence or the lack of discipline in the local church and, strangely enough, there are many who do so in terms of the parable of the tares in Matthew 13. 'You must not discipline Christians,' they say. 'If you try to exercise discipline and to put people out of the church, then you are contravening our Lord's own instructions, for when the servants said, "Shall we pull up those tares and destroy them?" the master said, "No, lest you uproot the wheat at the same time. Let them grow together until the harvest."' Furthermore, for exactly the same reasons, some people object to any separation of Christian people from what may be regarded as an apostate Church.

But this is a grievous misinterpretation of Scripture because the parable of the tares obviously does not refer to the Church but to the kingdom. All the parables in Matthew 13 are parables of the kingdom, and you may remember that in the last lecture I pointed out that the Church and the kingdom are not identical. The Church is one expression of the kingdom, but the kingdom is bigger than the Church. And, of course, our Lord Himself explicitly says, in His own interpretation of this parable, that the field in which the wheat and the tares are sown is not the Church but *the world* (Matt. 13:38). The **[Page 16]** good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one. So the parable of the tares has no bearing upon the question of discipline within the local church. It is a picture of the whole world which, since it belongs to God, can in that general sense be regarded as His kingdom. But within the world there are the two groups—those who are Christians, who belong to the eternal kingdom, and those who belong to the devil.

To apply the parable of the tares to the Church is, of course, to fall into the same error as the Roman Catholics, and it is an error into which most Churches that follow that Church have also tended to fall. That is why, in a sense, there is no discipline in the Roman Catholic Church. That is why it is possible for people to be regarded as perfectly good Christians when their lives may even be riotous. They are not disciplined; they are not put out of the Church. And, indeed, the same thing is true in general of the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church, again because of her view of herself, does not believe in disciplining the individual member. But the view of the Church which we put forward in the last lecture *demands* that there should be discipline. Furthermore, as we have just seen, the practice of discipline is something to which we are exhorted repeatedly and strongly in the Scriptures themselves.

Now discipline is to be exercised along two main lines. First of all, it is to be exercised with respect to doctrine. We read: 'A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject' (Tit. 3:10). John says that if a man does not bring the true doctrine he must not be received at all, not even into one's home, let alone into the church. Let me make this clear. This does not mean that Christians should never admit an unbeliever into their house. Of course it means nothing of the sort! What it does mean is that if a man who claims not only to be a Christian but also a teacher is teaching error, you certainly must not receive him into your house. But of course you receive the unbeliever into your house in order that you may talk to him about Christian things. Paul puts this perfectly in 1 Corinthians 5:11 where he says, in effect, 'In all these matters of discipline I am not referring to those who are out in the world, because if you are to keep yourself from all those people it would mean that you have got to go right out of the world! No, I am not

saying that, but I do say that if a man *who is a brother* is guilty of these things, don't keep company with him.'

So the New Testament tells us that we really must be concerned about doctrine in the Church, and that we must do something about **[Page 17]** false doctrine. And I think that the whole situation confronting us today is abundant proof of the terrible consequences of failing to exercise discipline with respect to doctrine. I do not hesitate to assert that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers in the nineteenth century failed to exercise the discipline they should have done when that fatal Higher Criticism began to come in from Germany. It was because they failed to discipline the people who believed and taught such things, that we are witnessing the present situation. With a mistaken tolerance and, often, a misunderstanding of the teaching of the parable of the tares, they allowed this wrong teaching, hoping that things would soon be better; and they talked about maintaining a positive witness and not being negative! In this present generation we are reaping the consequences of that tragic fallacy on the part of church leaders.

We must, therefore, exercise discipline with regard to doctrine and equally we must exercise it with regard to life and living because if the members of the Christian Church are deniers of her doctrine in their lives and in their practice, who is going to believe it? It is the negation of our Lord's words: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Matt. 5:16). Inconsistency or a sinful life on the part of a believer do incalculable harm to the cause of Christ. It does not matter how orthodox people may be, if they are not controlling and disciplining themselves, their temper, their desires, their passions, their lusts, they are, in word and in action, denying the faith they preach, and they are an obstacle and an offence to those who are outside.

The biblical teaching is that if a disobedient brother does not reform and pay heed to correction, then he must actually be put out of the church. You may have to 'deliver him to Satan', a phrase which is used by Paul, 'for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. 5:15). I do not know exactly what that means, but it probably means something like this—you not only put him out of the membership but stop praying for him. You hand him over to Satan, as it were, and Satan will cause him to suffer, perhaps in his body. He will become wretched and miserable, and that may bring him to his senses and his soul may be saved.

This is an important subject. Read the history of the Church at any time of revival and reawakening—it does not matter when—and you will find that, invariably, an outstanding mark at such a time is the exercise of discipline. Read, for instance, about John Wesley. If ever **[Page 18]** there was a church disciplinarian it was that man! In his *Journals* he records that on one occasion he went over to visit a church—the class meeting at Dublin—and when he arrived there he found about six hundred people. Then he began to examine the church members one by one, and when he had finished a few days later, the church numbered three hundred. One wonders sometimes what John Wesley would do today if he returned!

But this was not only true of Wesley. During periods of revival and reawakening, church leaders in all branches of the Church have always been concerned about purity—of necessity. They go back to the New Testament and they simply try to live a life in accord with the New Testament teaching; and the New Testament tells us that the vessel, the instrument, the channel, that God uses must surely be pure. So the teaching is not only of a 'gathered' church but also of a 'pure' church. How can a church that is mixed up with the world in various respects be a channel of the Holy Spirit? The thing is almost inconceivable! So the third mark of the Church is discipline.

When we come to the government of the Church, we find, again, that it is a highly debatable and controversial matter. It is interesting to notice that the New Testament is not very specific about church government. It does not give us detailed instruction, as it does with regard to many other doctrines, and undoubtedly that was because the New Testament was written while most of the apostles were still alive, and they and the prophets were able to teach and govern the Church. As we read those parts of the New Testament which were the last to be written, like the pastoral epistles, we notice a definite increase in teaching with regard to church order and government, which is, of course, exactly what one would expect. But even in the book of Acts we find the apostles ordaining leaders and giving instructions as to how the

life of the churches should be ordered. Therefore, though we have very little specific teaching, we do have a clear indication that order in connection with church government was increasingly necessary.

What causes the confusion for us, in our age and generation, is the fact that subsequent to the period of the apostles and prophets, and subsequent to the teaching of the Scriptures, the Church herself began to do things and to add things, which cannot always be found in the Scriptures, thereby creating a tradition that was often even in contradiction to the Scriptures.

What, then, are the main ideas that, throughout the centuries, have **[Page 19]** been current in the Church herself with regard to the question of church government? Well, first, there have always been those who do not believe in any church government at all, and there are still representatives of that view in the Church today. They say that there is no need for any government as such, because all members, as they come together, are obedient to the Spirit. This has generally emerged as a reaction against what we may call *ecclesiasticism*, or, if you prefer it, it is a reaction against that awful idea which is summed up in the word 'Christendom'.

Now let us admit quite frankly that there is a great deal to be said for this view. Unfortunately, when the Roman Empire became Christian, the Christian Church decided to call itself 'Christendom' and it borrowed many ideas from the Roman Empire, including its systems of government. And for myself, let me admit it quite plainly and clearly, I cannot see a modern Roman Catholic Church in the Scriptures. I once put that question to a Roman Catholic priest with whom I was discussing these matters. I said, 'Can you tell me, quite honestly, do you see your Church, as she is today, in the New Testament?' And he admitted that he could not. But, of course, he added, as they all do, 'Ah yes, but revelation has been given since.' And to the Roman Catholic, tradition is equal to the Scriptures.

Now we can well understand a reaction against all ecclesiasticism, this admixture of Church and state, and the elevation of offices, hierarchies and power-seeking. It is very easy to understand people reacting so violently against that as to say, 'I don't believe in any order at all, any order is dangerous. If you elevate a man he will soon add to what you have given him, and you will in the end have a tremendous organisation which will crush the life of the spirit.' They say that the machine always kills the spirit, that the organisation quenches the spirit. The Church becomes so complex, hide-bound and stiff that the Holy Spirit is not given an opportunity to work. The result, historically, is that whenever there is a revival, it has almost invariably led to the formation of a new denomination because the old, the ecclesiastical body, could not contain the new. It was too much alive; it was a disturbing element and people bound by the old ecclesiastical structures invariably found themselves outside.

So there is a great deal to be said for this refusal to accept church government, and yet I do ask whether this view has taken note of all that is taught in the Scriptures, whether definite offices are indicated there and functions ascribed to such offices?

[Page 20] Perhaps the final argument is that it is one thing to say that you do not believe in any leadership at all, but it is a very different thing to have a church in which, in practice, there are no leaders. Leadership is inevitable, and if you do not put it on paper, somebody will see to it that there are self-appointed leaders. So, if we are to have leadership and church order, let us base them on the teaching of the Scriptures.

The next theory with regard to church government is put forward by those who hold the Erastian view, which, as we have already seen, means that the Church is a function of the state, and that, therefore, the state governs the Church. The state appoints the officers of the Church, the high dignitaries particularly, and they in turn appoint others. No power at all is given to the local preacher. The ordinary member has very little say. Discipline, finally, is exercised by the state, and the Church has not even power to excommunicate. The Erastian idea is, as we have seen, the view of the Lutheran Church and of the Church of England.

The next view, which has some relationship to the last, is the episcopal system: belief in government by bishops. Proponents of this view teach that Christ Himself has committed the care of the Church directly to certain men, an 'order' or 'the bench of bishops', who are descendants of the apostles in a direct spiritual

succession. That is the teaching—that Christ appointed the apostles and that they were to perpetuate themselves and their order by the appointment of bishops, and that government in the Church is to be confined solely to bishops. This is taught by all episcopal Churches. Here, again, members have really very little say in the ordering of the life of the Church.

What of this? Well, all I would say by way of comment is that the man who has thrown the greatest light upon the subject is undoubtedly the great Bishop Lightfoot, who was once the Bishop of Durham. Bishop Lightfoot has proved, to the satisfaction of all, that in the New Testament there is no difference at all between the bishop and the elder—that the terms *bishop*, *elder* and *presbyter* are interchangeable. For instance, the apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Philippi, says this: ‘Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons’ (Phil. 1:1). The word ‘bishops’ there stands for presbyters or elders, and you observe that in the one church at Philippi there was not only one, but there were several bishops. So that far from there being one bishop over a great diocese, one bishop responsible for a large group of churches, in the New Testament there were many **[Page 21]** bishops in one church. They were thus not bishops according to our understanding of the word. They were ‘elders’, or ‘presbyters’—the older men to whom this position and function was given.

Again, it seems to me—and I am here happy to say that I am in entire accord with the gentlemen who are called ‘scholars’—that there is no New Testament authority for the episcopal view of the government of the Christian Church. In fact, this was an idea which came in several centuries after the first century, started by a man called Cyprian. And of course, again, we can easily see how it came into being. Problems arose in the Church, difficulties cropped up, and a need was felt for some kind of discipline, some kind of body to decide things. And once you start on that course, you are on the road to episcopacy. It has often been said of those of us who do not believe in a ‘bench of bishops’ that we do believe in bishops, but in local bishops! Perhaps there may be some truth in that charge. The moment we begin to exercise discipline, there is a need of some standard, some power and some body that can put it into practice. And it was only as the result of that need that the episcopal idea came into being. But since then, of course, the Roman Catholic Church has been at great pains to try to trace episcopacy right back to the apostle Peter!

That, then, brings me to the Roman Catholic view, which is episcopacy driven to its logical conclusion. Let us say this about it: this view is absolutely logical and consistent. If you really believe in the episcopal ordering of the Church, then the logical conclusion is one episcopate over all the others, the holder of which has final authority. He speaks *ex cathedra*, he is infallible, and his every word is definitely from God. That is the claim of Roman Catholics. They maintain that the Pope is not only the chief bishop but that he is the direct successor to the apostle Peter and is, therefore, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

Now we shall not go into the arguments against all that—there are books which can give you the full answer. But the main answer is that, historically, Roman Catholics have no case at all. Now I am not simply making an empty assertion; it is something that can be demonstrated. If you want a great book on the subject, read *The Infallibility of the Church* by a man named Salmond. The Roman Catholics have been completely unable to answer Salmond’s detailed argument so they reject the book as a whole. They cannot answer him because there is no answer.

The next theory of the government of the Church is the presbyterian view. Presbyterians started by saying that the local church in itself **[Page 22]** itself is an entity, but that for the sake of order and formality, for the sake of avoiding chaos, it is well for local churches to set up a body which they will all recognise and to which they will all conform. So a number of churches met together and formed a *presbytery*. When I say ‘a number of churches’, I do not mean that the whole body of the Church met but that each local church in a given area appointed delegates—a minister and an elder—and they all met together and formed a presbytery. Then they solemnly agreed together that every local church would abide by the decision of the presbytery. Next they went further and gathered together a number of presbyters into a general assembly. Each presbytery sent up a number of delegates who constituted the general assembly, and the presbyterians agreed to abide by the decisions of that supreme court, the general assembly. Now that is the essence of the presbyterian system that has been, for instance, the

method of government in the Presbyterian Church and, indeed, in the churches in general in Scotland since the time of John Knox and the Protestant Reformation.

And then, finally, there is the view of church government which we call *congregational or independent*. It is rather difficult to handle this subject nowadays because not one of the descriptions which I will be giving is strictly in correspondence with what is actually in practice today. Here I am beginning to talk about independency or congregationalism, but there is very little of such a quality to be had today. The Congregationalists—those who believe in the congregational system—affirm that every local church is an entity in itself, that it has supreme power to decide everything itself. It is a gathering of Christians who believe that the Lord is present and is the Head of the Church, and who believe that, as they look to Him and wait upon Him, He, by the Spirit, will guide them and give them the wisdom they need to decide about doctrine and discipline, and so on. The local church is autonomous, it governs itself, and does not look to any higher body, be it a bench of bishops, a presbytery, a general assembly or anything else.

But, I ask, how many such churches are there today? Originally, the description applied to the so-called Congregationalists and to the Baptists, for the Baptists believe in congregational church order, independency from the standpoint of government. But today, in general, both the Congregationalists and the Baptists have adopted the presbyterian idea with their sustentation funds and their control over the local church through funds. They are no longer Congregationalists **[Page 23]** but have become Presbyterian, with power given to a higher body which can influence the local church. But ideally, and originally in the seventeenth century, Congregationalism or Independency conformed to the pattern which I have just been describing.

Well, there, historically, you have the different views on the ordering of the Church. I have no doubt that many are anxious to ask a question at this point: Do I advocate one system of government rather than another? Well, I am not afraid of the challenge! When a man feels called of God to teach, it is his business to try to give guidance. I do not want to be over-dogmatic but I do suggest that as you think of these things in the light of the New Testament teaching, forgetting what has happened in history, you must surely come to the conclusion that the local independent conception is the one that is most scriptural. Yes, the local churches, even in New Testament times, did meet together for fellowship and surely we must do that. All of us who are Christians desire fellowship with Christians in other churches. We hold the same beliefs, we worship the same Lord, it is good for us to meet in conference—yes. But as I understand the teaching of the Scripture in New Testament times, no council possessed binding authority. Take, for instance, the council that met in Jerusalem which is described in Acts 15. It had no power to legislate for the local churches, it simply sent a recommendation. It simply said, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us’ (Acts 15:28). The council could not compel the local churches; it could not coerce. It said: This is our understanding. This is our advice. And the local churches could either accept it or reject it. Of course, if a local church disagreed entirely, then when they had their next fellowship meeting, other Christians had power to suggest that perhaps such a church should have no right to come to the fellowship. If they were not in agreement, there was no longer any fellowship. But there was no legislative, no coercive power. And that is why I suggest the local independent view: it seems to me to approximate most closely to the New Testament pattern. Each local church should be autonomous and independent, but ready always to meet in fellowship with those who are like-minded and of a like spirit.

If you do not accept the congregational view, and if you adopt any one of the other systems, eventually you will find yourself an evangelical member of a body in which the controlling powers do not agree with you in doctrine or in practice—and yet you are expected to support financially a teaching which you believe to be wrong and **[Page 24]** dangerous simply because you belong to such a body. That is what has invariably happened in history and that is the position of so many evangelical people today. They belong to churches with which, in the main, they not only do not agree, but are not in sympathy, and yet they are subject to such powers. An evangelical clergyman, for instance, may have a high church, extreme Anglo-Catholic bishop, to confirm his own members. Or an evangelical may find himself in a free church supporting funds to maintain ministers and ministries which, he verily believes, are a denial of the faith.

Therefore, I repeat, in the light of the New Testament teaching and surely also in the light of experience throughout the centuries, it seems to me that the ideal is the local church, the people who are agreed, who

are in fellowship with all others who are similarly agreed, but with nothing binding, with no right to impose anything on individual churches, no right to bind the conscience. This fellowship of like-minded believers, meeting together to further themselves and their spiritual life, help one another as best they can, but freely, voluntarily. No single church is compelled to do things which are contrary to its views and indeed even contrary to its conscience.

I do trust that nobody feels that this has not been a spiritual subject. These things are, to me, of vital importance and if you say, 'The government of the Church has nothing to do with me, I'm a spiritually minded person,' then the only thing I have to say to you is that you are a very unscriptural person. As a member of the body of Christ it is your business, your duty, to see to it that the Church visible in no way contradicts the doctrine of the Lord Himself, of which He has made us custodians and guardians.

3

The Sacraments—Signs and Seals

We have been considering the meaning and importance of the doctrine of the Church, which is the body of Christ, and its characteristics and government. We now go on to consider how, in the Church, we are built up in our most holy faith. In other words, we come to a consideration of the means of grace. We ask: How are Christian people built up, strengthened, encouraged and established? It is essential that we should approach the biblical teaching about the sacraments in that way, because there have been different ideas as to these means of grace.

In a sense, the Roman Catholic Church recognises only one means of grace, and that is the sacraments. The teaching of that Church is that all grace comes to the believer through the sacraments—baptism, the communion of the Lord's Supper, and also five other sacraments which Roman Catholics recognise and which I shall deal with later. But they say that grace comes to us in that, more or less, mechanical manner, through the sacraments.

The extreme opposite of Roman Catholic teaching on the sacraments is the view that was originally taught and propounded by the Quakers and is still held by them, namely, their teaching that the only means of grace is the internal operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Quakers believe that if someone experiences the working of this 'inner light'—the Spirit of God within—nothing further is needed.

Another view, which has arisen as a reaction to both the Roman Catholics and the Quakers, is the view which says that there is no other means of grace whatsoever but the written word of God, the Scriptures. It is held that the Bible alone, in whatever form it may [Page 26] come—spoken, taught, preached, read—is the only means of grace.

Now we cannot go into all this in detail in this series of lectures so let us, therefore, content ourselves by putting it like this: the traditional Protestant teaching about this matter is that the believer receives grace through the word of God and the application of the word of God by the Holy Spirit and through the sacraments. As we shall see, the sacraments must never be separated from the word. That was why some Protestant Fathers said that grace came by the word only, because, as they very rightly pointed out, the sacraments can do nothing without the word. But that is a little extreme and, therefore, we say that the normal means of grace are the word—the preaching, the teaching or the reading of the word under the illumination and guidance of the Spirit—and the sacraments.

That, then, brings us to a consideration of the biblical teaching concerning the sacraments. The word 'sacrament' has been used by the Christian Church for many centuries and yet I am very ready to agree with those who teach that it is unfortunate that this word should ever have been used. It is a word that is not found in the Scriptures but has been introduced into the Church and her teaching in subsequent centuries. There is very little point in examining the philology or the derivation of the word *sacrament* except that it does help us to see how the word came to be chosen by the Church.

Our word 'sacrament' is from the Latin *sacramentum*, which was a legal term. In a legal dispute there are always two parties—the one who brings the petition and the defendant. Now it was the custom in ancient law for both parties to deposit a certain amount of money in the court and then, when the case was decided, the money of the man who lost the case was given by the court for certain religious purposes. That deposit of money was called a *sacramentum*. So 'sacrament', meaning a deposit, a pledge, was applied to baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Unfortunately, the Latin word *sacramentum* was also used to translate the Greek word for 'mystery', which, in pagan religions, was the word used for a secret rite or initiation ceremony. I believe that even today certain pagan movements still have some kind of initiatory rite of entry. It was certainly true of the mystery pagan religions in the ancient world, and that idea was borrowed by the Christian Church in order to describe the means of grace which comes to people in this particular way.

It is, to repeat, unfortunate that the word 'sacrament' has ever been **[Page 27]** used, but that is how it happened and, perhaps, we have to take things as they are. Personally, I try not to use this term. In church, I never announce that 'the sacrament of Holy Communion' will be administered. Instead, I say, 'We hope to meet together at the communion table to partake of the Lord's Supper.' And I do that quite deliberately. The term, however, is used, and it is only right that we should know what people mean by it.

What, then, are the definitions of the sacraments that have been given in the past? In the twenty-fifth of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England we read, 'Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.'

The *Westminster Confession* has this definition: 'A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in His church to signify, seal and exhibit to those who are within the covenant of grace the benefits of His mediation, to increase their faith and all other graces, to oblige them to obedience, to testify and cherish their love and communion with one another and to distinguish them from those that are without.' It goes on to say that the parts of a sacrament are two: the one, 'an outward and sensible sign used according to Christ's own appointment'; the other, 'an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified'. Sometimes a sacrament has been defined as 'an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual grace'.

Now it is very important that we should pay attention to these definitions because they remind us that the sacraments are not a human invention. It is our Lord Himself who commanded His people to do these things. And there can be very little doubt but that His reason was to call in the aid of something which can be seen, to help that which has been heard. Now most people are undoubtedly helped by seeing things. That is why when we teach children the alphabet, we generally do it in the form of pictures. We say, 'A for Apple,' and show a picture of an apple, and the child remembers the picture. Children are always helped by pictures; it is easier to learn things by having a visual representation than by just listening.

I am tempted at this point to digress and point out that a sad feature of the age in which we are living is that there is accumulating evidence that people, in spite of their education and their vaunted culture, are finding it increasingly difficult to take in truth by listening **[Page 28]** and are increasingly calling for visual aids. It is an awful confession, but it seems to be the truth. Undoubtedly our Lord, in His infinite kindness and condescension, has stooped to our weakness and has provided visual aids, something we can see, to help us to grasp what we have heard. So we have something outward and visible which leads to an inward grace.

The question, then, that at once arises is: What is the relationship between the outward sign and the grace which is signified by it? You see the importance of that question? What is the relationship between the bread and the wine in communion, and the water in baptism, and the grace that is received? This is a question which, throughout the centuries, has led to great discussions and disputations. Indeed, a mass of literature has been devoted to this most fascinating and entrancing subject. And yet unless one is very careful, one can waste a lot of time in going through it. So let me try to summarise the ideas.

Now I trust that we all see that we are considering something very practical. If you do not, let me ask you these simple questions: What is your understanding of what really happens in baptism? What is your understanding of what you yourself do when you take bread and wine at the Communion Service? What is your idea about the bread and wine? What does it mean? That is the subject we are discussing. It is the relationship between the symbols, or elements, and the grace which they represent or symbolise.

Here, then, are the main ideas. First, there is the Roman Catholic teaching, and not only the Roman Catholic but also, of course, the Anglo-Catholic view, in fact, the view of anyone who delights in the name 'Catholic', because in most of the denominations there are groups who hold what they call a 'high sacramentarian doctrine'.

The Catholic idea is that the grace is contained in the very elements of the sacrament: that the grace is in the bread and the wine, and in the water. So the grace is received by taking the bread and the wine or by having the water sprinkled. It is as mechanical as that, it is like having an injection. If you eat that bread,

whatever may be your condition or the condition of the person who gives you that bread, you are, actually and of necessity, receiving grace. Because the grace is in the substance, it acts automatically. The technical term for that is that grace acts *ex opere operato*, which means that it acts, as it were, in its own strength and in its own being.

The extreme opposite of the high sacramentarian doctrine is a teaching that is held by many today but was originally put forward by [Page 29] Zwingli, one of the Swiss Reformers. Zwingli reacted very violently against the Catholic teaching and said that sacraments are nothing but external signs or symbols. Their only function is to commemorate and bring to mind something that happened in the past. Not only are they nothing in themselves, but they in no sense bring us grace. They are simply an external enactment of something, they are purely symbolical, and mainly commemorative. Therefore, when we take the bread and the wine, we are simply calling to mind something that our Lord once did.

Now the traditional, Reformed Protestant teaching is neither of those, but can be put like this: the sacraments, so called, not only *signify* grace but, as the *Westminster Confession* puts it, they also *seal* the grace. When Paul writes about circumcision in Romans 4:11, he says that Abraham ‘received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised’. Now he had this righteousness of faith before he was circumcised. Why, then, was he circumcised? Well, the teaching is that circumcision was given to him as a sign and as a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had already received. And that is the basis of the traditional Protestant definition of what is meant by a sacrament. It is a sign, of course, an external sign, something visual, as we have already seen. Yes, but it is more than that and this is where we part company with Zwingli. In addition to being a sign, it is also a seal.

Now a seal is something that authenticates a promise. When you put your seal on a document it does not add to the document as such, it does not add to the statements of the document, but it is a further authentication, it confirms the truth of what is stated in the document. And it was in that way that for Abraham circumcision was, not only a sign, but also a seal. The rainbow is a seal in exactly the same way. God gave the rainbow, you remember, to confirm the truth that He had already declared with regard to His relationship with the world. He said that the world should never again be drowned by a flood; but He not only said it, He gave the rainbow as a seal, a further confirmation (Gen. 9:8–17).

We come here to the very essence of the truly Protestant teaching with regard to this matter. So I will give another illustration. Take the use of an engagement ring or a wedding ring. Why does anybody ever give or receive a ring? It is not essential, but it is the custom, and there is something in this practice. The importance of the ring is that it is a seal. It seals the statement that has already been made. It does not add [Page 30] to the statement, it simply tells the same thing in a different way, yet there is value in it. The person who has the ring can look at it and be reminded of what that ring represents. But what I want to emphasise is that the act of giving or putting on that ring is an action on the part of a person who is sealing a promise to another person.

So the Thirty-nine Articles and the *Westminster Confession* tell us that the sacraments are not only signs, but are also seals of grace. They confirm the grace that we have already received. Yes, but shall we go further? They even *exhibit* it, says the *Westminster Confession*, meaning that in a sense they *convey* it.

Now this is where care is needed, because the moment we say that a sacrament conveys grace, people ask, ‘Haven’t you suddenly become a Roman Catholic? Aren’t you saying now that grace is conveyed by the means and the symbols?’

No, let me show you the difference. Roman Catholic teaching is that the grace is present mechanically in the symbols, that the bread has become the actual body of Christ: that is the teaching we call *transubstantiation*. And similarly it is said that grace enters into the water of baptism so that the water is no longer water, but contains grace in solution, as it were.

What I am not teaching does not say that at all. Let us return to the case of a young man becoming engaged to a young woman. He has already expressed his love plainly and clearly, he has repeated it, he has shown emotion. Yes, but is it not true to say that when the young woman receives the engagement ring, she feels she has received something additional, something extra? Now in a fundamental sense she

has not. She already has that man's love, and he has not given her any more love. Yet receiving the ring is a receiving of love in a special way, in a way which she has not already received it. Similarly, Protestant teaching says that the elements are actually a means of conveying grace to us. In other words, as we have already seen, the ring is a kind of seal and every time she looks at it, that young woman finds an assurance there to confirm what she already believes and knows.

That is the value, also, of a key which conveys admission to a building. It is the value of a deed when an estate is conveyed from one person to another, and so on. As we have seen, circumcision, therefore, was not only a sign, it was also a seal of the righteousness of faith. This is a scriptural distinction and it is very important that we should pay heed to it. When we receive any one of these sacraments, we must realise that it is not merely some external representation, but is truly a means of grace, **[Page 31]** and we should be conscious of receiving something which only comes to us in that special way. You will see the relevance of all this when we come to deal separately with baptism and with the Lord's Supper.

But let me underline all that I have been trying to say by putting it like this. What is a sacrament designed to do? Well, first, it is meant to signify, to seal and to convey to those who are within the covenant of grace, the benefits of Christ's redemption. They have heard the proclamation of the gospel, they have heard the statement of God's grace in Christ through the preached word. Very well, you may say, what more can they ever have? It is this sacrament. God, the Lord Himself, has designed it. It is He who has commanded us to keep it. When people are baptised they should be conscious that grace is conveyed to them personally in this special way so that what they have believed in general, they now know is theirs. The grace comes to *me*, to *you*. In the same way, when we take the bread and the wine at the communion table, we should regard it as God saying, 'Now this is the way that I have chosen to tell you that my grace is given to *you* in particular. You are admitted to this, you are a member of the body, and I am telling you through this bread and through this wine that my grace is coming to you.' That is His way of saying it. He need not have decided on that, but He did. That is what He told the apostle Paul, as we read in 1 Corinthians 11:23: 'For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you ...' The sacrament has been ordained by the Lord to help us.

The second purpose of a sacrament is that it is also a visible badge or sign of our membership of the Church. Those who are baptised and those who come to take the Communion have a kind of badge or a token of the fact that they are members of the Church. So there are those two main functions, but the first is the important one.

Our next question is: Are these sacraments absolutely essential? Now of course that depends upon the view you take of them. If you take the Catholic view, they are absolutely essential because if you do not take them, you are not receiving grace. And since they are the only means of grace, you must at all costs not neglect them. You may do without the preaching of the word and many other things, but you cannot receive grace without the sacraments.

The extreme opposite of that, as we have seen, is the Quaker position, and also the teaching of the Salvation Army. Those who hold this view believe that the sacraments are not necessary at all. They are not interested.

[Page 32] The Reformed, the Protestant, position is that we believe in these sacraments because they were instituted and commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is His commandment and we take part out of obedience to Him. Not only that, we see very clearly in the New Testament that the apostles themselves obeyed that commandment, and our position is that we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

But we hasten to add that the sacraments are not essential, and we take the bread and the wine not because we believe they are essential, but because this sacrament has been commanded and because it is one of the means of grace ordained by the Lord Himself. We say the sacraments are not essential because, by our own definition, they do not add anything to the word. And there is no particular, exceptional grace that is conveyed only by the sacraments. That is why it has always been the traditional teaching that the sacraments and the word should never be separated, and that the sacraments should always be observed in connection with the preaching of the word. There should never be a service only to meet at the

communion table or a service only for baptism. There must be a full church service, and the word must be preached, in order that we may safeguard ourselves from that grievous danger of all Catholicism of regarding a sacrament not only as something in and of itself, but also as the supreme means of receiving grace. I do not hesitate to take my stand with the great Protestant fathers who asserted that the preaching of the word comes first and foremost.

Clearly it is essential that anybody who is to derive any benefit from the sacraments must be a man or woman of faith. It is implicit in our definition that without faith there is no value whatsoever in baptism or in the Lord's Supper. It is because she already knows she is loved that a woman values her engagement ring. Similarly, the sacrament is confirmation of faith, it seals the faith. So we emphasise not only the preaching of the word but the absolute necessity of faith in the recipient. Roman Catholics are not interested in that. The grace is in the sacrament and must therefore enter into anybody who takes it, whatever may be that person's spiritual condition. But from our standpoint, faith is essential and there is no value whatsoever in our coming to the communion table and taking the bread and the wine if we do not come with faith—we are no different and no better than we were before. But if we come in true faith, realising that God has instituted the sacrament for the special purpose of strengthening our faith, **[Page 33]** then we ought to be conscious of receiving grace, not through the bread and wine as such, but through the realisation that God is telling us something through the bread and wine which He has chosen to say in that way.

That brings us to the last point: How many sacraments are there? The Catholics recognise seven: baptism, confirmation, the Lord's Supper, penance, extreme unction, order (that is to say, the ordination of a man as deacon or priest or bishop or whatever else it may be), and, finally, marriage. This understanding of marriage as a sacrament underlies the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, and, in general, the Church of England, to the whole question of divorce. It determines not only the general attitude of these Churches to divorce but, in particular, it controls their position with regard to the remarriage of the so-called 'innocent party'.

The traditional Protestant position is to recognise two sacraments only: baptism and the Lord's Supper. And the reason for that is simply that these were the only two to be instituted and commanded by the Lord Himself. And there is, obviously, as you go through the Bible—and I speak very deliberately and advisedly—no evidence whatsoever for regarding the other five as sacraments. It was a teaching that crept into the Church in later centuries as the power of the priest grew and the sacramentarian idea developed. This development is quite logical, once you take the first false step, but even the Roman Church does not pretend that it is based upon scriptural evidence. It is, however, claimed that this further teaching of the Church is as inspired as the Scriptures.

So we have been considering the question of the sacraments in general, and have seen that the great and important principle is the emphasis upon the sacrament being a seal. Now when we come to consider baptism and the Lord's Supper, we shall simply have to consider what is sealed and how, exactly, it is sealed. But I do trust that we are clear about this great central idea and understand that it is based on Romans 4:11. Surely we cannot but feel a sense of thanksgiving and praise in our hearts to God for having ordered and decreed and instituted these aids to our faith. It is God in His own infinite condescension who has stooped to our weakness and provided something for the eye as well as for the ear.

These are means of grace appointed by God so that we have no excuse if we fail. If we say we really cannot listen to a sermon that is longer than twenty minutes, and find that perhaps even a quarter of **[Page 34]** an hour is more than we can cope with in this enlightened age, if we say that it is too much to try to take in truth in that way, well, here it is—here is this other way. But do we not also recognise the extraordinary foreknowledge of God? How often has it happened in the history of the Church that when the men who were privileged to be standing in pulpits were not preaching the truth and the evangelical faith, but were preaching a kind of humanism or a morality, or even preaching the Church, how often, then, has it happened that when the pulpit has forsaken its privilege and its duty, the gospel has still been proclaimed to those who had any understanding by this other method, by the visual method? And therefore 'the hungry sheep'—to use Milton's words—who have come but have not been fed by the word preached, have been able to find spiritual nourishment in the bread and wine or in the water in baptism,

and have been reminded, through their understanding of the Scriptures, that God can speak in that way as well as by the preaching.

So we marvel again, not only at the kindness and the condescension of God who stoops to our weakness, mighty as He is, but also at His extraordinary provision for guaranteeing that the truth should always be proclaimed, through the Church, and often by men whose words denied what they were actually enacting as they administered the sacraments. The ways of God are truly beyond our understanding, but they are ever perfect. Praise be unto God.

4

Baptism

We are considering the means of grace that are available in the Church, and are administered by the Church for the upbuilding and the strengthening of the Christian believer, and in our last lecture we looked in general at what are called the sacraments. Now we come to a detailed consideration of the two ordinances which were commanded by the Lord and which we regard, therefore, as obligatory: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

First, let us take the biblical doctrine of baptism. It is probably unnecessary for me even to mention the fact that this is a subject about which there has been great disputation. Whereas many people might, perhaps, have been comparatively ignorant about some of the other causes of dissension, I am sure that at some time or another, every professing Christian has been engaged in discussion on the question of baptism. And equally saintly, equally spiritual, equally learned, people are to be found holding the various opinions. Therefore it behoves us once more to say that not only must we approach the subject with caution, but, still more importantly, in a Christian manner and in the Spirit which we claim we have received and to whom we submit ourselves. Never has it been more important to avoid mere labels, glib generalisations and dogmatic pronouncements than when considering a subject like this. Is it not perfectly obvious, before we go any further, that this subject cannot be finally decided, that it is not one of those subjects concerning which you can give an absolute and unmistakable proof? If it could, there would never have been all this controversy and there would not have been denominational distinctions.

I would cite the example of Professor Karl Barth, the great **[Page 36]** Reformed theologian (though my citing him does not mean that I agree with his essential position). Barth was brought up in the typical presbyterian manner, but he has undergone a great change in his view of baptism. Having been brought up to believe in infant baptism he has written a book to say that he no longer believes that, but believes in adult baptism. So it ill behoves us to be over-dogmatic and to give the impression that there is only one possible point of view.

As we saw in the last lecture, baptism is not essential to our salvation. No sacrament is essential to salvation: if you say it is, you are aligning yourself with the Roman Catholics. Protestants have always said that while baptism and the Lord's Supper are commands of the Lord, and we should therefore practise them, they are not essential. They do not add grace, they simply point to it and bring it to us in a special way. So we must approach the subject with this caution and with a Christian spirit.

There are three main positions on this subject: the paedo (infant) baptists, the Baptists, and the Salvation Army, together with the Quakers. In the early Church there was no definite reference to infant baptism until AD 175. That silence does not prove, however, that infant baptism was not practised before that date. An important piece of evidence comes from Tertullian, who was a great man in the early Church at the end of the second century. Now Tertullian changed his views on this subject and became an opponent of infant baptism. So there is surely a very strong case for saying that in Tertullian's day it could not be established that infant baptism was taught and practised by the apostles, for if it was, a man like Tertullian would never have spoken against it in the way that he did.

Another very interesting bit of evidence is that the great Saint Augustine, whose mother was a Christian, was not baptised as an infant. Again, you cannot lay too much weight on that argument, but it is significant in that it demonstrates that infant baptism was not the universal practice.

As we go on through the centuries, we find, in general, that right up until the Protestant Reformation there was only infant baptism. The main Protestant Reformers continued that practice, but towards the end of the sixteenth century a new body of people arose who were called *Anabaptists* because they believed in rebaptising on confession of faith (the prefix *ana* means 'again'), when one was old enough to be able to make a personal statement.

That brief historical survey leads us to the next question: What is **[Page 37]** the *meaning* of baptism as it is taught in the Scriptures? Here the significant thing to observe is that the phrase that is generally used is *'baptize into'*. There is the famous command, for instance, in Matthew 28:19: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in [into] the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Exactly the same phrase is to be found, in a most interesting way, in 1 Corinthians 1:13, where Paul says, 'Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in [into] the name of Paul?' It is the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10:2 where we are told that the children of Israel 'were all baptized unto Moses'—I shall refer to that again later on. There is also the statement in Romans 6:3–6 where Paul argues, 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized *into Jesus Christ* were baptized into his death?' And we read in 1 Corinthians 12:13: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles'; and it is the same in Galatians 3:27 and in Colossians 2:12. We considered a number of these statements when we were dealing with the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see volume 2, *God The Holy Spirit*).

What, then, do we learn from this? Well, surely, the first and the important thing about baptism is that it suggests *union*, being placed into something: we are baptised into the Holy Spirit, baptised into Christ, baptised into the body, baptised unto Moses. It is very important that we should bear in mind that the primary meaning of baptising is not cleansing but this union, that we become identified with a certain context, that we are put into a certain atmosphere. And, of course, in the quotation from Matthew 28:19, we are told that we are baptised into the blessed Trinity, into the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

So the primary meaning of baptism is union, but that is not the only meaning. There is also the secondary sense of cleansing and purification. In baptism we are cleansed from the guilt of sin, as we see in Peter's reply on the Day of Pentecost to the people who cried out saying, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Peter tells them, 'Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins' (Acts 2:37–38). We find this meaning also in Acts 22:16 where Paul is told, 'Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord'; and in 1 Peter 3:21, where Peter, talking about the people in Noah's ark, says, 'The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God).'

[Page 38] In other words, baptism is an assurance that we are delivered from the guilt of sin and, also, from the pollution of sin. There are many statements of this. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 we are told that some of the members of the church at Corinth had been guilty of certain terrible sins, yet Paul says, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified ...' And, no doubt, that 'washing' does partly refer to baptism. Likewise, in Titus 3:5, where Paul speaks of 'the washing of regeneration', there is undoubtedly a reference to the same thing. So the meaning of baptism is that it puts us into this position of union, but in order that we may be there, we need to be cleansed and purified from the guilt and the pollution of sin.

What, then, is the *purpose* of baptism, if that is its meaning? Here we must start with a negative. The function, the purpose, of baptism is *not* to cleanse us from original sin. That is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and not only that Church but the Lutheran Church also, and, indeed, certain sections of the Church of England teach quite specifically that the purpose of baptism is to cleanse us from original sin and to regenerate us. So they speak of *baptismal regeneration*. People often do not realise that that is the teaching of the Lutheran Church, and, in a sense, is the official teaching of the Church of England, though there are many in that Church who repudiate the suggestion. But we say that the purpose of baptism is not to deliver us and to cleanse us from original sin, nor to regenerate us.

So what is the function of baptism? Well, as I indicated in the last lecture, baptism is a sign and a seal. First, it is a sign and seal of the remission of our sins and our justification. As we have seen, baptism is something that speaks to me. As the engagement ring on the finger speaks, so baptism speaks to those who are baptised, giving them an assurance that their sins are forgiven and they are justified. They are not justified because they have been baptised; they are baptised because they are justified. Baptism is not the means of their forgiveness and justification, but an assurance of it.

But more than that, and, I would say, especially, baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration, of our union with Christ and of our receiving the Holy Spirit. Now, again, I say it is a sign and a seal. I do not become

regenerate as I am baptised; I only have a right to be baptised because I am regenerate. Baptism tells me that I am regenerate; it certifies to me that I am born again, that I am united to Christ and that the Holy Spirit dwells in me. It is the sealing of that to me. It is God's **[Page 39]** way of giving me a pledge. As He gave the rainbow, and as He gave circumcision to the chosen race, so He gives us a sign and a seal of our regeneration in the act of baptism.

And then, thirdly and lastly, baptism is a sign of membership of the Church which is His body. It is a separating from the world and an official introduction, in an external manner, into the visible body of Christ. We are already in the invisible but here we enter into the visible and baptism is a sign or a badge of that.

Let me, then, summarise this again and re-emphasise it. The prime purpose, the function, of baptism is as a seal for the believer. It is not primarily something that we do, it is something that is done to us. It is something of which we are the passive recipients. Our witness and our testimony follow that and are subsidiary to it. Now I emphasise this because I think you will agree that so often it is put the other way around, and the emphasis is on our action, our bearing witness, our giving a testimony. But that comes second. The main thing and the first thing about baptism is that it is something that God has chosen to do to us. It is God giving us the seal of our regeneration and, as we are baptised, He is speaking to us and telling us that we are regenerated. But, of course, as we are baptised, we are incidentally bearing our witness to the fact that we have believed the truth. So that, secondarily, baptism, is a bearing of witness and of testimony.

But again we must point out, as we did in dealing with sacraments in general, that baptism does not give us any blessing that the word itself cannot give us. It does not add to grace; it does not do something to us which cannot be done in any other way. So we do not say that baptism is essential, though we do say that it is of the greatest possible value. And, in any case, it is obligatory because our Lord has commanded it, and we rob ourselves of this particular seal of the promises of God to us if we do not submit to baptism. It is primarily meant, therefore, to assure us and to reassure us and to strengthen and increase our faith. So I repeat, people are very wrong when they just represent baptism as an occasion for bearing witness and as an evangelistic medium, while failing to emphasise that it is, first and foremost, God in His infinite grace and kindness stooping to our level, doing something objective, something that can be seen, and thereby sealing to us the promises of forgiveness and regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Now that brings us to something more controversial: Who is to be baptised? And here, of course, there is a great division between those **[Page 40]** who say that infants are to be baptised and those who say that only conscious believers are to be baptised. This is the very centre and nerve of the controversy. Let us start by looking at the arguments that are produced in favour of infant baptism.

First, people point to the incident of the little children who were brought to our Lord for His blessing. Luke tells us that they were actually infants. Our Lord picked them up in His arms and blessed them and said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God' (Luke 18:16). The reply, of course, is that there is no mention at all of baptism at that point. It is one thing to say that our Lord can bless children, but it is very different indeed to say that He therefore taught that children should be baptised.

The second argument that is produced is based on Acts 2:39, a verse to which I have already referred. When Peter is preaching on the Day of Pentecost, the people cry out and say, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter replies, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you [into] the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children ...' In that passage, the argument goes, those people are told that baptism applies to their children as well as to themselves. But whenever I read this argument in any book, I notice that the rest of the verse is always left out: 'and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call'. Clearly, by 'children' Peter does not mean physical descendants, he does not mean the children of those listening but, in effect: 'The promise is not only for you who are immediately here, now, but is for the next generation and the generation after that and after that and it will continue down the running centuries.

And it is not only for Jews but also for those who are afar off—the Gentiles, those who are outside the commonwealth of Israel. Indeed, it is for ‘as many as the Lord our God shall call’.

The third argument stems from Acts 16:15 and 33. We are told that when Lydia believed on the Lord, ‘She was baptized, *and her household*.’ And Luke also writes that the Philippian jailer was baptised—‘he *and all his*, straightway’. It is argued that this must mean that the children and perhaps even the infants in both the households were also baptised. To which, of course, the answer is that we are not told there were any children at all in either household. There may have been, I do not know, and nobody else knows. A household can consist [**Page 41**] of grown-up children, indeed, it does not even necessitate that. The household may well have consisted of the servants. There is clear indication, in the case of the jailer at any rate, that they must have been adult because we are told that the word was preached not only to the jailer but also to his household. We read, ‘And they [Paul and Silas] spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.’ Those in the household seem to have been capable of listening and receiving the truth. So there again there is no clear case for infant baptism.

The next evidence which is given is found in 1 Corinthians 1:16 where Paul says, ‘I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.’ Once more, the argument is that there must have been children in the household. But if we go to 1 Corinthians 16:15, we read this: ‘I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints).’ That is surely a suggestion that the household of Stephanas did not include children, but adults who had believed the truth and were now helping and ministering to the saints.

And then the last argument at this point is 1 Corinthians 7:14 where we are told that the children of believing parents are sanctified by their parents. Here our reply is that that does not of necessity mean that children were baptised. It just means that they were allowed to enter into the church services and have certain common privileges belonging to the Church. Indeed, there seems to me to be a conclusive answer at this point because we are told that an unbelieving husband is sanctified by his wife and that an unbelieving wife is sanctified by her believing husband. The same term is used about an unbelieving husband or wife as is used about the children. Clearly, therefore, this verse is not dealing with baptism at all.

So we can sum up by saying that in the New Testament there is no clear evidence that children were ever baptised. I cannot prove that they were not, but I am certain that there is no evidence that they were; it is inconclusive. The statements are such that you cannot make a dogmatic pronouncement.

The second line of argument in favour of infant baptism is the analogy based upon circumcision. We are told that baptism in the New Testament corresponds to circumcision in the Old Testament, and whenever a son was born to a Jew he was circumcised almost at once. Thus the apostle Paul says of himself, ‘Circumcised the eighth [**Page 42**] day’ (Phil. 3:5). The argument is that all sons born to Israelite parents were introduced into Israel officially and were given that sign by circumcision. Therefore, it is said, when we come over to the Christian era, surely the New Testament parallel should likewise be carried out with young children.

There is no doubt that in many ways this is a very powerful argument. But my difficulty is this: it seems to me that it ignores the essential point which is the mode of entry into the kingdom. Now the mode of entry into the kingdom of Israel was by physical descent and by that alone. The great contrast between the Old and the New is the difference between the physical and the spiritual, and the New Testament teaches that the mode of entry into the kingdom of God is not by physical descent but by spiritual rebirth. We must be born of the Spirit before we enter the kingdom of God. So it seems to me that that argument breaks down at that point.

People have also argued for infant baptism on the grounds that in the Old Testament God entered into a covenant with His people, and baby boys were circumcised as a sign of that covenant. In the New Testament God has inaugurated a new covenant and it is said that the children of those who are in the new covenant relationship should therefore be baptised. But this argument is based upon Acts 2:39 and I have

already suggested to you that to say that this verse refers to physical children is to misinterpret its meaning. So that is another inconclusive and, indeed, a fallacious argument.

But now let me say something on the other side. There are people who seem to think that they can solve this problem very simply. They say infant baptism must be wrong because baptism is the seal and the sign of regeneration and we do not as yet know whether a child will be regenerate or not. But that is a very dangerous argument, surely, because are you certain that the adult is regenerate? Someone may certainly say that he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, but does that prove that he is regenerate? If you say that you are sure he is, because he has said that he believes, then what do you say later on when he denies the faith entirely, as many have done? No, we cannot be certain that anybody is regenerate. It is not for us to decide who is born again and who is not. We have presumptive evidence but we cannot go beyond that. Therefore that argument must not be used as a basis for adult baptism.

Similarly, people often say something like this: 'Look at the thousands of children who were baptised when they were infants. [Page 43] They were accepted into the Christian Church but subsequently they lapsed, proving that they were never really Christians at all.' The answer again, of course, is exactly the same. That has happened, alas, thousands of times with people who were baptised on confession of faith when they were adults. We must be very careful as we handle these arguments because the same point can be raised on both sides. We must not base our arguments on observations but, as we have been trying to do, on the Scriptures.

What, then, do we conclude at this point? Surely the critical question to ask is this: What is baptism meant to do? What does it signify? What is its purpose? Well, I have already answered the question. If the great thing about baptism is that it is a sealing by God of that which I know has already happened to me, then, surely, it is for an adult believer. It cannot be a seal to an uncomprehending infant, that is impossible. If baptism were only a sign, then I could see a great argument for baptising an infant. But, as everybody is agreed, even those who put up the case for infant baptism, much more important than the sign is the sealing. Surely, then, baptism is only for a person who knows, who is aware of, what is happening. It does seem to me that, as you look at the case of the Ethiopian eunuch and the apostle Paul himself, both of whom seem to have been baptised more or less in private, the important thing about baptism is the seal. As far as I myself am concerned, that last argument is conclusive.

That brings me to my last main heading: What is to be the *mode* of baptism? How is it to be administered? Again, you may be familiar with the great discussion. There are two main schools of thought: sprinkling and immersion. What has history to say about this? Well, it has a great deal to say but unfortunately it does not decide anything! This much, however, can be said on historical grounds. For the first thousand years of the Christian Church, the common mode of baptism was immersion. Even Roman Catholics say that it is right that a person should be immersed. They do not put it in the first position but they say that it is legitimate and they give instructions as to how it should be done. The Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church still practise immersion and say that immersion is *the way*—many of our Baptist friends will be surprised when they hear that they are not the only believers in immersion! In the Church of England prayer book of Edward VI, immersion was put before sprinkling. Sprinkling was only allowed as an alternative to immersion in the case of illness or incapacity of some kind. The present practice was only [Page 44] introduced in the prayer book of 1662. The *Westminster Confession* says that the right way to baptise is by sprinkling and it excludes immersion, but it is very interesting to note that after a long discussion in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey, the Westminster divines had a final vote. Twenty-five voted for excluding immersion and twenty-four voted against excluding it, so their decision was carried by a majority of one!

But what are the arguments? There are people who say that the Greek word *baptizō* absolutely settles the argument. But it does not because the scholars are divided about its meaning. The word *baptizō* does not prove anything. Here is an interesting bit of evidence. If you read Luke 11:37–38 you will find this: 'And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.' The word used there is *baptizō* and clearly it does not mean that they were surprised that he did not go and have a complete bath. No, it was the custom of the Pharisees, before they sat down to eat, to hold their hands

under running water. They thought it was essential and were surprised that our Lord, instead of holding His hands under running water, immediately sat down. So there is the suggestion of sprinkling.

Again, the argument for immersion is brought forward on the basis of Romans 6 and those parallel passages that I mentioned earlier. But the reply is that those verses do not of necessity refer to the rite or the ceremony of baptism. In all those verses Paul is arguing for our union with Christ—he argues not only that we are buried with Him, but that we are crucified with Him, that we have died with Him. Baptism does not indicate that at all, does it? ‘But,’ people say, ‘it does indicate the burial and the rising.’ Of course, but Paul argues about the dying and the crucifixion also. So supporters of baptism by immersion are pressing the argument further than the apostle himself takes it.

Then there is another argument based upon our Lord’s baptism and that of the Ethiopian eunuch. We are told that our Lord ‘went up straightway out of the water’ (Matt. 3:16), and that Philip and the eunuch also came ‘up out of the water’ (Acts 8:39). That, it is said, is conclusive proof that baptism must be by complete immersion. But Acts 8:39 does not say that. All it tells us is that Philip and the eunuch stood in the water and then came up out of it, because we are told that *both* of them came up out of the water. And if that is meant to prove that the eunuch had been totally immersed, then Philip also must have **[Page 45]** been totally immersed. No, surely the verse simply indicates that they were standing in the water and does not tell us exactly how Philip performed the baptism. And the same applies in the case of our Lord.

But there is another bit of evidence which seems to me to be very important. In the Old Testament things were set apart, purified, consecrated and sanctified by sprinkling. The horns of the altar were sprinkled with blood, and blood was sprinkled in front of the curtain of the Holy Place (Lev. 4). Sin was remitted by sprinkling with water into which the ashes of a heifer had been put (Num. 19). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews uses that symbolism. He talks about ‘having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience’ (Heb. 10:22)—they are purified by sprinkling with the blood of Christ. The Old Testament use of sprinkling for cleansing seems to me to be significant and important.

And there is, finally, this argument, for what it is worth: thousands of people went to John the Baptist, attended his preaching and were baptised by him. Surely if baptism by immersion, in the sense that is generally accepted today, was John’s method of baptism, then the physical problem involved enters into this argument.

To summarise, it seems to me that, on the evidence of the Scriptures, the practice in New Testament times was something like this: the person to be baptised and the one baptising stood together in the water. If it was the river Jordan, they stood in the Jordan and the one who was baptising the other placed his hand in the water and sprinkled the water over the one who was to be baptised. I am not able to give you all the evidence, obviously, but in the writings of the various Fathers there is a great deal to suggest that, and as we have seen, it seems to me to fit in perfectly with what happened to the eunuch.

However, we surely cannot arrive at any finality and, therefore, the only view, it seems to me, which one is justified in taking is that one should allow both methods. The mode of baptism is not the vital thing. It is the thing signified that matters; it is the sealing that counts, and, for myself, I would be prepared to immerse or to sprinkle a believer. If there is an adequate supply of water such as a river, I think the best method is to stand in the water and to baptise in that way. I would not refuse even to immerse completely. What I am certain of is that to say that complete immersion is absolutely essential is not only to go beyond the Scriptures, but is to verge upon heresy, if not to be actually heretical. It is to attach significance to the *mode*, a view which can never be substantiated from the Scriptures, and certainly it **[Page 46]** is out of line with the practice that was consistent throughout the Old Testament.

In conclusion, as far as I am concerned, those who are to be baptised should be adult believers. I cannot see the case, as I have tried to show you, for infant baptism. But as to the mode, it can be sprinkling or immersion or a combination of the two, which I personally believe is the more scriptural and the method for which great evidence can be produced historically. But, having said that much about who is to be baptised and how such a person is to be baptised, let us again emphasise the importance of understanding that it is by this means that God has chosen not only to signify, but also to seal to us our redemption, our forgiveness, the remission of our sins, our union with Christ, our being baptised into Him and our

receiving the Holy Spirit. And thus God stoops to our weakness, authenticates our faith, gives us assurance and strengthens us and fortifies us when we are attacked by the devil, who tries to tempt us into unbelief. Baptism is God's appointment and, whatever the mode, let us remember the thing that is signified, the thing that is sealed.

5

The Lord's Supper

We come now to consider the Lord's Supper. This, too, has been the subject of great debate and controversy in the Christian Church for a number of centuries, especially since the Protestant Reformation, and great and mighty works have been written on it. It would be easy to go into all that but I have decided not to do so because most of the controversy that has arisen has not really arisen on the basis of biblical teaching at all but rather because of the additions to biblical teaching for which the Roman Catholic Church and her followers have been responsible.

In other words (I say this for those who are interested in method as distinct from matter), there is a very real difference between biblical theology and systematic theology. Biblical theology means doctrine which arises directly out of the teaching of the word itself. But we cannot go into a systematic consideration of doctrine without also considering what has been taught in the Church throughout the centuries. Now in this series of lectures, we have been trying to deal with biblical doctrine, but I have made references in passing to other teachings because I have judged that we have all heard something about them and we like to know how they came into being, why we think they are wrong, and how to answer them. I have tried as best I can (you will be the judges as to how far I have succeeded) to keep to biblical doctrine and to avoid going overmuch into the history of the doctrines. So if you feel disappointed that I shall not deal in a detailed manner with the Roman Catholic teaching about transubstantiation, that is my reason. Otherwise it seems to me that our series of lectures on biblical doctrine would become almost endless. So I shall now pick out what I regard as being really important.

[Page 48] There are only two standpoints with regard to this communion of the Lord's Supper. The first is the typical Catholic point of view—and when I say 'Catholic' I mean not only Roman Catholics but also Anglo-Catholics and others who belong to various ritualist movements, even in some of the free churches. Certain sacramentarian and sacramental societies are coming into being, and they all can be included under the generic title of Catholic. They are the people who in one way or another believe in that teaching which goes by the name of *transubstantiation*. They believe that, as the result of the action of the priest, the bread is changed actually into the physical body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that is a doctrine which, during the Middle Ages, began to make its appearance in the Western Church, which was then more or less nothing but the Roman Catholic Church, but the doctrine was not defined by them until the twelfth century. Transubstantiation then remained the official doctrine of the Western (but not the Eastern) Church until the Reformation and, as I said, is still held by the Roman Catholics and others.

Roman Catholics have woven a great philosophy round transubstantiation. If you ask: 'How can that happen, because I still see something that looks like bread, which is white and has the texture of bread and tastes like bread?' their reply is that that is perfectly correct. But they add that anything that you see can be divided into two main sections or divisions—the *substance* and the *accidents*. Now as I have said, I do not want to go into this in detail, but I do think that it is important that we should know something about it because there are so many people today who say that they have been blessed by such teaching. And you will always find that when true Protestantism is lifeless and lethargic there is a strange attraction for some people in sacramental teaching where you have nothing to do but receive the bread and it acts almost automatically. So, this view says that the whiteness of bread does not belong to the substance of bread but is one of the accidents, as are the texture and the taste, and the substance can be changed without affecting the accidents. So it is believed that the substance of bread is no longer what it was, but by a miracle becomes the actual body of the Lord. And, of course, believing that the bread is now essentially the body of the Lord, Roman Catholics put it in a special vessel; they worship it; they address their prayers to it; they call it 'the host' and carry the host in processions.

Now there is no need for us to stay with this because even the Roman Catholic Church herself is prepared to admit that the doctrine **[Page 49]** cannot be proved from the Scriptures. They try to lay great emphasis on the fact that our Lord said, 'This is my body' (Luke 22:19). That 'is', they say, is all-important.

They say that He did not say, ‘This represents my body,’ but, ‘This is my body,’ and you must take His words literally. There are many obvious answers to that. There was our Lord standing in His body, so how could He therefore mean that the bread that was in front of Him was actually His body? He was speaking in the body at the time and there was bread in His hand. That is one answer.

But there is another, and in many ways a more powerful, answer and one which the Roman Catholics can never deal with. Our Lord later goes on to say, ‘This cup is the new testament in my blood’ (Luke 22:20) and you can say to them that if they insist upon the ‘is’ in the one case they must insist upon it in the other. Therefore the wine does not matter at all, but it is the cup that matters because He said ‘this cup’, not the wine in the cup. Of course, there is no answer to that. In other words, the attempt to base this doctrine of transubstantiation upon that one word is not only unscriptural but is, indeed, unreasonable. The fact is that the whole doctrine came into the Church simply in order to enhance the position and the status of the priests. It is only the priest who can work this miracle and, as he alone can do it, he becomes correspondingly more important.

Now around about the 1830s, John Henry Newman (afterwards Cardinal Newman) and Keble and others began the Anglo-Catholic movement in this country. Now, quite deliberately, they said, and were not ashamed to say, that they thought that the only way of saving the Anglican Church (because it was then in a very bad condition) was to exalt the position of the minister—the priest. And they chose one of the time-honoured methods of doing that, namely, they adopted this old doctrine of transubstantiation. You see, I am greatly tempted, and I am exercising most commendable restraining grace, but I must keep to my word and refrain from going into this in further detail. That, however, in its essence is the position.

Now the Lutherans have a slightly different view. They do not believe in transubstantiation but in what is called *consubstantiation*. They say that the Catholics are wrong and there is no change in the substance of the bread. The bread still remains bread, but the body of the Lord becomes joined to it (*con* means ‘with’, hence con-substantial). So they believe they have both the bread and the body of the Lord at the same time; our Lord’s body is with and under the bread. **[Page 50]** Of course, that does not change the position very much and is most unsatisfactory. Luther, having started at the beginning by seeing this thing clearly, afterwards weakened and, having been influenced by some of his friends, went back to a rather unhealthy and unsatisfactory compromise with the old Catholic position.

Then it is interesting, I think, to notice the different view held by the Protestant Reformers. You may remember that I have already referred to Zwingli’s view of the sacraments (chapter 3). Now Zwingli was consistent with himself so he regarded the Lord’s Supper as purely a sign and a commemoration. But when we come to the Reformed view, we find again, as we saw in baptism, that the sacrament is not only a sign but also a seal. We covered this when we looked at the sacraments in general and now we simply have to apply that teaching to the Lord’s Supper.

So let me come to the vital question: What is signified by the communion of the Lord’s Supper? And there is no difficulty about answering that. The first thing signified is the Lord’s death. Paul states that explicitly in 1 Corinthians 11. He says, ‘For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [proclaim] the Lord’s death till he come’ (v. 26). The breaking of the bread and the pouring or the drinking of the wine are a representation of our Lord’s broken body, His shed blood. That is the primary thing that is signified by this action and in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul specifically tells us to do this because in that way we are declaring our Lord’s death. And, again, let me underline something we considered earlier. Do we not see here a wonderful provision made by the Lord Himself? For there have been periods in the history of the Church when the Lord’s death has scarcely been preached at all from the pulpits. It has been denied; it has been misrepresented and abused. Yes, but our Lord had given this commandment—as Paul says, ‘for I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you’ (1 Cor. 11:23)—and He commanded the other apostles in the same way (Luke 22:19–20). Though the pulpit may have failed, the Lord’s Supper has still gone on declaring, proclaiming, preaching the Lord’s death and often there has been a great incongruity, not to say contradiction, between the preaching of man and the preaching of the bread and the wine upon the communion table.

But the Lord's Supper is also a declaration and a sign of the believer's participation in the crucified Christ. We are in communion with Him. It reminds us of that and of our union with Him and, therefore, of our participation in His death. You remember the rich **[Page 51]** teaching about that in Romans—that we are in Christ and, because we are in Christ, we have died with Him, and been buried with Him, and we have risen again with Him.

But in addition to that—and this is tremendously important—the Lord's Supper is a reminder to us and a declaration that we participate in all the benefits of the new covenant. That, again, comes out in the apostle's words in 1 Corinthians 11:25: 'After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament [the new covenant] in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.' Now when we dealt with the Lord's death and the doctrine concerning it (see volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*), we showed how the shedding of blood in the death of the Lord was also the ratification of the new covenant. We read about that new covenant in the epistle to the Hebrews, in the eighth chapter, in the tenth chapter in particular, and, indeed, in the ninth also.

So, then, the Communion Service is a reminder to us that in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, God has made a new covenant with believers. Christ is the mediator of the new covenant. He is the head and representative of humanity in this new agreement, this marvellous new covenant that God makes with men and women. In Hebrews 8 you get that striking contrast between the two covenants, and it is interesting to note them.

For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts [no longer on stone outside but in their minds and in their hearts]: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:8-12

So every time we meet at the communion table and partake of the **[Page 52]** Lord's Supper we are declaring this new covenant and all the contents of the new covenant of which we are reminded there in Hebrews 8. You see what a tremendous thing it is to meet at that table and to take the bread and the wine?

Yes, but we do not stop even at that. In addition, we are reminded by the partaking of the bread and the wine that we, as believers, receive from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself life and strength to live the Christian life. The verses which tell us that are to be found in John 6. Now this section in John's Gospel has caused considerable dispute in this way: Was our Lord here referring to the Lord's Supper or was He not? I hold the view that He was not referring to the Communion Service and for this good reason: at that time the disciples were clearly not capable of receiving such teaching. Our Lord only really begins to deal with this at the end, in the upper room. The Roman Catholics, however, say that John 6 is a reference to the Communion Service—it suits their argument to do so—and so do those who follow them.

But though John 6 is not a reference to the Communion Service as such, a truth is stated in verses 56 and 57 which certainly can be applied at this point. Our Lord says, 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.' Now our Lord Himself goes on to explain that this is just a picture: 'When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life' (vv. 61–63). He is saying, in effect, 'You must eat of me. You must eat my flesh and drink my blood. That is, you must live on Me. As the Father has sent Me and I live by the Father, even so I am sending you and you must live by Me.' That was a spiritual partaking. He did not say that He was literally eating of the

substance of His heavenly Father, of course not! It is a spiritual conception: '[My words] are spirit and they are life.'

So we must live on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our life. Yes, and the bread and the wine remind us of Him. They represent, they are a picture, a portrayal, of Him. As we actually take the bread and eat it, as we drink the wine and swallow it, we should say, 'Yes, I must feed on the Lord as He told me. I must live on Him. I must take of Him. As He took of the Father, so I will feast on Him, not in a physical, but **[Page 53]** in a spiritual sense. And the bread and the wine remind me that I must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man in a spiritual sense if I am to be a strong and a virile and a conquering Christian.'

There is one other thing that is represented by the bread and the wine, and it is this: the union of believers with one another. They are not only all joined to Christ, they are all joined to one another. Now the apostle Paul has taught this in 1 Corinthians 10, a chapter to which we should always pay careful attention. He writes, 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' Then notice this: 'For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread' (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Now you see what Paul is teaching there? He says that as we partake of Christ, we become one; we become, if you like, one loaf. There are some who say that verse 17 should be translated: 'For we being many are one loaf—not bread—and one body.' So as we come to the Communion Service and the bread is broken, we are reminded at one and the same time of the parts and of the whole.

The term *communion*, therefore, represents not only our communion with the Lord but also our communion with one another. We are bound together with Him because we are all in Him, and that is why, in chapter 11, the apostle goes on to give the teaching he does. He says, in effect, 'You are denying the very principle of communion. Some of you are eating too much while others are not having enough to eat. You are selfish, you are divided, but you must all be one. You must wait for one another.' 'Can't you see,' says the apostle, 'that you are denying one of the central things taught by the Lord's Supper—that you are all one? You should bear one another's burdens, you should share what you have with one another, because you are all parts of the same loaf, the same bread. And it is idle for you to say that you have communion with Him if you are not in communion with one another.' Paul talks about the divisions and the heresies and he condemns them because they are a contradiction of everything that is represented by the Communion Service.

There, then, are the main things that are signified or portrayed by the communion of the Lord's Supper. But, thank God, it does not stop at that. This action, this communion, this sacrament, not only signifies but also seals all the benefits to which I have referred, so that when we take the Communion we are not only reminding ourselves of something, we are not only indulging in a memorial or a commemorative **[Page 54]** action, nor are we merely putting on our badges for church membership as it were, though we are doing that. But more than that, as we receive that bread and wine, God is telling us that we are participators in the benefits of this new covenant. It seals them all to us. It seals all these promises of God. It assures me that He died for me, that I am joined to Him, that I have died with Him and have risen with Him. It is like handing me a document with a seal on it: 'There it is, this is all yours.' The new covenant of God with man belongs to me. He has made it with me. He is handing it over to me. He is giving it to me. As the wedding or engagement ring is an assurance to the person who wears it of the love of the other, so the bread and the wine are a special assurance given to us by God in His love and condescension in order that as we take them we may know that He is giving us all these benefits. How vital and important it is that we should realise this when we come to the communion table.

Every minister will tell you that he is often asked questions about the significance of the Lord's Supper. People have come to me and said, 'You know, I don't know what to do in the Communion Service.' And I have known people who have found it a painful service for this reason. They have observed certain people in the Communion Service weeping silently and they have said, 'I've never wept and I can't make myself.' Have you known something about that? I certainly remember as a young Christian trying to produce tears because I thought it was the right thing to do and yet I found I could not. There is often a great deal of sentimentality about this and people are in trouble because they do not know what ought to be happening

and because they feel that there ought to be some curious sensation. And the answer is this doctrine which we are considering together.

As we take the bread and wine together at the Communion we are declaring ‘the Lord’s death till he come’ (1 Cor. 11:26). Yes, but remember that we are not only representing these things; God is also declaring things to us. He is sealing things to us. Remind yourself of that. Say, ‘Here God is telling me that I am in the new covenant, that I am a child of His, that He has adopted me, that all the blessings and the benefits of the new covenant in Christ belong to me and are coming to me and I thank God for them at this point.’ In other words, you should always feel thankful at that service. Some people call it the *Eucharist* and the word ‘eucharist’ means ‘thanksgiving’. Do not let the Catholics rob you of that term. As the young man gives that ring to the object of his love, God has chosen this method of speaking to **[Page 55]** us and telling us, ‘I give you the benefits of the death of My Son and of His life, take freely of Him, live on Him, and realise what I am doing for you in and through Him.’ So as we take the bread and the wine, let us remind ourselves that it seals all these glorious and wonderful things to us.

Finally, who is to partake of the Lord’s Supper? Here again the answer is perfectly plain and clear: it is only for believers. If we do not realise what we are doing, there is no object and no purpose in it. Our whole view of this sacrament, as of every other sacrament, is that it depends upon faith. We do not believe that this acts any more automatically than does baptism. We do not believe in that theory of the Catholic Church that it operates in its own force and by its own inevitable power, *ex opere operato*, because the grace is in it—not at all. There is no value in eating the bread and drinking the wine if we do not do so in faith. As we have seen, there is nothing in the bread, there is nothing in the wine as such. Faith is essential, so that it is only for believers. Yes, but for weak believers, even for sinful believers. We do not have to be perfect before we can come here.

There is a wonderful story about the famous Rabbi Duncan, that great Scotsman, a professor of Hebrew who taught at New College in Edinburgh in the nineteenth century. On one occasion he was taking a Communion Service and was watching what was happening as the elders were taking the elements around. And he observed one distressed woman in the congregation who was weeping copiously, but as the elements were brought round to her, she refused them. He saw her refusing the bread, he saw her refusing the wine and, seeing this, he understood exactly what was happening. The woman was so conscious of her sins that she felt she had no right to partake of that wine. So he got up and, taking the cup, he went to her and said, ‘Woman, take it, take it, He died for sinners.’ That is perfectly right. The woman was repentant. A repentant sinner has as much right as anybody else to take the bread and wine, if not a greater right.

Yes, but that is a very different thing from *living* in sin. The apostle condemns people who take the bread and wine when they are living in sin and are not repentant. That he prohibits, as has the Church throughout the centuries when she has exercised discipline. But as long as you are repentant, and in your repentance remind yourselves of the things that are sealed to you by the bread and the wine, and if you do it truly, you will end by thanking God—it will be a true Eucharist to you. And you will go on your way rejoicing. And you **[Page 56]** will say to yourself, ‘Yes, I will live on Christ. I will eat His flesh and drink His blood by faith. I will henceforth live on Him and I shall not fall into sin.’ So you go away with your conscience cleansed, with a joy in your heart of sins forgiven and with assurance of new strength and life and power of which you had not been aware before.

So we say that this sacrament must be received truly by faith, and if we cannot take it in by faith, then it is better to refrain because Paul teaches that if people will not examine themselves, if they will not examine and judge and condemn themselves and leave their sins, they will be judged. He says, ‘For this cause’—because they would not examine themselves—‘many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep’ (1 Cor. 11:30). He is specifically teaching that some members of the church at Corinth were weak and others were ill because they would not judge themselves as they should and cleanse themselves, but came unworthily to the Lord’s table, and the result was that God had chastised them. Paul says that if we judge ourselves we will not be judged. But when God does judge and punish us, we are ‘chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world’ (v. 32). This means that if we will not listen to the preaching and the exhortation, then we may become weak; we may become ill; we may be reminded of

death and become fearful. Then we will begin to ask, 'Why is this?' And we will face our sin, repent and come back, and so avoid further condemnation.

There is, indeed, a mysterious phrase 'and many sleep' (1 Cor. 11:30), which means that many were dead because they would not judge themselves. We do not understand this but it is clearly taught here that these people died because God chastised them in that way. It does not mean they were lost but it does mean that God chastised them even by means of death itself. For that they will suffer a certain loss in eternity. We read in 1 Corinthians 3 that some people's work will be burnt up—it is 'wood, hay, stubble' (v. 12). They will suffer loss but they themselves will be saved 'yet so as by fire' (v. 15). Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:30 probably means something like that. Therefore, when we come to that table, to the Communion, we must bear all those things in mind, and as we do so, it will be a means of great blessing to us.

Yes, but remember this sacrament does nothing more than the word does. It does nothing beyond preaching. I said that about baptism; I must still say it. There is no new or additional grace given in the Lord's Supper. No, what it does is seal the effectiveness of the **[Page 57]** word, it confirms our receiving of the grace. There is no special grace. There is nothing there that you cannot have anywhere else. There are those who say that the supreme service in the Church is the Communion Service, but I find no scriptural evidence for that at all. No, the supreme sacrament—if you like to call it such—the supreme means of grace in the Church, is the word, the word preached and taught. This is just another means of doing that. It is a remarkable one, a special one, but it does not give us any extra, special grace. What it does is intensify the grace, it makes it more effective to us. Go back to my illustration: the man who puts the ring on his lady's finger is not loving her any more at that minute than he was before, and yet she is getting something in that intense manner which his declarations do not give. And it is exactly the same with the Communion Service and the partaking of the bread and of the wine. It is one of the means used by God to make His own word to us effective. It is a portrayal, it is something the eyes can see. And so we thank God for this sacrament and should ever go from it feeling strengthened and built up and established in the faith and rejoicing in our great salvation.

6

Death and Immortality

In the last five lectures we have been considering the doctrine and sacraments of the Church. Now we must move on to consider another great area of scriptural teaching, and that is the doctrine of the last things, or, to use the technical term, *eschatology*. The word ‘eschatology’ is from the same root as the word ‘escalator’: you work up to the last things, to the ultimate, the end. Eschatology is a very important biblical doctrine and we all are curious and concerned about it. It is something that is quite inevitable. Whether we like it or not we have to face death and we can say with reverence that if biblical teaching did not deal with this question of the last things, it would be incomplete. But that is the wonder and the marvel of this book. It caters for the whole of life, every aspect, every department, every phase. There is nothing that appertains to the life of humanity but that we find it is dealt with, and dealt with in a thorough manner, in the Scriptures.

Here, then, are some of the questions that we shall be considering: What is death? What happens after death? What is our whole life leading to? What is the future? What of the future? We will consider these questions in two main ways. We all want to know our own destiny, and personal future. But, in addition to that, we are naturally interested in the larger question: What is going to happen to the whole world? Generation follows generation. Is that to go on endlessly, for ever and for ever, or is there a limit to this process? That is where this whole doctrine of the last things comes in. So as we look at these matters we are not animated by some mere theoretical or academic interest. Every one of these subjects is intensely practical and it is the business of Christian people to be familiar with the biblical teaching with respect to them.

[Page 60] Today there is a new and revived interest with regard to this section of biblical doctrine. During the early part of the twentieth century and the end of the nineteenth, there was very little interest in eschatology. I am speaking about the Christian Church in general when I say that, because one of the things that has differentiated evangelical Christians from the majority of Christians is that evangelicals have always attached great significance to this doctrine. But for the great majority of Christian people the whole idea of the kingdom of God applied only to life in this world. Christian people spent their time in talking about ‘introducing the kingdom’, which meant improving social conditions in this world. For various reasons, one of the main ones being, of course, the advance of scientific knowledge, and false deductions from that knowledge, people had come to the conclusion (speaking generally) that there is no life after death, that this is the only life and the only world. They felt that people are, after all, but animals, and when someone dies it is like the death of an animal. And that, they said, is the end of the story.

So there was no interest at all in this larger question of the future of the world. Life was more or less easy and comfortable. Conditions were more or less prosperous and everybody was interested in this world. But then came the First World War and the life which had seemed so secure and so stable and so settled was shown to be illusory. Everything became uncertain and unsettled again, and the Second World War, of course, accentuated all that. The coming of the atom bomb has given a great impetus to studies about the last things. Everybody today feels that the whole of life is utterly uncertain so that people are beginning to ask again: What is it? And how does it end? What is death? There does not seem to be much hope in this world—is there more in the next? *Is* there a next world? The whole question has come back again. It behoves us, therefore, to know the biblical teaching about these matters in order that we may answer people’s questions and in this age of insecurity help them to know exactly what the Bible says. Indeed, at the present time, this subject is undoubtedly one of the most fruitful means of evangelism.

Let us first of all look at this problem from the personal, the individual, standpoint. I think that is the natural order. People start with themselves and say, ‘Here I am. What’s going to happen to me? My life is uncertain, so what is there for me? Before I begin to think what is going to happen to the whole world, what is the truth about me myself?’ And that brings us immediately face to face with the question **[Page 61]** of death and the biblical teaching about death. Is it not extraordinary how people dislike and avoid

this subject? It is very natural, of course, in the case of unbelievers because they have no hope as regards death, but it is astonishing that Christian people should also tend to avoid the subject of death.

What does the Bible tell us about death? The first thing is this: death is not merely the cessation of existence. The common view held by the world is that death is just the end of life. Death means, it is said, cessation of existence. A man exists; he dies; he is no longer existing and that is the end of that. But that is not the biblical teaching at all! In fact, biblical teaching is the exact opposite, as I shall try to show you. Bible writers are very anxious to assert and to emphasise that death does *not* mean the cessation of existence. Death, according to the Bible, is simply the separation of the soul and the physical body. Here we are in this life, and the soul and the body are intimately connected; they are one. My soul functions in and through my body. When I die, my soul will leave the body. My body will still be left here in this world; my soul will go on. So death is the separation of soul and body but by no means the cessation of existence.

Now I could give you many texts. Two very important ones clinch the whole matter. The first is Luke 12:4–5. Here our Lord says to His disciples, ‘Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But ... Fear Him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell’. Or, as we read in the parallel passage, Matthew 10:28: ‘him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.’ There are some people who can destroy the body. Do not be afraid of them, our Lord says. The One to fear is the One who can destroy the soul as well as the body.

And our Lord’s teaching in Luke 16 about Lazarus and Dives obviously teaches the same thing. The rich man, Dives, dies; the poor man, Lazarus, the beggar at his gate, also dies. They both leave their bodies behind but their souls are there, existing in that other realm: it is the separation of the soul from the body. That is the fundamental biblical definition of death.

So the next question to ask is this: Why do we die? Why is there such a thing as death at all? The popular view here, the popular philosophical view, is that death is inherent in life, that death is a part of the life process. Life comes into being: there is a beginning, a sprouting. And that is followed by a movement: life develops, it blossoms, it matures, it attains its full maturity, and then it begins to decay. **[Page 62]** Why? It is because life is meant to go so far but no further and when it reaches its peak it begins to go down the other side of the hill. So the teaching is that as life was constituted, it had within it this germ, this seed, of death.

But that is again far from being biblical teaching. According to the Bible, death is not a part of life, it is not something inherent in it, but is the punishment for sin. It was introduced because of sin. You will find this in Genesis 2:17: ‘In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die’—or, ‘dying thou shalt die’. We considered that at the beginning of these lectures (see volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*). You find the same teaching exactly in Genesis 3:19. And it comes in the New Testament in Romans 5, where the apostle Paul shows how death entered in because of the sin of Adam: ‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned’ (v. 12). Death, you see, came by sin.

There is another very interesting statement of the same teaching in the epistle of James: ‘Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death’ (Jas. 1:14–15). So the biblical teaching is that death was introduced as God’s punishment for sin. There was no death until man sinned and there would have been no death if he had not sinned. This is a vital biblical principle and it cuts right across the popular modern philosophy which controls the teaching of the vast majority of people.

So then, we have seen that we die because of sin and we have seen what death is. But at this point a number of people are in trouble. They say, ‘All right, I’ll accept that, but then the problem you leave with me now is this: Why does a *Christian*, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, have to die?’ ‘I’ll admit,’ says this person, ‘that death was the punishment of sin, but after all, if I have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, my sins are forgiven. I am justified. I am reconciled to God. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” Why, then, does a Christian have to die?’

Now that is a most interesting and important question and there is a kind of subdivision to it. There are many people who argue in exactly the same way that a Christian should never be ill because Christ's death on the cross dealt with all the consequences of sin. This very argument forms much of the basis of the popular faith healing movements today—as well as of the cults. Those who believe this say **[Page 63]** that a Christian should never be ill because healing is a part of the atonement and they quote Matthew 8:17, which is itself a quotation from Isaiah 53:4, about Christ bearing our sicknesses. They say that when Christ died on the cross, He nullified all the consequences of sin. So it is important that we should take those two ideas together, because it is clear, is it not, that death was most certainly not dealt with in that way in the atonement.

With regard to physical death, the Christian believer has to die just as the unbeliever has to die. We are waiting for 'the redemption of the body' which means that we are waiting for the body to be delivered from death, from sin and from sickness. They all go into the same category. It has pleased God to allow sickness to persist, death to persist and sin to persist, even in the Christian. He could have made us immediately perfect had He chosen to do so. He could have abolished death immediately and all sickness, but He has not so chosen. The teaching of the Scriptures is surely perfectly clear in these respects and it is a misunderstanding of the atonement with regard both to sickness and to death to say, without any qualification, that the atonement has dealt with all the consequences of sin. It has done so for some immediately. Ultimately, it will do so for all.

So it seems clear that Christians are still left subject to suffering, sickness and death as a part of the process of their sanctification. These are a part of God's chastisement—see Hebrews 12:3–13—so that the Christian can say today, as the psalmist says in Psalm 119, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted,' and, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray' (vv. 71, 67). There is also that teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 in connection with the Communion Service, to which we referred in the last lecture, that because some people do not examine themselves, they are weak and sickly. Illness is a part of God's process of discipline. This does not mean that every time we are taken ill, we are of necessity being punished for sin. But we may be.

There is also no doubt that death, like illness, is one of the means that God uses to sanctify us. The fear of death has often been a blessing to Christian people. There have been Christians who, carried away by success in this world, have started to backslide, forgetting God and their relationship to Him. But suddenly they have been taken ill or have seen someone die, and this reminder of death has brought them back again, and God has healed their backsliding. God has chosen, it seems to me, to use sickness and death very much as He used the nations that He left behind in the land of Canaan to perfect **[Page 64]** the children of Israel when He brought them out of captivity in Egypt.

But let me hasten to add that though Christians are still subject to death, their view of death should be entirely different from that of the unbeliever. Why? Because of what they know. You can see this, for instance, in that great statement in 1 Corinthians 15:55. Every one of us should be able to look in the face of death and say, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' In Christ we know that 'the sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 56). This does not mean that we speak lightly and loosely and flippantly about death, but it does mean that we know that its sting has been taken away by the atoning death of Christ, and by the satisfaction He gave to the law. We know, too, the teaching of the apostle Paul about death being a 'gain': 'Having a desire to be with Christ,' he says, 'which is far better' (Phil. 1:21–23) while Revelation 14:13 tells us, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.'

So far, then, we have been considering the question of death itself and have thought about why Christians have to die. The next question which follows is: What happens after death? And here we come face to face with the idea of immortality. This has often been hotly debated. Is the human soul immortal? Has it an inherent, essential, immortality or has it not? Great volumes have been written on this subject, but generally most of their pages are devoted to a philosophical discussion of the subject and I do not think it is a part of my task to weary you with that.

We start by saying quite frankly that the Bible does not use the term 'immortality': it does not make an explicit statement that the human soul is immortal. But while there is not an explicit statement, I suggest to you that no one can read the Bible in an unprejudiced way without gathering the impression that it assumes everywhere that the human soul is immortal. If, for instance, nobody ever told you that the immortality of the soul is in doubt, reading the Bible would never have raised the question in your mind.

But first let me put the arguments against the belief in the immortality of the soul. There is a statement in 1 Timothy 6:16 which says of God, 'Who only hath immortality.' 'Now,' it is said, 'if anything can be plain, there it is. There is a specific statement to the effect that God alone is immortal.' Now the answer is that that statement is perfectly true. God alone has immortality in and of Himself. But the fact that this is true only of God does not mean that God may not have decided **[Page 65]** to give that gift to men and women. No one would claim that they, in and of themselves, are inherently immortal or can, indeed, achieve immortality. But the reply of those of us who do accept the immortality of the soul is that God, in His infinite wisdom, has chosen to give the gift of immortality to the human soul. He need not have, but He has chosen to do so. So we can say, therefore, that God alone has immortality in and of Himself as His right and as His possession, but He has given it as a gift to the souls of men and women.

But let us consider further arguments. It is said that as we read the Old Testament, we do not get the suggestion and the teaching that the human soul is immortal. Everything seems uncertain; everything seems shadowy. As the author of the book of Ecclesiastes puts it, 'A living dog is better than a dead lion' (Ecc. 9:4), as if to say that of course, when we are dead that is the end, we are finished. The Old Testament, it is said, seems to indicate that death is just the end.

Now the answer that is generally given to that argument is that there is a kind of progressive revelation in the Scripture and that ideas are much plainer and clearer, for instance, in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. As we work through the Bible we find a kind of development of doctrine. Things are hinted at, then they become a little plainer, and then yet more plain, and finally absolutely plain. Indeed, Scripture tells us that it is the Lord Jesus Christ alone, by His resurrection, who has 'brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:10). But they were there before; there were these suggestions; there were all these adumbrations. Christ has brought life and immortality into the full light of day. But when we say that, we must not say that there was nothing there before. There was, but it was inchoate, incomplete. It was a mere suggestion and, therefore, there is a development in the Old Testament teaching. For instance, the Old Testament does state very clearly that there is a place called *Sheol*, a state where the dead go. The Old Testament teaches that death is not the end but that the dead go on living and all people, the good and the bad, descend together to *Sheol*, or—to use the Greek word—to *Hades*.

Not only that, but certain specific statements in the Old Testament teach the immortality of the soul. Verses 10–11 of Psalm 16 say, 'For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt skew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' And if we go on to the next psalm, we again find immortality **[Page 66]** stated very clearly in verse 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' You could not have anything stronger or more explicit than that. Psalms 16 and 17 are of very great importance in this connection and that is why they are quoted several times in the New Testament itself.

In the book of Job, Job states, 'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God' (19:25–26). And there is a very strong affirmation of belief in immortality in Psalm 73 where the psalmist says that his hope is in God, that he has no one on earth but God, and also says, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory' (v. 24). There it is. And there are many other verses. If you go through the Old Testament and make a note of them, you will find that the evidence is very powerful. Many books have been written which collate all this evidence, one of the best being *The Immortality of the Soul* by a man called Salmond.

In addition to all this evidence, there is a further piece of evidence which always seems to me to be very important. It is the prohibition in the Old Testament against consulting familiar spirits. This prohibition is referred to, of course, by the so-called Witch of Endor who, when consulted by that tragic man, Saul, the first king of Israel, was able to produce the presence of the prophet Samuel. Now there is a great deal of teaching in the Old Testament against the consulting of familiar spirits, and against resorting to spiritism or spiritualism, and this prohibition is in itself a powerful argument in favour of the immortality of the soul. If the spirits of men and women did not persist after the death of the body, there would be no need for such a prohibition.

Then, finally, let me come to the New Testament teaching, which is very striking. There is the statement in Luke 12:4–5, which I have already quoted to you, that we should fear Him who not only can destroy the body but can cast the soul into hell, suggesting that though the body may be destroyed in this world, the spirit goes on. And then there is the evidence produced by the event which took place on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Moses and Elias appeared and spoke to our Lord. This shows that Moses and Elias are still in existence (Matt. 17:1–8).

And notice, too, the use which our Lord made of the statement: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' **[Page 67]** (Matt. 22:32). He was being questioned by a clever man who was trying to trap Him with regard to this question of the immortality of the soul, the persistence of life after death. When the trick question was brought to Him, that was His reply, and He continued, 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living'. In other words, our Lord's argument was that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive and God is their God now.

Then look again at the story of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16. Lazarus is there in Abraham's bosom. The rich man is also there: he is dead—yes—but he is still active; he is conscious; he is seeing; he is concerned. Death is not the end. That is very definite and specific evidence that the soul goes on after death.

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7

Conditional Immortality or a Second Chance?

We have seen that in the Scriptures we discover that the soul goes on after death. In the Scriptures also we have teaching about the resurrection. So the next question is: What happens between death and the resurrection? That is what is called the *doctrine of the intermediate state*. What is our condition between death in this world and the resurrection which is to come? There has been a great deal of writing and discussion about this, so let me try to deal with it as briefly as I can. I shall not discuss the Roman Catholic teaching with regard to purgatory, for the good reason that there is no biblical evidence for it. This is one of those doctrines that the Roman Catholics have added, as they have added other teachings from time to time—as we have seen.

But apart from that, there are certain wrong ideas with regard to the intermediate state. Some people think that it is a kind of vague state of being. In the classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome we find the belief that the soul goes on to some vague, illdefined condition where everything is nebulous and indistinct with no definition. Now that, as I hope to show you, is very far indeed from being the biblical teaching.

Another idea that is sometimes taught is that after death the believer and the unbeliever pass through some common place which is called Hades or Sheol where there are two kinds of compartments for the dead. One is Abraham's bosom, and the other, the place of suffering. Now we might very well spend a long time with this but I do not judge that it is profitable. The confusion has often arisen because the [Page 70] same word—this word Sheol—is used for a number of different ideas. Sometimes it simply means 'the grave'. We read of 'going down into Sheol', when what is meant is 'going down into the grave'. Or sometimes the word means nothing more than being in the state of death. At other times the context indicates that 'Sheol' refers to the place of punishment. If you are careful to observe the context, I think that you will be in no difficulty about the meaning.

Then another, and perhaps a more important, idea is the teaching with regard to the so-called *sleep of the soul*. Supporters of this view say that when we die we enter upon a state of sleep, when we are unconscious, and that we will remain in this state of unconsciousness until the resurrection. It is claimed that there is biblical evidence to support that contention. For instance, the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51 says, 'We shall not all sleep.' His teaching there is that some will be on earth when our Lord returns and their bodies will be changed. They, he says, shall not sleep, thus implying that others will sleep. Psalm 115 is also quoted in support of the 'sleep of the soul'. Here we read, 'The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence' (v. 17). And you will find that statement made many times in different ways in the Old Testament.

But to propose a 'sleep of the soul' is to misunderstand Scripture because the Bible teaches quite plainly a conscious existence after death and before the resurrection. This is an important principle in biblical exposition. We must never build up a doctrine on an isolated statement, and this doctrine is really based on that verse in 1 Corinthians 15: 'They shall not all sleep.' But it is quite clear that there the sleep simply refers to the fact that people are no longer alive. 'Sleep' is a euphemism for death. Instead of speaking bluntly, Paul puts it in terms of sleeping.

As I said, there is definite evidence that the soul is not unconscious after death. First and foremost, we again take the incident that happened on the Mount of Transfiguration when Moses and Elias spoke to our Lord. Clearly, they are not in a kind of unconscious state; they are not enduring this sleep of the soul, waiting for the resurrection. But there is the still more specific teaching of our Lord in the parable of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16. Lazarus and Dives are both conscious, otherwise there is no point whatsoever in the parable, the whole purpose of which is to show that this rich man is not only existing, but is consciously aware of the state of his brethren who are still alive on earth. And obviously Lazarus is also alive, otherwise the rich [Page 71] man could not plead that Lazarus be allowed to go to him to relieve him.

A still more important affirmation of a conscious existence after death is found in our Lord's word to the penitent thief on the cross, 'To day shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43). That is vital. And then there are statements made by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5. Take his words, 'We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord' (v. 8). Now that plainly indicates a conscious existence in the presence of the Lord. Still more striking and explicit, perhaps, are those magnificent statements in Philippians where the apostle says, 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (v. 21) and, 'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better' (v. 23). Now it cannot be argued that it is 'far better' to be in a state of sleep, with the soul in an unconscious condition. No, that would not be 'far better' than the conscious communion of the believer with our Lord in this world. Paul is enjoying his present communion: 'For to me to live,' he says, 'is Christ.' To go into a state of unconsciousness cannot be better than that. No, Paul says that to die is far better because it means he will be with Christ, and will enjoy His presence face to face. It must mean that, otherwise Paul has no argument.

Again, in Revelation 6:9–10 we are told that the souls of those who had been put to death by persecution are under the altar, pleading and praying for the end to come, and for the vengeance of God to be inflicted upon their cruel oppressors.

So there is an abundance of evidence to prove that the doctrine of the sleep of the soul after death is entirely unscriptural. The soul is not asleep. We can go further and say that both the believer and the unbeliever will be in a conscious condition—the believer enjoying untold bliss and joy, the unbeliever in a state of misery.

Now we must come on to a teaching which is increasing in popularity and often troubles people. Called *conditional immortality* or *annihilationism*, this is the belief that the souls of unbelievers will be utterly destroyed and will pass entirely out of existence. The teaching is something like this: man is not naturally immortal, but is mortal and the gift of eternal life, which is interpreted partly as the gift of immortality, is given to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. With regard to the others, their souls will go out of existence. Now proponents of this view disagree among themselves. There are different schools of thought. Some say that the souls of unbelievers will be [Page 72] destroyed the moment they die. Others say that unbelievers will be kept alive for a certain length of time and during this time will suffer and will be punished. But their period of punishment and of suffering will come to an end and then they will be finally destroyed, simply ceasing to exist altogether and for ever.

What argument do people have for this idea? Well, they are fond of quoting that statement which I referred to in the last lecture: God 'who only hath immortality' (1 Tim. 6:16). That, they say, must mean what it says—that only God is immortal. But, as we indicated, while we must accept that and agree with it, it does not of necessity preclude the fact that God has given the gift of immortality to all men and women. Immortality, it is stated, is referred to in the Scriptures as a gift—'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,' says Paul in Romans 6:23.

But the primary argument for conditional immortality centres upon terms like 'destruction', 'perish' and 'death'. Now, it is said, destruction means destruction, and it is inconceivable that something can go on being destroyed for ever. Destruction means complete disintegration, the end of something. 'Perish' and 'death' likewise must mean the end of existence. So if you quote 2 Thessalonians 1:9, which speaks of 'everlasting destruction', you are told that that is impossible.

What are we to say about this teaching? Well, I suggest to you that the general sense and teaching of the Scripture is altogether against it. If you were to start with the first verse of Genesis and go right through your Bible, you would never gain the impression (it would never even enter into your mind) that anything is taught in the Scriptures save that the world is divided up into those who are Christian and those who are not, those who belong to God and those who do not, and that those who belong to Him go on to everlasting bliss and those who do not to everlasting punishment and destruction.

We must be very careful not to arrive at any conclusion which is at variance with the general tenor and sense of scriptural teaching, and I would say that the whole teaching of Scripture not only does not suggest but is positively against the theory of annihilationism. Here Scripture is in agreement with what we can

describe as the common instinct of humanity which is to believe that after death the soul goes on, and goes on for ever. Let me give you one illustration out of the Scriptures. We read in Hebrews 2:14–15, ‘Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that **[Page 73]** had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.’ The whole human race is afraid of death, and it is afraid because it is afraid of the punishment that will come upon sin after death.

Belief in a supreme God is an instinct that all people have in common. Everyone who is born into this world has this instinct. In the same way, there is an instinct in human nature that death is to be feared. Why? Not because it means extinction and annihilation—many people would be very glad indeed to believe that that is true. They would say, ‘It doesn’t matter, then, what we do in this world, because when we die, that’s the end of it.’ No, men and women are afraid of death because they have an innate belief that there is judgment after death, as the Scripture teaches, and that there is suffering and punishment which goes on for ever and for ever. They are in bondage because of the fear of death.

But there are other arguments which are still more powerful. Take the word ‘eternal’. Eternal destruction, everlasting destruction: these are the biblical terms. Now it is perfectly true that sometimes the word ‘eternal’ refers only to an age, and those who believe in conditional immortality are very fond of saying that with regard to punishment ‘eternal’ only means a measure of time. But let us remember that this same word ‘eternal’ is used about the being of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: the eternal Father, the eternal Son, the eternal Spirit. And there, obviously, it carries the sense of endlessness, everlastingness.

The same word ‘eternal’ is also always used in the parallels and contrasts that are drawn in the Scriptures between believers and unbelievers. They face either eternal life or eternal destruction. Perhaps the best example of this is the last verse of Matthew 25: ‘And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal’ (v. 46). The contrast between the unrighteous and the righteous is the contrast between everlasting punishment and everlasting life. And if everlasting as regards punishment means only for a while and then extinction, why should everlasting not mean the same when it describes the righteous and the life that they will inherit? There is no exception to this. Constantly in the Scripture the fates of the believer and the unbeliever are contrasted in that way and each time exactly the same word is used in both cases—eternal on the one hand and eternal on the other. So if there is no such thing as everlasting destruction, there is no such thing as everlasting life, and all that is **[Page 74]** promised to the believer will only last for a while and then come to an end.

The best Greek scholars are agreed in saying that no word in the Greek language expresses so strongly the sense of endless duration as this particular word which is used both with regard to destruction and to life. Surely nothing could be plainer than that? But if you want something further, you can put it like this: in Jude 6 we read that certain angels have been reserved ‘in everlasting chains’. And we are told in Revelation 21:8 that unbelievers will be cast into the same place as those fallen angels and will share their fate.

But finally, and perhaps most convincing of all, is the fact that it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who speaks about ‘the fire that never shall be quenched’ (Mark 9:43–48). What can be stronger than that? ‘The fire that shall not be quenched’: it is never going to end. But if all those who are opposed to God are going to be destroyed, then you do not need a fire that shall never be quenched because a time will come when the fire will no longer be necessary and therefore will be quenched. It is our Lord also who, in the same passage, says, ‘their worm dieth not’, suggesting an eternal existence in a state of punishment.

I can well understand those who search the Scriptures with great diligence in order to arrive at this teaching about annihilation, but we must not base doctrines on our feelings. People say, ‘I can’t conceive of the love of God doing something like that.’ Perhaps they cannot, but our beliefs are not to be based upon what you and I can conceive, but upon what we read in the Scriptures. We are not only finite, we are sinful. You and I are incapable of adjudging the love of God truly. Our minds are not big enough; they are not straight enough; they are not clear enough; they are not pure enough. And to argue in terms of what you

think the love of God should be is not only to be utterly unscriptural but to put yourself into the position of the unbeliever for that is precisely what he does about the atonement and about almost every other doctrine of our glorious salvation. He does not see it, he does not understand it, therefore he does not believe it. Let us be very careful that we do not align ourselves with unbelievers or argue as philosophers rather than as those who submit their minds to the teaching of the Scriptures.

The next subject is the question of a second chance. Is there, beyond death, another opportunity for salvation? Is our eternal fate and destiny settled in this world or is there another presentation of the **[Page 75]** gospel beyond death and the grave? Here, again, is a doctrine which has been taught especially during the last hundred years and has been popular in certain circles. There are those who believe that another chance, another opportunity, will be given to those who have died in unbelief. On what do they base that theory? Again, their main argument, generally, is their idea of the love of God. They cannot conceive of a loving God not doing this. There are those who press this argument of the love of God to the extent that they say that ultimately everybody will be saved. The Lord is our hope. Even the devil, they say, will be saved. There will be no such thing as anybody remaining rebellious against God.

Advocates of this view also claim that it is supported by two scriptures. The first is 1 Peter 3:18–20, ‘for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: *by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*’ The second is 1 Peter 4:6, ‘For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.’ Now those are the only two scriptures that are claimed in support of this teaching, so we must face them and explain them.

Take, first of all, 1 Peter 3:18–20—what do these verses teach? There are some who have tried to avoid this difficulty by saying that the Lord Jesus Christ was in spirit preaching the gospel to the people of the first years of the Christian Church through the apostles. But that is surely quite impossible, because the emphasis is that it is not the apostles preaching but Christ in the Spirit. Christ was put to death in the flesh but quickened by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached. Quite apart from that, that explanation does not explain why this term about the spirits ‘in prison’ is used, and still less does it explain the reference to the men of the time of Noah and the flood. So we can leave that altogether.

Another explanation is that our Lord Jesus Christ, after His death and burial and before He rose again from the dead, went to the spirits in Hades and proclaimed judgment upon the impenitent dead. It is said that He descended into hell and there He proclaimed judgment upon all—those in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament times who had rejected God and His wonderful salvation. But if **[Page 76]** this passage means that, why then the reference to the men of Noah’s time? They were no worse than the sinners in subsequent generations, but the reference is particularly to those at the time of the flood. So that explanation must go out also.

Then a third explanation is that these verses teach that in between His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus went to this place in which the dead remain and there He preached the gospel to the righteous dead of the Old Testament dispensation. That means He preached to those who had served God according to the light they had and who had lived according to the law: people like John the Baptist’s father and mother and others who are described as righteous persons. This view says that He went to them and said, ‘You believed God and because of that I am now preaching the gospel to you. I am here to tell you what I have done for you.’ And thereby He completes their salvation.

But again, of course, that is quite impossible. How can such people be described as ‘spirits in prison’? There is nothing to suggest that the righteous dead of the Old Testament can be described as being in a kind of prison house. Not at all! As I have shown you, Moses and Elias were clearly not in such a condition. And, again, why the extraordinary reference to the people of Noah’s time, if the words are simply to be explained as preaching the gospel to the righteous dead? No, that explanation, it seems to me, must also be excluded.

Then there are those who go further and say that when our Lord descended to Hades between His death and resurrection, He offered the gospel of grace. There is a sub-division of views here. Some say that He offered the gospel to everybody in Hades—righteous and unrighteous alike. Others say that He offered it only to the people of Noah’s generation, and then only to those who repented at the very last moment when the flood came. The flood, it is said, came suddenly so they did not have time to express their repentance, but in their last agony they did repent. Our Lord, therefore, offered grace to those people because of that last-minute repentance.

Other people say that our Lord offered the gospel of grace to all who were drowned at the time of Noah because of the suddenness of their death. Their death was so sudden that it really was not quite fair to them and, therefore, they were given this further opportunity of grace. And there are those who say that it is an offer that was made by Him, then, to all, not only the people of Noah’s time, but of all other times. And they go even further and say that the gospel will go on being offered to all and sundry until the very end of the world itself. **[Page 77]**

So what have we to say to all this? Again, we start by saying that the whole tenor of scriptural teaching is entirely against the theory of a second chance. Surely, again, if you read the Bible from beginning to end, you must get the impression that this life and this world is the one in which our eternal destiny is settled. No impartial and unprejudiced person can read the Bible without coming to that conclusion. But the Bible also supports it in detail. Go back again to Dives and Lazarus. It is our Lord Himself who teaches that a gulf is fixed and there is no passing from one state to another. No glimmer of a hope is offered to Dives. Nothing is said about a second chance. Dives is reminded that he has had his chance and has rejected it. Our Lord’s own explicit and specific teaching surely should be sufficient for us. How precarious it is to found a doctrine and a theory upon a passage of Scripture such as the one from Peter, in the light of our Lord’s own perfectly plain teaching. Not only that, in John 8:21 our Lord talks about people dying in their sins, and the three parables in Matthew 25 surely leave us without any doubt whatsoever.

But let us come back to the passage in Peter. What possible connection can any of those expositions have with the very drift and meaning of this passage? There is nothing in the passage to suggest that between His death and resurrection our Lord did anything at all, leave alone anything of this particular type. What the passage talks about is the difference between our Lord in the flesh and our Lord in a spiritual condition. While He was here on earth our Lord was in a fleshly condition. Before He came into the world, and after He went out of the world, He is in a spiritual condition: surely that is the teaching of the passage. It says that He died according to the flesh but was ‘quickened by the Spirit’ and it is after His quickening, we are told, that He is in the Spirit.

Again, we must bring into consideration the references to the people of Noah’s time and to the ark being prepared—this is a vital part of the exposition. But still more important is the fact that in the whole epistle, and particularly in this section, the apostle Peter is clearly concerned to give comfort, strength and encouragement to Christian people who are suffering. That is the context, and I feel that all these other expositions have gone astray because they do not remember that context. So the question I ask is this: How did these verses strengthen Christian people to endure suffering? What was the use of being told that those who had died impenitent at the time of the deluge were going to have another opportunity of salvation? How did **[Page 78]** it help those suffering Christians to be told that after death there would be a second chance for the unbeliever? It is utterly irrelevant!

So, then, let us try to expound these verses in their setting. The apostle, I say, is encouraging these early believers in their trials and their experience of coming face to face with death. Indeed, he is going beyond that. He says in chapter 4:7, ‘The end of all things is at hand.’ He says later on in that chapter, ‘Judgment must begin at the house of God’ (v. 17). The time has come for judgment. It must begin there, and, ‘If it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?’ Peter sees clearly that these people, as it were, are at the end; they are suffering persecution and hardships and trials. They are in a condition of crisis.

The encouragement and the consolation Peter gives is to say, in effect, ‘Take the example of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Men killed Him even after the flesh but that wasn’t the end, He was quickened in the

Spirit. The most that men can do to you is to kill the flesh. They cannot touch the spirit.’ That is Peter’s first statement, which he makes in verse 18. Now in verse 17 Peter has just said, ‘For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.’ And Peter continues, ‘For Christ also hath once suffered for sins ...’ And he goes on to say that Christ suffered in the flesh, but was ‘quickened by the Spirit’. That, therefore, is the first thing.

Peter goes on to argue that our Lord is still doing in the spirit what He did in the flesh. He helped men when He was here in the flesh, and encouraged them and strengthened them. Risen from the dead, though men did kill Him, He is still the same, and is still doing the same thing. Not only that, but I suggest to you that Peter goes on to teach that when He was here in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ warned men and women. He called them to repent, to flee from the wrath to come. He warned them against the terrible consequences of not believing Him and disobeying God. And on top of all that, He told them that He had come to save them. That was His message. ‘And He is still doing that,’ says Peter in effect. ‘Yes, He is not only still doing it, He did it once before. There was another occasion in this world when judgment came upon humanity, when the end of all things was at hand. It was at the time of the flood. That is the only previous occasion when the whole world was judged and this final separation took place.’

Now you see why the apostle refers to the time of Noah and why he tells us about the preparing of the ark? It has no sense or meaning **[Page 79]** apart from that context of suffering. ‘Go back,’ says Peter, ‘and look at that old time—what do you find? You find that Christ was then preaching to people, even as He did in the days of His flesh and as He is doing now. He used Noah to build an ark to warn the people against the deluge, and went on warning men and women for 120 years (Gen. 6:3). Christ was preaching righteousness, warning people about their fate, about the destruction that was to come and showing them that they could be faced if they but believed the word and entered into the ark. But they would not; they rejected it. Ah yes, but those who did believe—Noah and his family, just eight people—went into the ark, and because they went into the ark, believing Him, their souls were saved and in spite of the deluge they lived.’

‘It is exactly like that now,’ says Peter. ‘That ark is a picture of baptism; those who believe on Christ and are baptised into Him enter into the ark of salvation. Oh yes, men may destroy you in the flesh, as they destroyed Christ in the flesh. It does not matter. If you are in Christ, your spirit is safe. He arose and you will rise with Him. He was put to death but goes on in the spirit, and in the same way, though they may kill your bodies, if you are in the ark (by what baptism signifies) your spirits are absolutely safe, and men simply cannot harm you at all.’ Peter uses that very expression: ‘Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?’ (1 Pet. 3:13).

Now that, it seems to me, is the teaching here. The whole point is that Christ has overcome death and therefore, just as Noah, who listened to Him before the flood, overcame the flood, we also can overcome everything, even the fiery trial that may come upon us. We shall be safe with Him because, though He has been crucified in the flesh, He is alive in spirit and He is reigning and He is the Lord of all.

Then, when we come to 1 Peter 4:6, I suggest that very similar arguments are of equal cogency. This is a statement which, on the surface, seems to say that there is preaching after death: ‘For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.’ Now people try to interpret that as meaning that the gospel was preached again to those who are dead. But surely there is nothing at all here to say that the gospel was preached to anybody after their death. We are not told that they died and that then the gospel was preached to them. What we are told is that the gospel was preached to certain people, who are now dead, but were alive when it was preached to them—which is a very different thing. **[Page 80]**

But let me again put this argument to you: Peter is still writing to the same people. How can it possibly help these suffering Christians to be told that another opportunity of salvation will be given to the very people who are persecuting them? It is no comfort at all. It is pure irrelevance. It has no sense. No, the apostle is again saying the same thing. ‘Those people,’ he says, ‘those Christians to whom the gospel was preached and who believed it, they have certainly suffered judgment—condemnation—as people according to the flesh. But they are all right. They are alive according to the spirit. So you need not be

troubled about your loved ones who have died.’ That was something that greatly troubled this first generation of Christians and the apostle Paul had to deal with the same thing in writing to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:13–18). They were saying, ‘We’ll be all right, of course, when Christ returns, but what about those who are dead, what’s going to happen to them?’ There was a curious feeling that those who had died, and especially those who had died the death of martyrdom, were somehow or other being robbed of their salvation. That is the very thing that Peter is dealing with here. He says, in effect: ‘You need not trouble about those who are dead. They have certainly been put to death according to the flesh, as Christ Himself was, but as He is alive according to the spirit, so are they. They are in His safekeeping. The gospel was preached to them, as it is to you now, for this reason: that if they believed in Christ they would have no need to fear being put to death in the flesh at all, they would know that they were perfectly safe, and so they are.’ ‘You see to it,’ says Peter, ‘that you are equally sure and certain of your salvation.’

Peter’s argument therefore continues: Have nothing to do with unbelievers. Do not live any longer as they live. And not only that, do not be afraid of them. They can only destroy your body but they cannot touch your soul. You belong to this Christ whom they also killed but whose spirit they could not touch. Have nothing to do with them. ‘Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you.’ And if you must suffer, suffer as a Christian and then all will be well with you. Make sure of Christ and your relationship to Him and then none of these things can touch you.

So if you take these two verses in their whole context, if you remember this reference to Noah and the time of the flood and the preparation of the ark and the emphasis that is laid upon that, then surely you must agree that the only adequate and satisfactory exposition of **[Page 81]** the two verses is the one that I have thus tried to put before you. In other words, there is not a vestige of evidence in the whole passage that a further opportunity of salvation is given to anyone beyond death and the grave. No, my friends, what makes preaching so vital and urgent is that it is in this life and in this world that the eternal destiny of all men and women is determined. Let us remember, therefore, that we all have a responsibility for the men and women round and about us. Do not comfort yourself by saying, ‘They will have another chance after death.’ As we deal with men and women, we must believe that their eternal bliss and joy, or their eternal unhappiness and wretchedness, is decided in this present world by their belief or rejection of the gospel of God’s wondrous grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. ‘Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men’ (2 Cor. 5:11). God enable us to do so.

8

The Second Coming—a General Introduction

We have seen that in the Scriptures a good deal of time and space is given to the doctrine of the last things, and have noted that the subject naturally divides itself into two main headings: first, our individual destiny, and second, the destiny of the whole world. We have looked at the doctrine concerning our personal future, and though we have not finished dealing with it, we have thought about the biblical teaching concerning death itself and the state of the soul after death.

Now at this point we must turn to the general aspect of the doctrine of the last things, because all that Scripture tells us further about our personal destiny is bound up with something which affects not only the whole of humanity but indeed the whole cosmos itself. We come, therefore, to the biblical teaching concerning the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is a tremendously important subject. Certain people who are very fond of statistics like to analyse the Bible in a statistical manner and one man even goes so far as to claim that one verse in thirty in the Bible is a reference to the second coming of our Lord. Another statistic—I am giving you this simply to show you the importance of the subject—takes the references in the Scriptures to the first and second comings of our Lord, and shows that the proportion is this: for every one reference to the first coming of Christ as the baby of Bethlehem, there are eight references to His final, His second, coming.

In those statistics I think we see an indication of the very great importance of this subject, but there are also many other things that emphasise its significance. Certain chapters in the Scriptures, for [Page 84] instance, Matthew 24 and 25, are given exclusively to this doctrine. There are those who would say that both epistles to the Thessalonians were written solely to deal with this subject. I would not quite agree, but quite a good case can be made out for that view. At any rate, our Lord's second coming is the dominating theme in both those epistles. But still more important is the fact that our Lord Himself emphasised it and referred to it frequently. For instance, Matthew 24 and 25, to which I have referred, contain the account of a discourse by our Lord Himself on this very question and there are parallel statements in Mark 13 and Luke 21. We cannot read the Gospels without seeing that in addition to all the teaching our Lord gave there and then, and all that He foreshadowed about His death, there was this teaching about His second coming.

In passing, let me point out that although we may have differing views with regard to Dr Albert Schweitzer, his biggest achievement in the theological realm is undoubtedly in connection with our Lord's second coming. Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the prevailing theological mood was modernism or liberalism, and its exponents were the people who constantly talked about 'Jesus', contrasting the 'Jesus of history' with the 'Christ of St Paul'. Their whole teaching was that the real picture of Jesus of Nazareth given in the Gospels was of a good man, a great religious genius. Then Albert Schweitzer wrote a book which was translated eventually into English under the title of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, and in that book he established beyond any dispute—and the case has never been answered—that whatever else the Gospels may say about Jesus of Nazareth, they constantly emphasise His apocalyptic teaching concerning the second coming.

The liberals had taken the apocalyptic element right out. Our Lord, they said, taught nothing but morality and ethics, conduct and behaviour. They were, they said, reconstructing the Jesus of history, and they stripped Him of all that was miraculous and supernatural. But Albert Schweitzer proved that we are then left with very little; certainly we have nothing which can account for the subsequent history of the Christian Church. Now do not deduce that I am describing Dr Schweitzer as an evangelical Christian because he is very far from being that, but at any rate he did that excellent bit of negative work. As a student bringing a scientific mind to the Scriptures, he really did demolish that so-called liberal 'Jesus of history' by establishing that this apocalyptic element was an essential part of our Lord's teaching. [Page 85] I would not have mentioned this if it had not been that Dr Schweitzer is now eighty and you have been

reading about him in the papers. This is one of the most important facts about him and it is probably not mentioned in the newspapers.

If we move on to the Acts of the Apostles, we find this subject again, starting with the very first chapter. Our Lord was asked a question about events in the last days which He answered (v. 7). And then the angel spoke to the disciples as they watched our Lord ascending into the heavens and said, 'This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.' Peter refers to this subject in his preaching (cf. 3:19–21), as does Paul (cf. Acts 17:31).

And then when we come to the epistles, we again find our Lord's return taught everywhere. In the third chapter of his second epistle, Peter says of Paul, 'As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things'—that is, the coming of the day of the Lord, to which Peter has just referred. There is never a doubt about the fact of the second coming of our Lord. That is Peter's testimony and, certainly, as we read Paul's epistles we find this doctrine everywhere. It is in James also; it is in the epistles of John and in the book of Revelation. Not only that, the teaching is that no greater comfort can be offered to the Church than this particular doctrine. It was the comfort that was offered to that first generation of Christians, placed as they were in a difficult world and subject to persecution. It has sustained the martyrs and the confessors in all ages of the Church. It is the blessed hope, it is that to which the Church is looking forward and at the same time, of course, it is the greatest incentive to holy living. Peter says, 'Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness' (2 Pet. 3:17). And, in the light of these things, he has already exhorted them with the words: 'What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God ...?' (vv. 11–12).

We see, therefore, that Scripture itself emphasises the importance of Christ's second coming. And yet I think we have to agree that this doctrine, this truth, is somewhat overlooked and is certainly not emphasised as it should be, and it behoves us to consider the reasons for this neglect. There is no doubt that one reason is the tendency in all of us to spiritual lethargy. We tend to become victims of life and of circumstances. That is why these scriptures are always exhorting us to **[Page 86]** remind ourselves of these things, to stir ourselves up, that we may contemplate them. We are confronted by an enemy who is always trying to depress us and to keep our lives so full of other things that we forget this blessed hope. That is why this doctrine tends to stand out most prominently in days of persecution and trial. So often, it is only when we see the vanity of this world that we look to that glorious future that is awaiting us.

Another reason for the neglect of this doctrine is that there are false views and ideas with respect to what it really means. When we talk about the second coming of our Lord, what do we mean? Now, there are some who have taught that it just means the fact of death. They interpret most of the references to the coming of our Lord in terms of the Christian dying and going out of the life of this world. Very often they quote the fourteenth chapter of John: 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself' (vv. 1–2). Just as that is a reference to death, so, it is said, all the references to the coming of Christ refer to His coming to fetch us in death. Thereby, of course, this great doctrine is avoided.

Others interpret our Lord's coming in terms of what happened on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon and into the Christian Church. They point out that before His death our Lord told His disciples that He would be disappearing for a while but would come again. This is all taught in chapters 14, 15 and 16 of John's Gospel. In John 14:17–18, for example, our Lord says, '... the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.' And that, these people say, obviously happened at Pentecost. That was His teaching concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit; and He came again into the Church and into the lives of His people through the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. All references to the Holy Spirit, they say, must be interpreted in that way—it is the spiritual coming of our Lord.

Then a third and, at one time, very popular idea with regard to the interpretation of the second coming describes it and defines it solely in terms of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is very easy to

understand how that interpretation came about. If you look at Matthew 24 and the corresponding passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21, you will find obvious references both to the destruction of Jerusalem and to **[Page 87]** the ultimate coming of our Lord. So it was not unnatural that certain people should have said that the whole thing, surely, is just a reference to the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. And they have in that way confined the coming of our Lord solely to the end of the Jews as a nation. Obviously those who hold the last two views will not pay much attention to this great doctrine but will regard it as something that has already happened, something that belongs to the past, which is of value as far as it goes, but is not a very vital doctrine for the Church.

The third reason, I think, for the comparative neglect of this doctrine is due to a kind of shyness and carefulness on the part of Christian people because of extravagant teaching, of which there has been a great deal, perhaps more than with respect to any other single doctrine. People have become interested in times and seasons. They have fixed dates for the coming of our Lord, and these dates have been precise (some of them) even down to the hour. Other people have elaborated theories and multiplied ideas, and have been utterly dogmatic, speaking with great assurance. This has gone on for centuries and, of course, the dates predicted by so many of these teachers have long since passed. Yet our Lord has not returned and the natural—almost inevitable—reaction in the minds of all sane, balanced people is to say that we must be very careful about all this. To avoid vagaries and the exaggerations which have characterised so much of this teaching, people have said that the safest thing is to leave it alone and not to consider it at all, lest one become involved and immersed in the disputation.

There is no question at all but that the history of this whole matter has been rather sad because there has been dogmatism where dogmatism is not justified at all. People have exaggerated their theories, turning them into facts, and have even made such views the test of people's orthodoxy. When this happens, then I think it becomes very serious. There are, for example, three possible views with regard to the millennium. You can be a premillennialist, a post-millennialist or a non-millennialist and you will find equally saintly people—as I shall show you—belonging to the three groups. Yes, but there are certain societies which insist upon your being a premillennialist. Now that is the kind of thing to which I am referring. To elaborate theories and to make them tests of orthodoxy is surely to wrest the Scriptures—as Peter puts it—to your own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Where we cannot be certain, we must be careful. We must be guarded in our speech **[Page 88]** and in our language and we must always try to define the point beyond which we cannot go with certainty.

So it is, I think, for those various reasons that many people have to admit that they have read very little about this subject and know very little about it. But while it is right to be careful, carefulness does not mean that we avoid a thing altogether. And it is perhaps best at this point to emphasise that the essence of wisdom is to be sure that your reading about this subject is balanced. Start with the Scriptures. Then go to these books which will help you. And, above all, read both—or all—sides of the matter, for there are many sides. Do not be content with reading just one side. I find it tragic that people should read one side only. Often they have never heard of another side, or if they have, they are not even prepared to consider it. Surely that must be wrong.

Now there are various books on the subject. There are some people who read that edition of the Bible known as the 'Schofield Bible' and this has footnotes which deal very extensively with our Lord's second coming. So read the Schofield notes, but do not stop there. There is a little book which is easily read, which, on most aspects of this subject, takes the opposite view to that taken by the Schofield notes. It is called *The Momentous Event* and is by W. J. Grier. I suggest that even if you go no further, you do, at any rate, read that much. If you are familiar with the Schofield teaching, then balance it with the other, and come to the Scriptures having read both. Test what you read by the Scripture itself. Nothing is more sad than that people should say, 'This is what I've always been taught, this is what I've always believed, and I'm not going to start thinking about anything else.' That must be wrong. When saintly men of God on both sides—equally saintly and equally scholarly—put forward these views, it behoves us in humility, and with open minds, to read their ideas and to test them as best we can by our understanding of the Scriptures.

But may I add this word of warning: this lecture is largely introductory, but I regard it as most important. Beware of losing your balance with respect to this doctrine. Beware of becoming an exclusivist.

There are some people who take it up as a study and it almost becomes an obsession to them so that they see nothing else in the Scriptures. I knew a man once who, when I first met him, was a theological student and was going to be a minister. His own conversion happened to take place when the preacher was preaching on the second coming, so he thought it was his duty to preach on that subject and on nothing else. And he did that until it was pointed out to him [Page 89] that he was losing the balance of the Scripture. So while it is good for us to read about those things, and it is our duty to do so, let us be careful to preserve a balance.

Of course, the need for balance does not only apply to the doctrine of our Lord's return, it applies to every doctrine. I have never been able to understand the mentality that believes in forming movements in connection with holiness or movements in connection with the second coming. Surely the truth of Scripture is one. These are but aspects and facets of a truth that is a whole. All the doctrines should be held together. If you start having a movement to preach one thing only, you are bound, eventually, to lose your balance. The Church should preach all the doctrines always and not concentrate on certain things only.

So, having made that point, let us now try to approach our subject. First of all, we must look at the terms which are used with respect to our Lord's second coming, and there are a number. One is *the apocalypse*. The word 'apocalypse' means revelation, and that is why the last book in the Bible is called by some, the Apocalypse, and by others, the book of Revelation or the Revelations of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Apocalypse' also means unveiling and conveys the idea of a veil drawn back. That which stood between us and the sight and the vision is removed.

Another term is *epiphany*—we talk of the epiphany of our Lord—and 'epiphany' means an appearance or a manifestation. There is a slight difference of meaning, as you observe, between apocalypse and epiphany. Ultimately they mean exactly the same thing, but they emphasise two different aspects. The idea of apocalypse is that our Lord is standing there, but a veil is also there and then the veil is taken away and we see Him. Epiphany, on the other hand, gives an emphasis to His coming, His appearing.

The third term is *parousia*, which means presence—the presence of the Lord with His people, which is His second coming. And, of course, His presence includes all that has led to it. A person cannot be in your presence without his appearing and if something prevented his being in your presence, if he were on one side of a veil and you on the other, then that barrier must be removed. So there are three terms: revelation, appearance and presence.

But a large number of other terms are also used to describe this great event. It is described as the *day of God*. We find that in 2 Peter 3:12: 'Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, [Page 90] wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.' Another, and most important, term is the *day of the Lord* (1 Thess. 5:2 and 2 Pet. 3:10). This event is also described as the *day of the Lord Jesus* or the *day of [Jesus] Christ* (2 Thess. 2:2). Sometimes our Lord's coming is referred to simply as *the day*. The apostle Paul uses that term in 1 Corinthians 3 where he talks about our building on the one and only foundation. You can use wood and hay and stubble, or gold and precious metals, and they will all be tried, Paul says, by fire. The wood, hay and stubble will be burnt up, but the other will remain. Paul writes, 'Every man's work shall be made manifest: for *the day* shall declare it' (v. 13). That 'day' is sometimes also called the *last day*, the *great day*, the *day of wrath*, and the *day of judgment*.

Now some people teach that these terms not only have different shades of meaning, as I have indicated to you, but describe different things, and it is at this point that the controversy tends to come in. There is a teaching, for instance, which says that the presence of our Lord—the parousia—is entirely different from His epiphany—His appearing. It is said that the parousia means the Lord Jesus Christ coming *for* His saints, whereas His appearing means that He is coming *with* the saints. A great deal of teaching is based on that difference. My answer is that I do not recognise such a distinction. These terms, as I understand it, are interchangeable. As there are different terms to describe the same thing in many other connections in Scripture, so there are with regard to our Lord's second coming.

Now I have always felt that there is one text which ought to be more than enough to settle this matter and it is in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2: 'Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus

Christ’—and the word there is *parousia*—‘and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.’ In these verses the apostle clearly regards ‘the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and ‘the day of Christ’ as the same event, though he uses two different expressions.

There are people who say that there is a great distinction between the terms ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘kingdom of heaven’. But in fact the terms are used interchangeably. Matthew says ‘kingdom of heaven’ in describing the parables; Mark and Luke in describing the same parables use the expression ‘the kingdom of God’. The terms mean the same thing but there are special reasons why one word should be used [**Page 91**] in one case and one in another. It seems to me that it is exactly the same with these great fundamental terms about the second coming and that it is indeed doing violence to the preaching of the Scriptures to suggest that there is a marked difference between the ‘presence of our Lord’ and the ‘coming of our Lord’. Well, there are the main terms that are used. If you read the books that I have described and advocated, you will be able to work all that out in detail and I beg of you to do so.

The next major heading is: What is to be the *manner* of the second coming? What exactly does it mean? Let us be certain that it does not mean the three things to which I have referred, namely, our own death, the coming of the Lord in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost or the destruction of Jerusalem. We reject those three interpretations because certain things are taught very plainly and clearly in the Scriptures with regard to the manner of our Lord’s second coming. First, it will be a *personal* coming. There are people who have taught that by the second coming of Christ the Scripture means His coming again as an influence: He has created the Church, He has influenced the life of the Church and He has influenced the life of the world through the Church. But surely no one reading the New Testament without theories and without prejudices can possibly accept that, for, all along, the terms refer to a personal appearance, they indicate that He in person is going to come. Of course, we are told a great deal about His influence, but over and above that, He Himself will appear.

Second, we are told that His coming will be not only spiritual, but *physical*. There is no doubt at all but that our Lord did come, as He promised on the day of Pentecost through the Holy Spirit. ‘I will come to you,’ He said to His disciples (John 14:18). And He gave an explicit promise: ‘Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me’ (v. 19). Yes, and not only in the resurrection appearances, but in the coming and the sending of the Holy Spirit, our Lord did come into the Church. He is the Head of the Church and He came through the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. There is no question about that—that was a spiritual coming.

There is also no doubt but that He did come in judgment on the Jews as a nation in AD 70 when their Temple was destroyed, their city sacked and razed to the ground and they themselves cast out among the nations. That was a ‘coming of the Lord’ in Judgment.

The Lord still comes in a spiritual way. He has come into the [**Page 92**] Church in a special manner in times of revival. He comes to us individually. In dealing with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit we touched upon the spiritual manifestations of the Son of God (see volume 2, *God the Holy Spirit*). He draws near to each of us, we are conscious of His nearness—that is a spiritual coming of Christ. But when we talk about the doctrine of the second coming, that is not what we have in our minds at all.

The doctrine of the second coming teaches a physical coming of the Lord in the body. He said so Himself. When He was on trial, our Lord told the High Priest, ‘Hereafter shall ye see the Son man ... coming in the clouds of heaven’ (Matt. 26:64). It will be a visible seeing; He will come in a physical manner. The classic passage which teaches this is the great statement in the first chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles: ‘And while they [the disciples] looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:10–11). In and of itself that is enough to establish that according to the Scriptures the second coming will be a physical coming. We find exactly the same thing in Hebrews 9:28 where the contrast is drawn between our Lord’s first and second comings, ‘So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.’

First coming, second coming—both physical. And in Revelation 1:7 we are told, ‘Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him.’

So we must be very careful to draw a distinction and insist that when we talk of our Lord’s second coming, we are not dealing with His spiritual influence; we are not concerned about the general preaching of the gospel and His teaching and the memory of Him; we are not even concerned about His spiritual manifestations; we are referring to something external and physical. So the next point is that His return will be *visible*. He ‘shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11). ‘Every eye shall see him’ (Rev. 1:7). ‘Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man ... coming in the clouds of heaven’ (Matt. 26:64). This, again, is something that I must emphasise. There are some who would teach that our Lord’s presence, His parousia, will be secret and nobody will see Him except His own. Yet I suggest to you that if you go through all the passages **[Page 93]** describing His second coming, you will find they all emphasise its visibility. There is a popular teaching which says that our Lord appeared secretly in 1914. He has already come, it is said, but it was a secret, invisible, appearance, and our Lord is now dwelling in the air, unseen. Such a secret, unseen event is utterly unscriptural.

The next thing is that His second coming will be *sudden*. Our Lord Himself taught that, comparing it to the flashing of lightning, something that is not only visible, but sudden (Matt. 24:27). He also compared His return to a thief coming in the night (Matt. 24:43), and that is also the way in which it is described by the apostle Paul (1 Thess. 5:2). That is why we are warned, ‘Be ye also ready’ (Matt. 24:44), and why we are reminded that as Christians we should never thus be taken by surprise. We must always be looking for Him and always expecting Him. This suddenness is something that is emphasised everywhere in the New Testament.

And, lastly, it will be a *glorious* appearing. In His first coming He came as a baby; He came in humility. But His second appearance will be in glory, on the clouds of heaven, with His holy angels. Far from being secret, He will be heralded by a trumpet blast: ‘The trumpet shall sound’ (1 Cor. 15:52), and the archangel himself will make that trumpet proclamation. Christ will be attended by His saints and He will come as the King of kings and as the Lord of lords.

So when we talk about the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we mean this great, mighty event, this personal coming, this physical coming, this visible coming, this sudden coming, this glorious appearing. As the apostle Paul puts it in writing his epistle to Titus, ‘Looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ (Titus 2:13). I do trust that, having emphasised those aspects of it, we shall proceed to consider it and to think of it in this devotional manner. We shall not approach this teaching theoretically or academically or as if we were trying to fit in the parts of a jigsaw puzzle and establish a theory. Let us rather approach it as we are exhorted to do by the Scriptures. It is something that should rejoice our hearts, should comfort us, should stimulate us to holy living. As John says, ‘Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure’ (1 John 3:3).

There is a right way and a wrong way to study this great doctrine, and if you want to be sure that you are doing it in the right way, this is an infallible test: if your study of it humbles you, your study is in the right way. If it inflates you or inflames your mind and your passion, **[Page 94]** you are studying it in the wrong way. If the study of it leads you to go down on your knees in worship and adoration and praise, it is the right way; but if it gives you a sense of self-satisfaction that you have understood it and, as it were, have encompassed the thing with your own mind, then it is utterly and absolutely wrong. If your study of it makes you realise that the time is short and that you must be up and doing, that you must purify yourself and prepare yourself for it, then you are studying in the right way. But if it is something purely intellectual, and it does not affect your spirit and your way of living, then you can be certain that your whole approach is wrong. This is not a subject for the mind only, it is for the whole person. It is the ultimate end of salvation. It is the completion of all that we have hitherto been privileged to consider together. May God give us grace, therefore, to approach this glorious truth in that way.

9

The Time of His Coming—the Signs

In the previous lecture, our consideration of the doctrine of the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was very largely introductory. We considered the main terms that are used and we also went on to talk about the manner of our Lord's second appearing. We emphasised that it will be personal, physical, visible, sudden and glorious. Nothing, perhaps, which we ever have to consider as Christian people demands such a careful observance of our spirits as this particular subject, since it involves many difficult and abstruse points and is subject to such controversy and debate.

So, then, we now move on to the next aspect of this doctrine, which is the time of His coming. Now if I have emphasised already, in general, the importance of care and the danger of being gripped by prejudices, how much more necessary it is with respect to this particular aspect of the subject, because so much of the interest in our Lord's second coming centres upon this one question of the time. When is our Lord going to appear? Is His coming imminent? May it happen at any moment? And undoubtedly it is because of that kind of interest that this subject always makes its appeal to Christian people.

I remember on one occasion, when Dr Campbell Morgan was still here with us, he was giving a series of lectures, and one evening in the vestry before the meeting, he said to me, 'Keep your eye on the increase in the congregation tonight.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Well,' he said, 'I'm announced to speak on a prophetic subject and I never deal with the question of prophecy but there's always a marked increase in the size of the congregation!'

But we must be very careful lest we be led by the adversary of our **[Page 96]** souls into something that is quite false. Let me therefore repeat that the test of the sincerity of your interest in this question is the effect of your study of it, or of your consideration of it, upon your daily life and living. I think I established in the last lecture that whenever this doctrine is introduced in the Scriptures, it is always as a part of the appeal to holiness. So if your interest in this subject is so that you may know times and dates and may be able to speak with authority as to when certain things are going to happen, then you are just unscriptural. You have a wrong interest, a false, an unhealthy interest. Our concern about the second coming of the Lord should always be in terms of our relationship to Him, and unless it has the effect upon us of making us strive to be holy and to be ready for that great day, then there has been something wrong in the way we have been approaching it: 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure' (1 John 3:3). Unless you are filled with a desire to be purified, and are determined to purify yourself, then either I shall have failed very badly in what I have been saying, or else you will not have been listening to what I am saying! That is the context and we must never forget it. So we must examine our motives.

We must also bear in mind the history of the Church and must remember how saintly men and women of God, whom God used and honoured, were led astray with regard to this doctrine. Some of them actually committed themselves to precise dates, dates which have long since passed, clearly showing them to be wrong. Let us take great warning from the past, and approach this whole subject with the great desire to know Him better, to serve Him more truly, and to strive honestly to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

It is rather astounding that people should ever go astray on this matter because there are at least two statements in the Bible that should have saved them from error. Take the statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:1, 'But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.' And Paul goes on to point out that the day of the Lord 'cometh as a thief in the night'. But in Mark's Gospel there is a still more important statement. Listen to these words of our blessed Lord and Saviour Himself: 'But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven'—notice—'neither the Son, but the Father' (Mark 13:32). There is the Son of God Himself telling us that He does not know the day or the hour. He says that this is a knowledge which was denied Him as the Son of Man and that the angels in heaven do not know it but only the Father. And yet look at **[Page 97]** the books which bear eloquent testimony to the

fact that Christian people have nevertheless been trying to fix the time, exactly, in spite of those two verses, and without adducing any other verses.

Obviously, therefore, I shall not give you any help or indication whatsoever in a precise form as to when this second coming will take place. Indeed, my whole endeavour as we consider this great subject is simply to concentrate on those things about which we can be absolutely certain and I have already mentioned them. There is no question, for example, about the manner in which He will come. Here the Scripture is perfectly plain and explicit. So we shall hold on to those things. As for the rest, all I shall endeavour to do is put various views before you and ask you to weigh them in the light of the scriptural evidence, asking God to guide you. Indeed, I shall be very pleased if, by the end of this series of discourses, you feel less certain than you were at the beginning! I shall feel that I have achieved my object because if there is one subject about which dogmatism should be entirely excluded it is this. I have known large numbers of people whose spiritual life has become dry and barren simply because fixing the time of our Lord's second coming has become almost an obsession with them.

As we approach the question of the time of our Lord's coming, there are certain points which we must take up. For instance: Did the apostles believe that it was going to happen in their own day and generation? That is a question that is often raised. There have been critics of the Scriptures who have said that they cannot accept the Scriptures as the word of God because it is perfectly clear that the apostles—the very writers—believed that the Lord was coming in their own day and they were patently wrong. In this way an attack is made upon the authority of Scripture in general. But what do the Scriptures really say? Well, I suggest to you that the apostles, in their questions to our Lord, most certainly did give the impression that they thought He would return in their day and generation. But I defy you to give me a single statement where they ever taught that in writing. That is a dogmatic statement, but if you examine the Scriptures you will find that it is correct. They seemed to believe it in their questions to our Lord, but they never taught it. There are, however, certain statements and passages which, on the surface, on the first reading, might give the impression that the New Testament writers did teach our Lord's imminent return. So what do we do with them?

Now there are certain principles which we must bear in mind as we **[Page 98]** study the Bible verses dealing with the timing of the second coming. First, when a statement is made from God's side, we must always remember that with God a thousand years are as one day and one day as a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8). The term 'time', when it is thought of from the godward side, must always carry with it that thought. So we must not take our ideas of time and import them into such a statement. That is one principle.

Second, the term 'the last times' or 'the last days', as it is used in the New Testament, generally refers to the whole of the New Testament era, starting with the coming of our Lord and going on to His second appearing. So the time in which we live is a part of the last days or the last time. Therefore it is wrong to limit the terms to something that is yet to happen. We are already in the last time; the Christians of a thousand years ago were; the first Christians were. The last times began at the first advent and will run on until the second advent. That is a very important point to bear in mind as we read our New Testament.

Third, in the Bible we find what is rightly called 'prophetic fore-shortening'. As we read the prophecies in the Old Testament, we notice that the prophet talks about the first coming of the Lord and the second, in the same breath, as it were, and we have to be very careful to make sure which he is referring to. The two seem to be blended in together—that is prophetic fore-shortening. Thus the whole period of the Church in which we are living is there in the Old Testament prophecies, but it is not there very obviously. We find exactly the same thing in the New Testament. There are references to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and references to the day of judgment—the end of the world—more or less telescoped into one another and we have to be careful to bear that principle in mind as we read certain chapters like Matthew 24 and 25 or Mark 13 or Luke 21.

Now let us spend just a moment with this because it is so important. Take those chapters to which I have referred. The question is: What is our Lord dealing with in these discourses? Well, there are three main subjects. The first is: When will the Temple and the city of Jerusalem be destroyed? The disciples had asked that question. Our Lord had told them about the coming destruction of the Temple, and they asked,

'When will this happen?' As our Lord answered that question, He also dealt with the second question which is: What are to be the signs of His coming? Then, in addition to that, He went on to discuss the end of the age and the final judgment. **[Page 99]**

So when the commentators and the expositors throughout the centuries have come to read these chapters, there have been three main schools of thought. There have been those who say that in those chapters our Lord deals with nothing but the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the spread of the gospel. Then there is a second school which teaches that our Lord certainly did deal with that, and in a sense it was His main concern, but He did not stop there. He made use of that to say that the events of AD 70 were also a picture of what would happen on a much bigger scale at the end of the age and on the day of judgment. In other words, what would happen in AD 70 was a fact, yes, but also a picture, a parable, of a yet greater event that would happen when the age was summed up and the final judgment pronounced.

But then there is a third school, and if you were to press me to say which of the three I belong to I should say the third one. This holds that in those chapters our Lord was deliberately dealing with the two things: that certain of His statements are a literal account of what would happen in AD 70 only while other statements refer to literal events at the end of the age and the day of judgment. We read about AD 70 in particular and the end of the age in particular. Now I commend to you a study of those chapters in the light of that principle. (I obviously do not have time to go into it in detail. Perhaps I should not be doing as much as I am, but I am deliberately raising these points in order that we may be aware of the difficulties and see that nothing is so wrong as to jump to conclusions.) So go through these chapters, observing the way in which our Lord deals with Jerusalem only and then with something much bigger—the end of the world and the end of the age. Often confusion arises because people interpret in terms of the end, what our Lord was saying simply in respect of AD 70.

The second question is: Might our Lord come again at any time? Or can we say that certain things will happen before He comes? Here, again, I feel Scripture is very definite and explicit. It tells us that certain signs will precede His coming. The first is the calling of the Gentiles. We find that in Matthew 24:14, a famous and most important verse: 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' That is perfectly clear, is it not? There is a similar statement in Mark 13:10 and we find it also in verse 25 of that great eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans where Paul refers to 'the fulness of the Gentiles'.

[Page 100] Yes, but having said that, let me come to something which is really difficult and yet taught quite clearly. A second sign will be a gathering-in of the fulness of Israel. Romans 11 clearly teaches that before the end the Jews will certainly be gathered into the kingdom. There is a similar statement in 2 Corinthians 3:15–16, which is generally quoted in this connection: 'But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.' But the key passage is Paul's statement in Romans 11, especially from verses 25 to 29, and this is one of the most controversial aspects of this entire doctrine. So what does it teach?

As you may know, many people today believe there is to be a national restoration and conversion of the kingdom of Israel. The Jewish nation, we are told, will be taken back to the Promised Land where a great conversion of the nation will take place, and this nation of the Jews will then become the greatest evangelists that the world has ever known. That is the teaching in its essence, but there are subdivisions and different schools of thought. Some say that the conversion of the Jewish nation will precede the millennium while others believe that it will take place during the millennium.

Now what evidence is there that there is to be a national conversion of the Jews? Two passages of Scripture are generally put forward. In Matthew 19:28 we read, 'Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' Then again we read in Luke 21:24: 'And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.' Those are the important scriptures that are put forward in connection also with the statement in Romans 11. And those friends who hold this view have pointed out that it is a historic fact that the Jews have persisted as a nation and as a race in spite of

terrible persecutions, and that, of course, is true. In this century we have witnessed the important events in 1917 when Jerusalem was recaptured from the hands of the Gentiles, the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and the setting up of the state and the nation of Israel and the return of so many Jews to the Promised Land.

There, in its essence, is the case for this belief that there is to be a national restoration and conversion of the Jews. But let me put certain evidence against that for your consideration. Take the statement in Matthew 8:11–12, where we read, ‘... many shall come from the **[Page 101]** east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out ...’ Then there are very significant statements in Matthew 21. There is, for instance, the parable of the two sons in verses 28 to 32, and there is no doubt but that this parable refers to this matter. It tells of the son who said he would go to work in the vineyard and then did not go, and the son who said, ‘I won’t go,’ but afterwards repented and went. That is followed by the parable of the wicked husbandmen, which concludes with one of the most important statements which even our blessed Lord Himself ever made: ‘Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof’ (v. 43). There is our Lord, addressing the Jewish nation as represented by its religious leaders and, having spoken His parable, He sums it up and emphasises its message with that statement.

Then in Matthew 22:1–14 we read the parable of the king’s marriage feast and the man who went in without his wedding garment—clearly again dealing with the question of the Jews. And there is no doubt at all but that the parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13:6–9 deals with the same subject. The fig tree is to be left for yet another year. It is to have a three-year trial, corresponding with the ministry of our Lord, and, unless it bears fruit at the end, it is to be cut down.

Take all those statements and put them with 1 Peter 2:9: ‘But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’ The significance of Peter’s words is that they are a repetition of what God had said to the children of Israel before He gave them the Ten Commandments. When they were at the foot of Mount Sinai, God said to the children of Israel, ‘Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation’ (Ex. 19:6). They were His people, His special possession, His ‘peculiar treasure’. And the apostle Peter applies to the Church, consisting of Gentiles as well as Jews, the same words that God had applied to the nation of Israel. So if we link that with our Lord’s words in Matthew 21 that the kingdom is to be taken from the Jews and given to another nation ‘bearing forth the fruits thereof’, we see that the Church is the nation to whom the kingdom is given when it has been taken away from the nation of the Jews. That is some of the evidence on the two sides, and I trust that you will consider it, look at the verses and take them in their context.**[Page 102]**

That brings us to the special teaching of Romans 11. Now before we go on to consider it, let me set you some homework. The task I set you is to read and carefully study chapters 9, 10 and 11 of the epistle to the Romans in order that we may arrive together at a conclusion with regard to the meaning of the crucial phrase in verse 26: ‘And so all Israel shall be saved.’ What does the apostle mean when he says that? Indeed, what does he mean in the whole of that eleventh chapter? What is he teaching about the Jews?

Three main lines of exposition have been traditionally put forward and I find it an absorbing task to read these three chapters in the light of the three possibilities. One school of thought says that by ‘all Israel’ Paul means the entire number of the elect from among both the Jews and the Gentiles. ‘All Israel’, according to that interpretation, is the Church of God and the phrase in Romans 11, like the similar phrase ‘Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16, simply means all converted, redeemed, regenerate people.

The second exposition says the words ‘all Israel shall be saved’ refer to the restoration of Israel as a nation. There have been two subdivisions of that school. There have been those who have said that it means the Jewish people in general, and does not mean that every single Jew who is alive when our Lord returns shall be saved—that, they say, is ridiculous. What it does mean is that there will be such a large number that one really will be able to speak of the Jewish nation as redeemed. But there is another school of thought which teaches, and teaches very confidently, that when our Lord returns, every single individual Jew who is alive will be converted. It is said that ‘all’ means ‘all’ and therefore when Paul writes

'all Israel' he means every single Jew. Indeed, some have even gone as far as to say that the apostle is here teaching that every Jew who has ever lived will be saved and all who are already dead will be resurrected in order that they may be saved. If there is one missing, they say, then it is no longer 'all Israel'.

The third possible interpretation is that 'all Israel' refers to the total number of elect Jews, the total number of Jews that are to be saved. This means that Paul is thinking of a spiritual Israel and is not thinking nationally at all. Just as there is to be a 'fulness of the Gentiles', so there is also to be a fulness of the Jews. So the final Church will consist of the fulness of both Israelites and Gentiles.

If I were to begin to tell you of the various other sub-divisions that have been put forward, then we would never finish our exposition, because there have been all sorts of ideas. But I must draw your **[Page 103]** attention to one teaching frequently found today which maintains that the Jews as a nation will have a special place, a special position, in God's redemption, with the result that there will be the saved Church and the saved Jewish nation. I ask you to consider whether or not such ideas are scriptural and in the next lecture we shall attempt to consider the arguments.

10

God's Plan for the Jews

The point at which we have now arrived with regard to our Lord's coming is this: we have seen that the Scripture teaches that certain signs must happen before He comes. First, the teaching of the Christian gospel to all nations will precede this great event, and second, before our Lord returns something will happen with regard to the conversion (I use the term in general) of Israel. And we are now considering what exactly that means. We began by seeing that Matthew 21:43 is a crucial statement. Here our Lord said, 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' And Peter, in 1 Peter 2:9, confirms that by applying to the Christian Church composed of Jews and Gentiles the words that God used just before the giving of the law with respect to the nation of Israel.

But now we must concentrate in particular upon the teaching of this mighty eleventh chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans and especially on the phrase at the beginning of verse 26, 'And so all Israel shall be saved.' Let us look again at the three possible interpretations which I outlined to you at the end of the last lecture. I am sure that I shall not be able to satisfy everybody but I can put forward to you some of the considerations on both sides with regard to the three views.

Now the big question confronting us, I think, is this: Is this first view, which regards 'all Israel' as the Church, the correct explanation? Well, for myself, I do not hesitate to say that I do not think it can possibly mean that because, as we read Romans 9, 10 and 11, we find that the term 'Israel' is used very frequently and every single time it refers not to the Church but to Jewish people. So if I were to believe **[Page 106]** that 'all Israel' here means the Church, I would have to say that the apostle suddenly changed the meaning of the term without telling us. I cannot believe that the great apostle would do such a thing, and that seems to me a sufficient ground in and of itself for saying that 'all Israel' here cannot mean 'the Church'.

Second, then, does 'all Israel' mean Israel as a nation? Now we introduce a subject that could occupy us for many weeks. It has been studied throughout the centuries; books have been written on this one theme alone. We cannot do that so I shall do my best to summarise what is perhaps the most popular view today. Incidentally, I should perhaps have said that I am not going to pay its supporters the compliment of even outlining such vagaries as the so-called 'British Israel' theory. I am discussing, rather, the view which tells us that Paul's words are a reference to the Jewish nation and that what we are taught in the Scripture is something like this: a time is coming when the Jews as a nation will go back to Palestine where they will be converted as a nation and will then become the greatest evangelists that the world has ever known. There are all sorts of sub-divisions to this theory and people do not agree at one point and another, but in its essence that is the teaching, and that is the big subject with which we are concerned. Is the apostle teaching that? Is he saying here that the Jews as a nation will have special treatment and be put in a special position, so that at the end of time there will be the Christian Church and the Jews as a nation? It is not that everybody will be in the Church. No, they say, there will be two lots of redeemed people: the Church and the redeemed Jewish nation.

As, then, we come to look at the suggestion that Paul meant the Jewish nation, there are a number of considerations which we must bear in mind. It is generally claimed that this contention is supported, first, by Old Testament prophecies. People say that if you read those prophecies, you will see that they look forward to some great day of blessing which is yet to take place. It will happen, they say, when the nation of Israel is saved and they add that most Old Testament prophecies have a reference to this. Then these people say that in the Gospels, also, there seems to be a great deal of teaching pointing to the fact that the kingdom is for the Jews only. And there are others who say that our Lord really came to offer the kingdom to the Jews, and because they did not accept it, the Church was brought in as a kind of parenthesis, almost an afterthought, but after the formation of the Church, the Gospel will again be offered to the Jews. There are **[Page 107]** even those who say that the Gospels, and Romans 9, 10 and 11, teach that for the Jews salvation will not come by grace but as the result of their acceptance of the law and the message of the kingdom. In other words, there is a different way of entry into the kingdom for Jews than for Gentiles.

Well, trying to avoid the sidelines and ramifications, and keeping to the main issue, what are we to say about these teachings? Now this question of Old Testament prophecy, of course, is very important and most interesting. We must be very careful at this point and I think the wisest course to adopt is to discover, if we can, what the New Testament tells us. And from the New Testament we are able to say that there are certain prophecies which, if you only read the Old Testament, you would assume refer only to the nation of the Jews, but which the New Testament applies to the Christian Church. Take, for example, the prophecy used by the apostle Peter in his sermon at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. People were asking about the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the men speaking with tongues—these astounding phenomena. And Peter, you remember, replied by saying, ‘This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel’ (Acts 2:16). If you read the second chapter of Joel, you would think that the prophecy had sole reference to the Jewish nation, but Peter said that it applied to the Church. The people were there and then seeing a fulfilment of Joel’s words. I know that the reply is to say, ‘Yes, but that was only a partial fulfilment,’ but I would ask you to read again what Peter said, and I think you will find that he did not say that it was a partial fulfilment. ‘This,’ said Peter, ‘is the fulfilment.’ He said, ‘This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.’ This does not mean that it all happened then. It was the beginning of the fulfilment, yes, and it has been going on ever since. Peter’s words are a reference to the whole of this age to which the Church belongs and which leads to the second coming.

Still more important and significant are James’ words in Acts 15:14–18. James was presiding at the conference of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem and this is what he said:

Simeon [Simon Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: **[Page 108]** that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

James was quoting from Amos 9:11 and this is crucial. If you were to read that prophecy of Amos, you would come to the conclusion (if you were left to yourself) that the prophet was undoubtedly referring to something that was going to happen to the Jewish nation: the tabernacle of David which had fallen down would be raised up and built again. But James, speaking under divine inspiration, did not hesitate to say that the prophecy of Amos had already been fulfilled and the residue of people seeking after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, was the very subject that they were discussing in their conference. ‘It’s all right,’ he said in effect, ‘we must admit these Gentiles. Amos has prophesied that. Amos says that when the tabernacle of David which has fallen down is built again, then the residue of the people and the Gentiles are going to come in, and they have come in, as Peter has reported to us—it’s a fulfilment of the prophecy of Amos.’

Acts 15:14–18 is significant because of the term ‘the tabernacle of David’. Those friends who believe that ‘all Israel’ means the Jewish nation, tell us that we must take the Old Testament promises literally. But James says that the ‘tabernacle of David’ referred to by Amos means the Christian Church which has been founded by David’s greater Son. So James does not take Amos’ prophecy literally but spiritually. Now with this key we must proceed to consider the other prophecies and we can interpret them in exactly the same way.

Let us turn, for instance, to the prophecy of Ezekiel from chapters 40 to the end. These important chapters have often been studied. Indeed, many people have gone back to chapters 37 and 38 as well and in the light of contemporary events have often said that all these prophecies have been fulfilled. For instance, when Molotov and Ribbentrop signed their pact in 1939, some people were absolutely certain that they were seeing the fulfilment of Ezekiel’s prophecy about Gog and Magog and the great northern confederacy. But, of course, this did not seem quite so clear when Germany attacked Russia in 1941! Read those chapters and try to interpret them literally. If you work out all those measurements about the restored Temple, you will find that you have measurements which cannot be fitted into a literal Palestine. If you work out what you are told there about the river, you **[Page 109]** will find that river will have to rise and flow up over mountains—impossible if you take it literally! But if you understand Ezekiel’s words pictorially and spiritually there is no difficulty. A literal interpretation of these chapters involves us in believing that a day is coming when the Jews will again occupy the whole of the land of Palestine with a

literal Temple again built in Jerusalem. Not only that, but burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins will again be offered—and this after the Lord Jesus Christ has given and made one sacrifice for sins once and for ever.

In reply, those friends say that the Temple and its sacrifices will only be a kind of memorial of what our Lord has already done. But can you really believe such a thing? When the one sacrifice is there, once and for ever, and the memorial is the bread and the wine, can you possibly go back again to the types? Surely it is quite unthinkable. I could say a great deal more, but I must leave it at that. There, it seems to me, is the way in which we must approach the argument which is based upon the Old Testament prophecies with regard to 'Israel as a nation'. But let us go on.

It is a simple fact that our Lord never spoke about the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land. Never. There is no reference to it in all His teaching. What we do know is that He said—as I quoted in my last lecture—that a day is coming 'when many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out' (Matt. 8:11–12). He said that, but He never said that they were going back to Jerusalem.

There are also certain other powerful considerations. What about all the statements in which the apostle Paul so delighted? 'Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free' (Col. 3:11). How Paul gloried in that! Yet people tell us that the Jews are separate and that at the end there will be the Church of Gentiles, and also the Jews in a special position. Paul says that there is no longer Jew nor Gentile; they are finished, once and for ever. Our Lord has 'broken down the middle wall of partition ... we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father' (Eph. 2:14, 18). And then there is the tremendous statement of Galatians 3 in which Paul says that we are all of the seed of Abraham—and he was writing, remember, to Gentiles.

I would argue that the teaching of Romans 11, in and of itself, proves that the view we are considering cannot be right because Paul's **[Page 110]** whole argument there is that there is only one root, that the Church is one—Old Testament and New. The Gentiles are grafted in, Paul says. It is not the branches so much as this one root that is important. 'If the root be holy,' says Paul, 'so are the branches' (v. 16). It is this essential oneness and unity and continuity that the apostle is concerned about. It seems to me, therefore, that there is no special place for the Jews as a nation; it is impossible.

Also it is important for us to bear in mind that so often people reading Romans 11:25–26 read it like this: 'For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in and then, after that, all Israel shall be saved'—as if the salvation of Israel happens afterwards. But Paul did not say that. Paul said, '... blindness in part has happened in Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. *And so all Israel shall be saved.*' Paul is not talking about chronological sequence. His words must mean, *in this way, in this manner.* In this way, the way he has been describing, 'all Israel shall be saved.'

So a good principle always when dealing with a difficult statement in Scripture is not to concentrate on that statement, not to pore over it and bring a microscope, as it were, on to it. The better method is to stand back and say, 'I'm not clear about that statement in Romans 11:26. What shall I do? Well, let me go back to the beginning of Romans 9. Clearly chapters 9, 10 and 11 form a whole, they are a complete argument. Paul starts on something at the beginning of chapter 9 and he goes right on with it until the end of chapter 11, then he takes up another subject.'

If, then, we take Romans 11 in its entire context, what do we find? The first question we must ask is this: Why does the apostle introduce this subject at all? Why does he bring in the Jews? It seems to me that there can be only one adequate answer to that question. In his marvellous peroration in chapter 8, Paul is comforting the Roman believers and telling them that God's promises are sure: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate ... Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom He justified, them he also glorified' (Rom. 8:29–30). So Paul stands back and says, in effect, 'What do you say to that? Nothing can stand in God's way.' And then he works up to his terrific climax: 'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, **[Page 111]** nor height, nor depth, nor

any other creature’—nor anything else you can think of, wherever it may be—‘shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (vv. 38–39). All is well.

But then Paul hears somebody saying to him, ‘Wait a minute, you’re letting your eloquence run away with you, Paul. That sounds very wonderful, but what about the Jews? Look at the promises made to them. It doesn’t seem as if they’re being carried out. How many are there in the Christian Church? It seems to consist chiefly of Gentiles and the Jews are persecuting the Christians. If what you are saying is right, and if God’s promises are absolutely sure, what do you say about the position of the Jews?’ That is how this subject came in. How can you reconcile this tremendous assertion of God’s promises being inviolable with the facts that are staring you in the face?

So the apostle takes up the question of the Jews and discusses it in chapters 9, 10 and 11. He is not concerned just to give an outline of his prophetic teaching; he is answering an objection. So let us summarise Paul’s teaching. He says that the rejection of Israel is not complete; it is not absolute; it is only in part. But then he does not stop at that; he goes on to make a crucial statement which is the key to the understanding of the three chapters: ‘Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect’ (Rom. 9:6). Why not? Here is the answer: ‘For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.’ In effect, Paul is saying to the objector, ‘You’re in difficulties, my friend, because you think the term “Israel” means the literal, physical nation of men and women, all of whom are Jews—but it doesn’t. Israel, as used in the Scriptures, doesn’t mean every single Jew because “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” There is the vital distinction.’

Paul then goes on to show that the promises of God have never applied to the literal nation as a whole but have always had reference to the remnant, to the spiritual Jews, those whose circumcision was not outward but inward, of the heart and of the spirit. God’s promises were to this particular people He has chosen within the nation—the true Israel. And God has always kept His promises to these people. Take, for instance, says Paul, the time of Elijah. It looked as if the promises of God had gone entirely astray and indeed Elijah himself thought they had failed, and he turned to God and said, ‘Lord, they have killed thy prophets ... and I am left alone’ (11:3). And God replied, No, there are 7,000 others you do not know about—‘the remnant according to the election of grace’ are always there. Yes, **[Page 112]** when you think there is nobody, Israel, the true Israel, is still there, even now.

Paul goes on to say in Romans 11, ‘Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite.’ Paul says, in effect, ‘If I were the only Christian among the Jews, I would still be able to prove that God’s promises are true: “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew”’ (Rom. 1:1–2). And then Paul continues with his doctrine of the remnant, the spiritual Israel.

And here, I suggest to you, is the key to the solution of this problem as to what ‘all Israel’ means. Paul has talked about the ‘fulness of the Gentiles’. Yes, there is also a ‘fulness of the Jews’. All whom God has called among the Gentiles; all whom God has called among the Jews: they will all be saved, the total Israel that God had in His mind from the beginning will all be brought in. There may be very few, perhaps, in certain generations, and large numbers in others, but they will all come in. ‘All Israel’ must carry that meaning and connotation.

So what we must be careful about is this: the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus Christ when He came because of their carnal ideas of Israel, because of their nationalistic ideas, because He did not come and set Himself up as a king, because they were bound by their political, national, social ideas. They did not recognise the spiritual truth, and they rejected Him. Is that going to happen again? And are some of God’s people falling into the same trap and error of thinking in terms of the nation rather than this remnant, this spiritual Israel about which the Bible is always concerned and which—according to the apostle Paul—is the only Israel in which God is interested from the standpoint of salvation? How dangerous it is to think in terms of the physical nation and not to realise that ‘they are not all Israel, which are of Israel’.

Finally, let us look at some verses from Galatians 3 which put this matter in a very clear way: ‘Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham’ (vv. 7–

9). Then, 'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (v. 14). And then, finally, 'And if ye be Christ's,' Paul says, writing to Gentiles, 'then are ye Abraham's **[Page 113]** seed, and heirs according to the promise' (v. 29).

Abraham's seed is not national, physical Israel. Abraham's seed is all the children of faith, all who exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who belong to Him and who are redeemed by Him. We are violating Scripture, are we not, when we try to re-introduce and perpetuate the distinction between Jews and Gentiles and to say that the promises are to literal, physical Israel.

Thus the conclusion of this interpretation of the words 'all Israel shall be saved' is that they mean the total of all believing Jews in all ages and generations, all whom God has foreseen shall infallibly be saved. So at the end there will be the fulness of the Gentiles and the fulness of the Jews. There are some, and I am among them, who believe that Paul does teach in this chapter that before the end there will be large numbers of conversions among the Jews. It will be astonishing and it will rejoice the hearts of believers then alive. It will be like life from the dead. But they will not be in a special position, the nation of Israel will not be differentiated from Gentiles. No, the Jews, though thousands together may believe, will have to come into the kingdom by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They will have to trust to the blood of Christ as I have had to and every other Christian has had to; there is no other way into the kingdom. No one will ever be able to keep the law. It is by faith in Christ alone, and Him crucified, that anyone can be saved. That is the everlasting gospel and there will never be another. So thank God for it. Thank God that His purposes are sure and that what He has purposed will most surely come to pass. We can believe Romans 8 in spite of appearances: God's purpose according to the election of grace, through the remnant, is still being fulfilled.

[Page 114]

11

The Antichrist

We are still considering the question of the time of our Lord's second coming. The Bible, as we have seen, teaches clearly that certain things will precede this and we have now arrived at the third of these. We have considered the fulness of the Gentiles and the meaning of Paul's phrase 'all Israel shall be saved' and we come now to another important sign—the Antichrist.

This, like the first two, is a vital and interesting matter and, again, one which is the subject of much disagreement. Let me underline once more the fact that we must approach it with humility, with caution and with reverence, knowing that when godly, saintly and able men have confessed a difficulty, it is not a subject upon which we can glibly pronounce a final judgment.

So as we come to consider the question of the Antichrist, let me begin by referring you to certain specific statements in Scripture. First, there is the passage in 1 John 2, especially verse 18: 'Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many anti-christs; whereby we know that it is the last time.' Indeed, 'the Antichrist' is a term which is used only by the apostle John. Then there is also the great passage in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, which, again, is clearly a description of the same person. Furthermore, it is also clear that in Daniel 7:8 and 7:15–28 and in the classic passage in Revelation 13:1–18 with its account of the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, there are references to the same power. And finally, there are also incidental references in 1 Timothy 4 and in 2 Peter 2 and 3.

Now let me give you my proof that Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13 all refer to the Antichrist. First of all, in each passage **[Page 116]** the source, the origin, is the same. In Daniel 7:8, the little horn comes from the fourth beast; in Revelation the rule of the Antichrist is the last phase of the beast from the sea; while the man of sin from 2 Thessalonians is visible after the removal of the Roman Empire.

Second, the time of the origin is the same. The little horn is among the divided successors of the Roman Empire; the beast receives his power and his great authority from the dragon (who is Satan) marching through pagan Rome; and the man of sin is revealed after the restraining power has been removed.

Third, their end is the same. All three are destroyed at the second coming of Christ in final judgment.

Fourth, in each account, the figure exercises religio-political power. The little horn in Daniel 7 is similar to, yet 'diverse' from, the others in that it is a religious power, unlike the other 'kings' (Dan. 8:24). In Revelation 13 the beast wears a crown, yet demands and receives worship, and the 'man of sin' in Thessalonians shows both aspects.

Fifth, the figures in the three accounts show blasphemous presumption. The little horn has a 'mouth that spake very great things' (Dan. 8:20), and, 'He shall speak words against the Most High' (Dan. 8:25). We are told that the beast in Revelation has 'a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies' (Rev. 13:5), while the man of sin exalts himself against God (2 Thess. 2:4).

Sixth, in both Daniel and Revelation the time of their domination is the same: three and a half years. In Daniel it is described as 'until a time and times and the dividing of time' (Dan. 8:25), and as far as the beast in Revelation is concerned, 'Power was given unto him to continue forty and two months' (Rev. 13:5). But Paul in 2 Thessalonians gives no exact time.

Seventh, all three wage war against God's people.

Eighth, they have great power. Of the little horn in Daniel we are told, 'whose look was more stout than his fellows' (Dan. 7:20), while it is asked of the beast, 'Who is able to make war with him?' (Rev. 13:4). And the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians works, we are told, 'with all power and signs and lying wonders' (2 Thess. 2:9).

Finally, in each passage divine homage is demanded: the little horn sets himself over the saints and times and laws of the Most High (Dan. 7:21, 25); the beast causes multitudes to worship him (Rev. 13:12), and the man of sin sets himself up as God (2 Thess. 2:4).

So, having seen the relationship between those three passages, what does it all mean and what is Paul teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2? Well, **[Page 117]** Paul begins by saying that the 'day of Christ' is not as near as some people had been saying, and then he goes on to explain that certain things must happen first.

First, there will be apostasy—'a falling away'. That must happen in the Church and will be *the* apostasy. Then 'that man of sin', 'the son of perdition', the wicked and lawless one will be revealed. Notice that it is not that he will *come*, for he is already present and working, but that at that point he will be revealed.

Paul then goes on to say certain things about him. We are told that he is lawless. This is not negative sin, but positive resistance against God. It is deliberate disobedience in which self-will is raised to the highest power.

Second, he is opposed to God and to Christ and His kingdom and work. He is the *Antichrist*, who stands instead of Christ and takes the Christian name, yet is against the kingdom of truth which the name implies. Third, he sits in the sanctuary of God, and his fourth characteristic is self-deification- 'shewing himself that he is God' (2 Thess. 2:4).

Fifth, Paul says that this is a mystery which, as always in the New Testament, is only revealed to those who have spiritual understanding.

Sixth, his presence is masked by lying pretensions and false miracles, as Paul enumerates in verses 9 to 11—'all power and signs and lying wonders', making people believe a lie, which is the working of Satan, and arrogating to himself the whole domain of faith.

Paul also says that the revelation of the man of sin is delayed by a restraining power (v. 7) and that he is doomed to destruction at Christ's coming: 'whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth' (v. 8). But Paul also makes it clear that 'the mystery of iniquity' has already started—'doth already work' (v. 7). However, as we have seen, unlike Daniel, Paul does not give the exact times.

To what, then, do these descriptions of the Antichrist refer? Three main explanations have been given. One is that this has already happened: that it refers to the Jewish apostasy and rejection of Christ. Others say that it is entirely in the future and refers to a Jewish or Gentile person who will set himself up in the restored Temple in Jerusalem and make war against the saints.

The third explanation is that the Antichrist passages refer to the papacy. This was the view of the Protestant Reformers. To support their argument, they pointed to the words, 'He as God sitteth in the temple of God' (2 Thess. 2:4) which they said refer to the pope's seat in the Church among God's people. They pointed out that papal **[Page 118]** power began after the downfall of the Roman Empire, which corresponds with the biblical account of the origin of the Antichrist. The politico-religious element, they said, is also present in the papacy, as is the demand for worship, and they further maintained that there is an opposition to the gospel, to be seen most subtly in the denial of the doctrine of justification by faith only and in the exaltation of the Church. This view also compares the 'lying wonders' with the large number of supposed miracles upheld by the Roman Catholic Church, and as far as 'believing a lie' is concerned, they pointed to the faith in miracles, for example, and to the fact that the Council of Trent anathematised the true faith.

The Reformers further suggested that the 'restrainer' refers to the Roman emperors, whose power was then removed; the 'spirit of his [the Lord's] mouth' in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 was the Protestant Reformation; and so the 'tenth part of the city' which fell, in Revelation 1:13, becomes a reference to the French Revolution.

Those, then, are the possible interpretations of this tremendous subject of the Antichrist. So much remains uncertain, and objections can be raised against all three views. Of some things, however, we can be certain. As we have shown, the Antichrist was already at work in the days of the apostles Paul and John, but it is very clear that though there may have been many imitations of him, he will reach his fullest power

immediately before the end of this age. Furthermore, while Daniel shows the political aspect, Paul emphasises the ecclesiastical aspect of his rule, and you find both in Revelation 13, with the beast from the sea symbolising political, and the beast from the earth ecclesiastical, power. Possibly those two aspects may follow one another, with a terrible ecclesiastical power coming after an equally terrible political power.

Finally, we can, I think, be certain that the Antichrist will ultimately be concentrated in one person, who will have terrible power, and will be able to work miracles and do wonders in a way that will almost deceive the elect themselves.

Now this, it seems to me, is the sense of their teaching and we must realise that we ourselves are confronted by such a power. We must not be guilty of over-simplification but we can be sure that from the beginning of the Church until the very end an evil power is at work within the Church. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers ... against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12).

12

The Interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27

We are continuing with the subject of the time of our Lord's second coming and let me emphasise again that I am not giving you a scheme or an exposition which I regard as perfect and which alone must be right, I would not dare venture to say such a thing. I am simply trying to put before you some of the various ideas and types of interpretation, while indicating, as anyone who is concerned to teach the Scriptures must do, the interpretation that most commends itself to my mind and to my understanding. I shall continue to repeat this because it seems to me to be the most important point I can make in connection with this whole subject. If I can somehow shake the glibness and the dogmatism that has characterised this matter I shall be most pleased, and I thank God that there are signs and indications that people are prepared to consider this matter anew. It may well betoken a period of blessing in the history of the Church.

In the last lecture we were considering together the biblical teaching concerning the Antichrist, the man of sin, the son of perdition, who, according to one interpretation at any rate, is to appear, and to be manifested, before our Lord comes again.

Now, having done that, there are certain statements in Scripture that we must consider together. Certain passages in particular, and in one case a whole book, have great relevance to this subject. One such passage is the ninth chapter of Daniel which we shall consider now. Other passages are Matthew 24 and 25, parts of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 and also some verses in 2 Thessalonians. And then, of course, quite inevitably, there is the book of Revelation. I am not, however, proposing to take you in detail through Revelation. That is something that should be done, and can be done, but not in discourses such as **[Page 120]** these on biblical doctrines. To expound a whole book would spoil the symmetry of a series of addresses. But we cannot deal with this great theme of the second coming without indicating how the book of Revelation is to be interpreted and, God willing, I hope to do that.

So there is our programme. Now anybody who has ever studied this question of prophecy will, I am quite sure, be in great sympathy with me from the standpoint that the books that have been written and the ideas that have been propagated with regard to the chapters to which I have referred, are so voluminous that it is indeed a great task to know how to organise one's material, what to leave out, and what to emphasise. Now any man who preaches the gospel likes to read a passage and expound it, explaining the meaning of the words and showing its general tenor, saying, 'This is the statement of Scripture and here are the lessons.' But in dealing with a subject like this it really is not enough to do that, though there are many who do. There are many who, in handling these prophetic questions, simply stand up, give their own interpretation and leave it at that. Of course, that is a very simple and nice thing to do! But to me, it is not sufficient because there are other ideas, and people brought up on these ideas will want to know why they are being given a different interpretation, and what is wrong with their idea. It is an essential part of teaching that we should help one another as far as we can and, therefore, much as I would like to, I cannot simply give a positive exposition. I shall have to give other views and beg of you to try to evaluate them, giving you as much guidance and help as I can.

Now here is the difficulty. If I had been dealing with these matters before 1830, my task, my problem, would have been very much simpler. But I cannot ignore what has happened since 1830. A new school of interpretation came into being round about that date which has had a profound influence. Its two leaders were, first and foremost, the Reverend Edward Irving, a minister of the Church of Scotland who came to a church in London after having been the assistant of the great Dr Thomas Chalmers in Scotland. Edward Irving exercised a most amazing ministry in London, becoming famous, almost notorious, for the brilliance of his preaching. But he developed an interest in the second coming, and began to attend conferences which were also attended by the saintly John Nelson Darby, one of the founders of the Brethren. Now those two men became the leaders of a series of conferences which were held to study and discuss these prophetic questions, and the outcome was a new school of teaching.

[Page 121] Of course, since then, there have been many sub-divisions and ramifications of the teaching proposed by Edward Irving and J. N. Darby. Indeed, they did not all agree from the start—I mention this just to show you the complexity of the problem. There was a real disagreement between J. N. Darby and the equally saintly George Müller who himself belonged to the Brethren but did not agree with Darby's prophetic interpretation. Thus you find two saintly, able men disagreeing, and there were others, such as B. W. Newton. But the teaching that has proved to be most popular and that has become widespread is the one that has come down from J. N. Darby.

D. L. Moody, the evangelist, adopted J. N. Darby's teaching and, of course, because Moody was such a well-known man as a result of his evangelistic campaigns, it was popularised immediately. The formation of the Moody Bible Institute popularised it still more and the publication of the Schofield Bible was possibly most influential of all. As a result, this view is highly esteemed in many evangelical circles. It has its own particular interpretation of most of the chapters that I have mentioned, and since one must always expound the Scriptures in a given situation, any exposition of Daniel 9 which did not pay attention to this teaching would indeed be inadequate.

So I come now to consider what exactly we find here in Daniel chapter 9, and I shall indicate the different views as we go along. We are particularly concerned, of course, with verses 24 to 27, the verses at the end of the chapter. The setting is this. The children of Israel are in captivity in Babylon, but the time of the end of the captivity is drawing near. Daniel starts the chapter by telling us that through the study which he has undertaken he has discovered that the captivity is to last for seventy years. 'In the first year of the reign of Darius ... I Daniel understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.' And Daniel, in the light of that, goes to God in prayer and asks the obvious question: 'What is going to happen now?' He admits the sin, he admits that the nation has deserved all that has happened to it, but he wants to know: What of the future? And then the reply is given to him by the angel Gabriel. And we can read this reply in verses 24 to 27.

I remind you again that there have been many different interpretations of this chapter. Those who know the IVF Bible commentary will notice that I shall be following, in the main, the exposition given there by Professor Edward Young of the Westminster Theological Seminary **[Page 122]** in Philadelphia, America, who gives a very fine interpretation and exposition after the traditional Protestant understanding of this chapter. Incidentally, Edward Young, himself a great Old Testament scholar, says that this is undoubtedly one of the most difficult passages in the entire Old Testament, and there is no question about that.

So what are we told? Well, first of all, let us look at the actual phrases, the very words that are used, before we come to interpret them. The first thing we are told is that God has decided something with regard to the people: 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.' The first thing, therefore, is to understand that God has a plan for the people. He has determined that certain things will be done to them. What happens to Israel is not something haphazard or accidental; it is all determined by God. So here now we have a foreview, a foretelling. Prophecy includes foretelling—it is not only foretelling but it does include it. It is not simply preaching but tells what is going to take place. And now we immediately come up against the term *seventy weeks*.

What do the words 'seventy weeks' mean? Well, strictly speaking, these words should not be translated 'seventy weeks', but 'seventy sevens'. It may be argued that seven days make a week, yes, but it does not of necessity follow that here a week is meant. The literal meaning is 'seventy sevens'. There is a period of time referred to as 'seven', and there are going to be seventy of those particular 'sevens'. Now there are those who say that seventy weeks means just that: 490 days, and that in prophecy a day always means a year, so that seventy weeks, of necessity, means 490 years. However, that in itself is open to discussion: does a day in prophecy always mean a year? And you will find that there are all sorts of disagreements, and there are some who say that it does in chapter 9, but not in the other chapters.

I am led to the conclusion that it is unwise to regard the 'seventy' and 'seven' as exact terms. I suggest to you that in prophecy numbers are symbolical. They are not meant to be exact, but are meant to convey

an idea. Now I want to use a phrase that was used by a man who was perhaps the greatest evangelical commentator of the last century, certainly he was the greatest in Germany, a man called Hengstenberg. If ever you see a book with the name of Hengstenberg on it, buy it, keep it and devour it! Hengstenberg said that these numbers in Scripture can be described as having *concealed definiteness*. That is a wonderful phrase: they are definite, and yet not definite in [Page 123] the sense that you can say exactly when a thing begins and when it ends. Yes, there is a sort of certainty about them, but there is an uncertainty also, and it is because people have not realised the concealed part of the definiteness that so many of the greatest names in the history of interpretation have arrived at definite conclusions which history has proved to be absolutely wrong. The great Bengel was guilty of that. Gratton Guinness, one of the great expositors on this subject in the last century, was also wrong. Such men said that the numbers are absolutely definite and they say they could tell us when a thing was going to happen, but they were always wrong and they will always be wrong. God wants us to know that the time is definite in *His* mind, our Lord's second coming will happen at a definite time, but you and I can never say the exact day. There are indications which would make us think and be ready, but we can never say it must happen on such and such a date. The whole history of prophecy is strewn with the wreckage of the reputations of men who have not taken into account the fact of concealed definiteness: exact and yet not exact, the exactness being concealed from us.

I suggest to you, therefore, that a good way of understanding these numbers 'seventy' and 'seven' is this: in biblical symbolism seven is always a perfect number, as is the number ten. So seven times ten, which is seventy, suggests the complete era, the complete period, divided again into perfect periods suggested by the figure seven. And I do suggest to you that the more you take hold of the idea that you must not press these figures too far but regard them symbolically, the happier you will be in your reading of the Scriptures and the less liable to fall into error and bring the whole of prophecy into disrepute.

What, then, will happen during this period of seventy 'sevens'? We are told that six things will happen, three negative and three positive, and they are all given in verse 24. The three negative things are: first, 'to finish the transgression', which means to put it away, to put an end to it. Second, 'to make an end of sins', which means, of course, that sins are going to be forgiven; an end will be made of them because they will have been dealt with; they will be sealed up; they will be finished. That leads to the third thing, which is, 'to make reconciliation for iniquity'. There is a need of reconciliation. Man, by sin, has become estranged from God, his sin comes between him and God, and before man can be reconciled to God, sin must be removed. Something will take place which will put iniquity on one side and man will again be reconciled to God. There are the negatives.

[Page 124] But now look at the three positives. The first is, 'to bring in everlasting righteousness'. What a wonderful phrase that is! Righteousness needs to be brought in. It is not here, but will come, it is a part of the prophecy. I leave it at that for the moment; I shall go further later on. The second positive thing is, 'to seal up the vision and prophecy'. To seal up means to wind up, to finish, to fill up. There is going to be an end to vision and prophecy. I shall leave the exposition until later, I am simply noting the things now. And the third positive thing is, 'to anoint the most Holy'. A few people would say that that means the most holy place, but the suggestion, rather, is that a most holy person will be anointed. Those, then, are the six things that we are told will happen during these seventy 'sevens'.

So in verse 24 we are given the programme. But now we come to the vital questions: When and how is all this going to happen? And in verses 25, 26 and 27 we are given an answer. We start with verse 25: 'Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.' Now the first thing we notice here is the phrase, 'from the going forth of the commandment'. What is meant by this 'going forth' of the word? It is here that disagreement comes in. Those people who are anxious to make an exact 490 years are bound to differ among themselves as to the way in which they interpret this phrase. Some say that the going forth happened in the first year of Cyrus, which means 538 BC. Others say it means the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, which means 445 BC. But neither one party nor the other can provide proof, and other people have still other ideas. All we know is that the beginning is marked by the giving or the sending forth of the

commandment. When was this? The most obvious interpretation is that it was the time when God first gave His command to Cyrus, but it does not of necessity follow that that was when it began to be carried out. Rather that was when it was first mooted, when it was first indicated, when God first showed that this was to be done. But we cannot prove it and, therefore, how dangerous it is to try to fix exact dates! All we know is that from the going forth of the first talk about this to the coming of the Messiah the Prince there was to be a period of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.

Now notice this term, 'the Messiah the Prince'. In the Revised Version, it is translated 'the anointed, the Prince', anointed having the **[Page 125]** same meaning, of course, as Messiah. But it is interesting to notice that the person is described as someone who is at one and the same time an anointed prophet and a Prince, and that clearly fixes the One to whom it refers. The Prince is none other than our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself. And on that point, I think, most people are agreed.

'But why this division,' says someone, 'of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks and, in verse 27, of one week?'

The seventy weeks are divided up for us: seven, sixty-two, and the remaining one week. The first seven covers the period of the actual rebuilding of the destroyed city of Jerusalem. The Chaldeans had destroyed it, and the remnant who went back rebuilt the walls, the city and the Temple. So clearly the first division of seven covers that.

Then, following that, there are sixty-two weeks to the coming of the Messiah the Prince, which is clearly a reference to the first advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is not much difficulty about that, and most people are prepared to agree.

But when we come to verse 26, there is no longer any agreement. We read that 'After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.' Now that phrase 'not for himself' should read: 'shall have nothing', and that is how it is translated in the Revised Version. It means that He shall have none belonging to Him. It is a suggestion that when the Messiah is cut off and is killed, He is absolutely alone. Everybody deserts Him. He seems to have nothing, nothing that He can claim as His own. That is the first part of the statement.

Verse 26 goes on to say, '... and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.' And it is here that there is great division and disagreement. The traditional Protestant and Reformed exposition is that this is clearly a reference to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman army in AD 70 during the reign of the Emperor Titus. Notice that in verse 26 these words come immediately after the statement that the Messiah will be killed—just as the events of AD 70 came soon after the death of our Lord. But according to the new school of thought that started in 1830, this is a reference to something that is yet to happen. However, let us bear that in mind for the moment, and go on to verse 27: 'And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.' Now again that is not a very good translation. Perhaps a **[Page 126]** better way of putting it is this: 'He shall make the covenant firm,' or 'He shall cause the covenant to prevail.' What is important is that we should not read it as, 'He shall *make* a covenant.' The meaning is much stronger than that. The Authorised Version has *confirmed* which does give the right suggestion, but so often people interpret it as, 'He shall make a covenant.' And we are not told that. The suggestion is that there was already a covenant in being which He will make firm. He will establish it. He is going to make it effectual.

We are also told in verse 27 that in the middle of the week, 'He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.' Something is going to happen as the result of the action of this person which will put an end to the sacrifices and the oblation. And the last thing we are told is that, 'for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.' Now here the Authorised Version is confusing. The Revised Version, which is altogether superior, reads, 'and upon the wing of abominations shall come One that maketh desolate'. That is an excellent translation, and the margin of the Revised Version is perhaps even better for that puts it like this: 'Upon the pinnacle of abominations shall come One [or be One] that maketh desolate and even unto the consummation, and that determined, shall wrath be poured upon the desolate or the desolater.'

Those are the actual statements which confront us. Now the words, 'upon the wing of abominations' or, 'upon the pinnacle of abominations' are surely a reference to the destruction of the Temple. Starting at the very pinnacle, the Temple is to be completely destroyed.

The great question that arises is this: What is the interpretation of verses 26 and 27? There are two main schools of thought, and the argument turns upon this: When does the seventieth week take place? The prophet has told about the seven and the sixty-two, but that only comes to sixty-nine. When does the remaining week take place?

Another question we ask is this: Do the events which are described in verse 26 take place in the seventieth week? All we are told is that they take place 'after threescore and two weeks', but remember that the threescore weeks and two come after the seven, which means that the events take place after sixty-nine weeks. The passage does not actually say that the events will happen in the seventieth week, nor does it say they will not happen then. All it actually says is that they will happen after week sixty-nine. Does that mean in the seventieth week? That is the great question.

[Page 127] And the third problem at issue is: Who is the 'he' at the beginning of verse 27? 'And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.' Does that 'he' refer to the Messiah in verse 26? Or does it refer to the prince of whom we read in the second half of verse 26?

Now the view of those who do not believe in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and of those who do not believe that prophecy ever means foretelling, is that they can easily expound all this by saying that the events have long since happened, and even took place before the birth of our Lord and Saviour. This, they say, is nothing but an account of what was done by a man called Antiochus Epiphanes, with the anointed one being one of the priests of Israel who was killed by him. But we need not waste our time in considering that because it is simply based upon presuppositions which rule out the possibility of prediction and, indeed, undermine belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures.

So we have to consider two views: first, the view that became popular—and is very popular still among many people—originating from the conferences of 1830. There I can do nothing better than read to you a statement of that view: 'These are weeks or, more accurately, sevens of years, seventy weeks of seven years each. Within these weeks the national chastisement must be ended and the nation reestablished in everlasting righteousness.' I wonder whether you notice the significance of that? It says that the *nation* must be re-established in everlasting righteousness. But there, at once, some of us feel like raising a query. We are not told that the nation shall be re-established in everlasting righteousness; what we are told is that everlasting righteousness shall be brought in, which is not the same thing. But, you see, if you start off with the theory that the Jews are to have a special place in the kingdom of God, and that God is still concerned about them in a special manner, and that they will enter into the kingdom in a special way, and so on, then, of course, you must import that idea everywhere.

Now we cannot deal with this whole subject in this lecture, but let me just read the remainder of this exposition so that you can consider it when we take it up in the next lecture. It says that the seventy weeks are divided into: seven (forty-nine years); sixty-two (434 years); one (seven years). In the seven weeks (the forty-nine years) Jerusalem was to be rebuilt in troublous times (there, as I told you, we are all agreed). This was fulfilled, as Ezra and Nehemiah record. Sixty-two weeks comes to 434 years, and thereafter Messiah was to come. This **[Page 128]** was fulfilled in the birth and manifestation of Christ (again we are agreed). Now then, verse 26, they say, is obviously an indeterminate period. I wonder whether it is obvious to you that verse 26 must be an indeterminate period? There one raises a query. The statement of this view continues:

The date of the crucifixion is not fixed, it is only said to be after the threescore and two weeks. It is the first event in verse 26. The second event is the destruction of the city—fulfilled in AD 70. Then unto the end comes a period which is not fixed, but which has already lasted nearly two thousand years. To Daniel was revealed only that wars and desolations should continue. The New Testament revealed that which was hidden to the Old Testament prophets, that during this period should be accomplished the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and the outcalling of the Church.

You see, this view tells us that the Old Testament knows nothing about the Church, nothing about the Gentiles coming in and being blessed and saved. It goes on: 'When the Church age will end and the seventieth week begin'—you see the implication? It says there is a great gap of at least two thousand years between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth week—a gap introduced by this interpretation. We are then told that the end of that time, when the Church age has finished and the seventieth week has begun, is nowhere revealed. They say, 'Its duration can be but seven years; to make it more violates the principle of interpretation already confirmed by fulfilment.'

Verse 27 deals with the last week and the supporters of the view we are considering tell us dogmatically that the 'he' of verse 27 is 'the prince that shall come' (v. 26), 'whose people, Rome, destroyed the Temple in AD 70. He is the same,' we are told again, 'as the little horn of chapter 7'—we talked about that in the last lecture—'he will covenant with the Jews to restore their Temple sacrifices for one week'—as a matter of fact, we are not told this in verse 27—'but in the middle of that time he will break the covenant and fulfil Daniel 12 and 2 Thessalonians 2. Between the sixty-ninth week, after which Messiah was cut off, and the seventieth week, within which the little horn of Daniel 7 will run his awful course, intervenes the entire Church age. Verse 27 deals with the last three and a half years of the **[Page 129]** seven which are identical with the great tribulation of Matthew 24, the time of trouble of Daniel 12 and the hour of temptation of Revelation 3.'

There, then, is the view so commonly accepted today as the interpretation of this chapter. Now before I come to express criticisms of that view and to remind you in detail of the traditional Protestant interpretation prior to 1830, we must try to think it out. The questions which you must keep in your mind are:

Has the programme outlined in verse 24 yet been carried out?

What about the things described in verse 26?

Who is the 'he' at the beginning of verse 27?

Did the events described in verse 26 happen in the seventieth week or in a supposed interval between the end of sixty-nine and the beginning of seventy?

Is there a great gap between the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth week?

Think those things out for yourself. One part of this scheme of interpretation, an interpretation which, as I have said, gives a special place to the Jews in God's eternal purpose and in the coming kingdom, is the belief that the Temple will again be built in Jerusalem, and blood sacrifices will be introduced once more. Proponents of this view do not accept my interpretation of the Antichrist given in the last lecture but regard the Antichrist as entirely in the future, and link this up with a similar interpretation of the book of Revelation.

The subject is difficult and involved, but having laid down these principles and this foundation, it will be somewhat easier for us to continue.

13

Daniel 9 Concluded and the Secret Rapture

In the last lecture, we looked in detail at the statement in Daniel 9:24–27, and we simply explained the terms in order to bring out the meaning. We saw that there are three main interpretations. The first we dismissed because it does not regard these verses as a prophecy, but thinks that they are history written after the event. We need not waste time with that. That leaves us with the two main teachings and we looked in particular at the interpretation that has been extremely popular during this present century, having been taught with a new impetus from about 1830 onwards.

Now according to that teaching, you remember, the events that are referred to in verse 24 have not yet happened, but will take place in the future. This interpretation also teaches that there is a great gap between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week and says that the seventieth week has not yet started. The sixty-nine weeks are completed, but the whole Church era must finish before the seventieth week begins. It is the so-called *gap theory*.

The third emphasis of this teaching concerns the person who is described at the beginning of verse 27—‘And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation...’ Friends who advocate this teaching say that the ‘he’ is the prince described in verse 26: ‘And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself [shall have nothing]’—in other words, he is left alone—‘and the people of the prince **[Page 132]** that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.’

And when will ‘he’ bring about the events of verse 27? Well, as we have seen, it is said that this all belongs to the future and will happen during the seventieth week. For the first three and a half years of the seventieth week this prince will have a covenant with God’s people. By then the Jews will all be back in Palestine, having rebuilt their Temple, and will have reintroduced their animal sacrifices; and this prince will have made a covenant with all God’s people. But suddenly, halfway through the week, he will go back on his word. Breaking his own covenant, he will begin to persecute them in a terrible manner and will continue to do so for the following three and a half years. But then the Lord will return and will destroy the prince, delivering His people, and will usher in the millennium. That is the essence of this teaching with regard to this section in the ninth chapter of Daniel.

As we look at this view, I want us to consider also another possible way of expounding and explaining these great verses. The problem at once confronting us, of course, is the question of ‘the gap’. The Scriptures do not actually say that there will be a gap, all they say is, ‘After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off.’

‘But,’ say the exponents of the gap theory, ‘the Scriptures do not say that there is *not* a gap.’

But surely that is not quite enough.

‘Well,’ they reply, ‘but the Scriptures do say that there is a division between weeks sixty-nine and seventy.’

Quite true, but the Scriptures also say that there is a division between the seven and the sixty-two: ‘Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.’ Why did Gabriel not say ‘threescore and nine weeks’? But he did not. The sixty-nine weeks are divided in exactly the same way as week sixty-nine is divided from week seventy. Yes, but even the people whose theory we are considering do not say that there is any gap at all between the seven and the sixty-two. They agree that the sixty-two weeks follow on directly from the seven weeks, and say that the seven probably refers to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and then the sixty-two to the period from the end of that until the coming of the

Messiah the Prince. Yet suddenly we are told that there is a gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks [**Page 133**] which has already extended to very nearly two thousand long years and may go on still further.

I ask you to consider the gap theory very carefully and seriously. Does that seem to you to be a fair way of expounding Scripture? Does it commend itself to you as something that arises naturally out of the actual statement before us? I confess that for myself I find it extremely difficult to accept such a view because it seems to me that the relationship of the sixty-two to the seven is exactly the same as the relationship of the sixty-nine to the final seventy.

Let me therefore suggest to you that there is another way of looking at this great statement which, it seems to me at any rate, gives us great comfort and is a proof of the veracity of prophecy because it has already been fulfilled. Take verse 24: 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.' At once there is a suggestion that something climactic and drastic is going to happen to this people and to their city in seventy weeks. What will happen? First, 'to finish the transgression', to bring it to a final end. Then, 'to make an end of sins', to deal with sins, to make a way of forgiveness. Next, 'to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy'. Finally, 'to anoint the most Holy'.

Can you not see it all in the New Testament? It is amazing to me how anybody does not see this. Look at the words, 'to finish the transgression'. Did a final kind of judgment not come upon these people in AD 70? Our Lord had warned them, and finally it came: 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.' And the people and the city suffered judgment then, and have suffered it ever since.

Then there is, 'to make an end of sins': is that not our blessed, glorious Christian gospel? During that period an end *was* made to sin. The fountain for sins and uncleanness was opened on Calvary's hill. The way of atonement was opened. The way of forgiveness actually came. And then look at it in this other way: 'to make reconciliation for iniquity'. What is the gospel that is committed unto us? This is it, says Paul: 'To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). Daniel is giving us a foreview of the very thing that happened during this period.

What else? We read, 'to bring in everlasting righteousness'. You remember that the other view says that the righteousness of the nation of Israel will be eternally established. But we are not told that. We are [**Page 134**] told simply that everlasting righteousness shall be brought in, and has not everlasting righteousness been brought in by our blessed Lord and Saviour, by His perfect life, by His making Himself an offering for sin? God's way of righteousness, says Paul to the Romans, has come in now. It is my gospel, says the apostle: 'For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith' (Rom. 1:17). This is the everlasting righteousness and there will never be another. It is the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ and it is the only righteousness that God will ever recognise or humanity ever know. It is indeed an everlasting righteousness.

And because of the righteousness brought in by our Lord, He will 'seal up the vision and prophecy'. Christ is the fulfilment of the prophecies. 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil' (Matt. 5:17). So the prophecy and the vision are sealed up, naturally, because our Lord is the One to whom they all point. Then, 'and to anoint the most Holy'. And He was anointed. He was anointed for His work by the Holy Spirit, and He gives the same anointing, by the same Spirit, to all who belong to Him. The New Testament Scriptures tell us specifically that God anointed Him. He is the Messiah. So I suggest to you that verse 24 is entirely messianic. It is a prophecy of what would happen when Christ came to do His perfect work.

Verse 25 presents no difficulty at all; it is perfectly clear. When we come to verse 26, this is what we are told: 'After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing.' Now we know that that happened exactly. What then? 'And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.' And that literally happened. Titus was the name of the prince and, in a most terrible and almost diabolical manner, he and his Roman legionaries did destroy the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Josephus describes what happened: 'There never has been such a havoc upon earth as there was

then, the suffering, the tribulation, the cruelty of that war still stands out in the whole of history.’ And here, amazingly, is a prophecy of that event.

But then come along to verse 27: ‘And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease.’ Now I have told you the other view which suggests that this is a reference to that prince of the people who shall come. But try this experiment—read this section aloud to somebody who has not considered the passage and ask who [Page 135] the ‘he’ refers to. Surely the subject, the one who is being spoken about in the entire paragraph, is the Messiah? The other prince comes in and does his work, but the theme, the subject, is the Messiah. ‘He shall confirm that covenant with many for one week’—and the Messiah did that. You will remember that we were at pains to point out that the verse reads, ‘shall confirm’—not make—‘the covenant’. He will establish a covenant that was already in existence. And did not the Lord Jesus Christ do that? The covenant of grace and salvation starts back with Abraham; indeed, it started in the garden of Eden, as we saw earlier (see volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*). The Lord Jesus Christ came to confirm that covenant, and He did confirm it. He established it. He made it solid. He is the ratification of it all. And He ratified it by His shed blood, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews teaches us (ch. 9). Ah yes, and then go on: ‘And in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.’ The great antitype having come, the types are, of course, no longer necessary. When ‘the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29) has come and has been killed to make the atonement, shadows and types are no longer needed. So the sacrifice and the oblation are made to cease and, in an amazing way, they have ceased. There is no Temple, and sacrifices are not offered. The one final offering has been made, once and for ever, as, again, the book of Hebrews goes on emphasising and repeating.

But then we read this: ‘And for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.’ Quite so. The immediate consequence of the Jews’ rejection of Him was that their city was attacked and made utterly desolate, so that, in a sense, He Himself did that to them. In other words, there is a parallel between verses 26 and 27. There are two sections to verse 26, and two sections to verse 27. In the first half of verse 26 we are told about the Messiah being cut off and having nothing, and, in connection with that, there is a terrible flood, and the war with all its desolation which literally did take place in AD 70. And there is an exact repetition of the same two things in verse 27. First of all, the Messiah Himself confirming and ratifying the covenant and by His death putting an end to the sacrifices, and then in the second half the desolation and the war and the destruction which took place. And it all literally happened in AD 70.

So there are the two views and I would ask you to consider them carefully and prayerfully. I see in this section of Daniel a most [Page 136] astounding prophecy of what literally took place over five hundred years later. What a foreview of the gospel! What a marvellous prophecy of God’s eternal way of salvation! Daniel, you remember, was troubled. He said: What is going to happen? What will the future be? And here is the answer. He is told what will happen to his nation and to his people. But, thank God, it does not stop at that. He is also told of what God will do in fulfilment of His ancient covenant and promise. He is told about the Messiah, the everlasting righteousness, the atonement, the reconciliation and all the glory of the Christian salvation. It therefore seems to me to be totally unnecessary to introduce a gap between weeks sixty-nine and seventy. Seventy follows on directly from sixty-nine. These things are in a sequence and they happened in the very sequence taught here.

Another matter which is taught by the same school of interpretation concerns not only the *time* of His coming but also the *mode* of His coming. I am referring to what is commonly called the preliminary rapture of the saints. Now this teaching, unlike the interpretation of Daniel 9, was not known before 1830. It was first taught at one of the prophetic conferences which were known as ‘The Powerscourt Conferences on Prophecy’. The teaching is that there is a vital difference between the *coming* of Christ and the *appearing* of Christ, also called the ‘day of the Lord’ or ‘the manifestation of the Lord’ or ‘the appearing of the Lord’. It is said that our Lord’s coming has reference only to the Church, to Christian people, and does not concern the world directly. When our Lord comes He will come only for His saints. The Old Testament saints will be raised, the Christian saints who have already died will also be raised and the Christians who remain on earth will be changed and will be taken up with these other resurrected saints

to meet the Lord in the air. Then, it is said, after the Church has already been removed and after the Holy Spirit has also gone with the Church, the Jewish remnant will be left here upon earth. They will be back again in the Holy Land, the Temple will be built, and the sacrifices will be offered. Then the Antichrist will appear and he will make a covenant and do all that I have been describing. This will continue until the day of the Lord, when our Lord comes back again, with the saints this time—not *for* them but *with* them. Then He will destroy the Antichrist and will introduce the great period of the millennium.

According to this 1830 teaching, our Lord's second coming will thus be in two stages, there will be two separate comings. He will [Page 137] come the first time only to receive the saints unto Himself. He will come the second time, accompanied by the saints, to destroy the Antichrist and to introduce the period of the millennium. But it does not stop at that. This first coming of the Lord will be secret. Nobody will see Him but the saints. It will be a *secret rapture*. Unbelievers will not know that He has come. All they will be aware of is that the believers whom they knew are no longer there.

Do you see the importance of this teaching? The secret rapture may happen at any moment; there are no prior signs. It differs from the traditional view which I have been putting to you which says that the Antichrist must appear and be revealed before the second coming of our Lord can take place. No, it is held that this coming of the Lord for His saints will precede the manifestation of the Antichrist and all his nefarious works. This is obviously a most important matter to consider.

I have said that the teaching about the secret rapture did not appear before 1830. We have, in fact, an authoritative statement as to how it began. There was a New Testament scholar called Tregelles, who belonged to the so-called Plymouth Brethren. Tregelles was certainly one of the greatest scholars of New Testament textual criticism of the last century, and in addition he was a saintly man of God. In 1830 and subsequently he was present at the Powerscourt Conferences which were attended by the great J. N. Darby and B. W. Newton, and other people belonging to that school. This is what Tregelles says: 'I am not aware that there was any definite teaching that there should be a secret rapture of the Church at a secret coming until this was given forth as an utterance in Mr Irving's church, from what was then received as being the voice of the Spirit. But whether anyone else asserted such a thing or not, it was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology arose.'

Now let me remind you about the Rev. Edward Irving. He was a remarkable Scottish preacher whose whole life history is worth reading. He was a great orator with a brilliant intellect and was at one time the assistant to the great Dr Thomas Chalmers in Scotland. Then he went to London where he had a phenomenal ministry, becoming the most popular preacher in the city. All sorts of people crowded to listen to him, society people and others, because of his amazing oratory and sometimes, also, because of the novelty of his views. Unfortunately, poor Edward Irving—to be charitable—seems to have become slightly unbalanced in his teaching. He began to speak in tongues, as he claimed, and to preach that God had given him a [Page 138] vision. So he founded a new church which was called the Apostolic Church. He claimed that the Church was still apostolic, that apostles and prophets should not have ceased at the end of the early period of the Church but that there should still be apostles and prophets, and that they should still have revelations and indulge in prophetic utterances and have visions and speak in tongues and so on. His followers claimed to be doing all of that, and that is why they called themselves the Catholic Apostolic Church. He had a certain following for a while but gradually support diminished and vanished. Now Tregelles says that as far as he knew the doctrine of the secret rapture of the Church at the coming of our Lord was first taught as the result of a prophetic utterance in Edward Irving's church. It originated as an utterance in tongues, interpreted by somebody, and, indeed, Tregelles emphasised this by saying that this teaching was a 'revelation'.

I trust that we are seeing the significance of this, because there are forms of teaching today which attract certain people who claim to be very spiritual, and again the teaching is based upon a revelation that God is supposed to have given to a particular person. I am making a general point here. As I understand the New Testament, we should always be suspicious of a teaching that is based upon some supposed 'revelation'. If you read of the origin of the Seventh Day Adventists you will find that the whole teaching about the seventh day, and various other matters, came, it is claimed, as a revelation to a certain Mrs White. It did not come out of a study of Scripture, but was a revelation. Now it is for you to consider

whether such a thing can be squared with the New Testament teaching with respect to doctrine. The Roman Catholic Church, of course, claims that she is as inspired as the early Church and that God has given revelation to her subsequent to the New Testament canon. That is why Roman Catholics can now teach the immaculate conception and the assumption of Mary, and so on—revelation was given apart from the Scripture.

According to Tregelles, the teaching with regard to the preliminary rapture of the saints, which first came in as a prophetic utterance, was accepted by certain people present at the 1830 conference, including J. N. Darby. But it was not accepted by B. W. Newton, nor by Robert Chapman or George Müller. Many people are not aware that it was not generally accepted, even among that circle, and there was a division. Only J. N. Darby and certain of his followers accepted it, though they entirely dissociated themselves from Edward Irving when he began to talk about the tongues, the visions, the apostles and so on.

[Page 139] Nevertheless the teaching about the rapture persisted and still persists.

That, then, is the teaching about this preliminary rapture and the friends who believe this claim that there are certain scriptures which prove it.

So let us look first at 2 Thessalonians 2:8: ‘And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming’—or, ‘the epiphany of his parousia’ or, ‘the manifestation of his coming’. There is, it is claimed, a distinction between His ‘coming’ and the ‘manifestation of his coming’. But this is surely answered by verses 9 and 10 of chapter 1 where the destruction of the sinner and the glorification occur together. Furthermore, 1 Thessalonians 2:1 identifies the parousia with the coming of the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 also speaks of the coming of the Lord—the parousia—and at this point the argument of those who believe in the preliminary rapture is that the ungodly and evil are not mentioned here at all so these verses do not apply to them. But to say that is to ignore the immediate problem with which Paul was dealing. The Thessalonian believers were worried about Christians who had died (vv. 13–14) and Paul assures them that these people will also rise on that day. He is not concerned with unbelievers here. The same theme persists into chapter 5 (in v. 2, ‘the day of the Lord’ is clearly the same day). Believers are to be prepared for that day (5:4) but how could they be unprepared if they had been raptured seven years earlier?

With regard to Matthew 24:40–41 which reads, ‘Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left’, the whole setting is that of judgment and in the context is comparable to the flood. This verse therefore means that at the final judgment there will be a separation.

Next we come to Acts 1:11: ‘This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.’ Here the argument of those who believe in the rapture is that Christ’s ascension was not seen by the world and therefore Christ’s coming will not be seen either. But when the angels say, ‘in like manner’, they are clearly referring to the *mode* of His coming, which will be bodily and visible.

1 Corinthians 15:23 reads, ‘But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming [parousia]’. And verse 24 continues, ‘Then cometh the end ... ‘So the **[Page 140]** order is, first, Christ; then Christians; then the end. That is, we are told, an indication that seven years and the millennium lie between Christ’s coming ‘for’ and coming ‘with’ the saints. But surely, the sequence here is normal. Moreover, the word ‘cometh’ is not in the original.

Then we read in verse 52 that ‘the trumpet shall sound’, and in verse 26 that ‘the last enemy will be conquered’. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 tells us that ‘the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first’. There is nothing secret about this.

Finally, in John 5:28–29 our Lord says, ‘Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which *all* that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation’; while in John 6:39–40 He refers to ‘the last day’.

So the clear impression of Scripture is that there is only one coming, not two; nor are there two stages. There is only one resurrection, also, as we shall see later. There is, then, no ‘secret’ or ‘preliminary’ rapture, and no coming of our Lord at any moment. Certain things must happen first, as we have seen.

Shortly before his death, George Müller was asked whether we are to expect our Lord’s return at any moment or whether certain events must be fulfilled first. This was his reply:

I know that on this subject there is great diversity of judgement, and I do not wish to force on other persons the light that I have myself. The subject, however, is not new to me; for having been a careful, diligent student of the Bible for nearly fifty years, my mind has long been settled on this point and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Scripture declares plainly that the Lord Jesus will *not* come until the Apostasy shall have taken place, the Man of Sin, the son of perdition shall have been revealed as seen in [2 Thessalonians 2:1–5](#). Many other portions also of the Word of God distinctly teach that certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. It does not, however, alter the fact that the coming of Christ, and not death, is the great hope of the Church and, if in a right state of heart, we (as the Thessalonian believers did) shall ‘serve the living and true God, and wait for his Son from heaven’.¹

[Page 141] Let us, then, end on this note: let us consider all this not in some excitable, carnal spirit, but on our knees, as it were, praying for the guidance and the unction and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Let us make sure that we are interested because we are looking for His appearing, because that is our blessed hope to which we look forward with longing and because of which we are purifying ourselves now and seeking to live as children of the light, and obviously different from the children of night and of darkness.

[Page 142]

¹Quoted by Frank H. White in *The Saints Rest and Rapture*.

14

The Book of Revelation—Introduction

In our consideration of the biblical doctrine of the last things, and especially the doctrine of the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we come now to a general consideration of the message and teaching of the book of Revelation, or, of you prefer it, the Apocalypse. We have already considered certain passages in the Scriptures which have a direct bearing upon the doctrine of the time of the second coming and now we turn to this great book which deals specifically with that. No study of this doctrine is complete without consideration of this book and without some analysis of its contents.

Now the book of Revelation is, to me, a very great problem; indeed, it is a problem to all Christians. There is, however, nothing more tragic than the way in which some Christian people, because of difficulties and differences, simply avoid the problem altogether. That is true of the entire study of these prophetic matters, but I think it is particularly true with regard to the book of Revelation. So many never even read it, their argument being that they cannot be bothered since there are so many different views, including certain explanations that are fantastic. Indeed, I am afraid that we must all plead guilty to avoiding this book to a greater or lesser extent. Far too frequently the contents of this great book, which is as much a part of the canon of Scripture as any other book in the Bible, have even become the subject of mirth—people have joked about the various beasts and the false prophet and so on. Now, of course, I know full well that friends who are guilty of that are not really making jokes about the book but about fantastic explanations of it and especially about over-preoccupation with these things. Thus, you see, certain good Christian people, quite unconsciously and having no desire whatsoever to do [Page 144] so, have even brought the Scriptures into ridicule and contempt through a lack of balance in their interest and in their exposition.

Therefore, once again, we must surely be very concerned that our spirits should be right as we approach this book. We do not come as disputants. We do not come in a legal spirit to fight a case. We do not come simply to prove that we have always been right and somebody else wrong. No, I trust we come in order that we may try together to consider the truth with open minds and spirits and hearts in order that we may learn the message that God has for us. Many great reputations have come to grief in dealing with this book. I am very conscious of that fact as I speak about it. We all remember that as great a man as Martin Luther spoke foolishly and inadvisedly when he described it as worthless. Clearly he did not understand it, and I am afraid that he was certainly urged to speak like that because of certain excesses in his day. So if a man like Luther can fall into such error, how careful we must all be! So we proceed to consider this book in the same way as we have tried to look at the other Scriptures that deal with this great matter of our Lord's coming again.

Since we are dealing with biblical doctrines, I do not propose to go through the book of Revelation in detail. But it does behove us to try to have a general understanding of its teaching and message. It seemed to me that the most profitable way forward is for me to put before you the three main ways of interpreting this book. Then I will attempt to evaluate them and to criticise them (using criticise in the right sense of the term which really means to evaluate). And finally I will try to give you a positive exposition, a positive line of approach. I think that it is vitally important to take the *whole* book in this way, and not to start suddenly in chapter 13 on the various beasts and so on. No, we must start with the whole book before we come to any particulars.

The three main schools, then, are first, the *preterist view* or interpretation of the book of Revelation. This is a teaching which tells us that everything that is prophesied in the book of Revelation has already happened, that, indeed, it had all happened by the beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era. The view is that the book is a prophecy of what the Church was going to endure, first from the Jews and then from the pagan Roman Empire, that it describes all that was going to happen to the Church until Constantine, an emperor of Rome, became a Christian and Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Therefore, there is, in a sense, [Page 145] no contemporary or future message for us in

the book of Revelation. It simply encourages us by telling us what once happened and how it all led to a glorious period when the Roman Empire became Christian.

The preterist view was first propounded round about 1614 by a Jesuit priest whose name was Alcazar. That is an extremely interesting point because it is not at all difficult to see why he put forward this theory. You will remember that we saw in an earlier lecture that without exception the Protestant Fathers taught that the papacy was undoubtedly the Antichrist and the second beast described in Revelation 13 and the little horn of Daniel 7. Now here was Rome's attempt to negate that criticism and to turn attention away from the papacy and all that is so true of it. It was a very convenient solution to say that the whole of this book had nothing whatsoever to do with the papacy, nor with the Roman Catholic Church, nor any other corrupt Church, but dealt entirely with the first three centuries of the Christian era.

The second view is called the *futurist view*. This is the exact opposite to the preterist teaching, pointing not to the past, but to the future. Here again it is interesting to note that this teaching was started by another Jesuit priest, a man called Ribera, who propounded it somewhere round about 1603. Again, it is not at all difficult to see what it was that prompted Ribera to put forth this theory because this also takes the thrust of the book away from the papacy and the Church of Rome and puts it, as I shall show you, right way in the future. According to this view, the events described here will happen after the Church has been taken out of the world and, therefore of course, the book of Revelation has nothing to do with the papacy.

So we see that the Jesuits, who were a kind of counter-Reformation reaction against the Protestant Reformation, found that it suited them admirably to get rid of any suggestion that the book of Revelation was a prophecy concerning the Roman Church and the papacy. One view puts the events all in the past, the other puts them all in the future.

'But,' someone may say, 'you're not being quite fair here because surely there were people in the first centuries who took the futurist view? Some of the early Fathers, the so-called sub-apostolic Fathers, were also futurists.'

The strict answer to this is that these early Church Fathers were not futurists in the sense that we use the term today. Some of them certainly believed that the prophecy of the book of Revelation pointed to the **[Page 146]** future but not one imagined that two thousand years were to elapse before these things would take place. Indeed, all these early Fathers taught that some of the things were already happening, and though others were still in the future, that future was at hand and the end was coming very soon. They certainly had no conception of transferring this book far into the future.

It must also be pointed out that though Ribera propounded his theory in 1603, you hear practically nothing at all about it until it was taken up at the famous prophetic conferences to which I have had to refer so frequently. If you read the prophetic views of the Puritans of the seventeenth century, or those of the evangelical leaders of the eighteenth century—whether it be Whitefield or Wesley or any one of the others—you will find that none of them were futurists. They did not seem to know about the very existence of this teaching. No, the futurist view was not taken up until 1830 when it was taught by certain members of the prophetic conferences, especially J. N. Darby. In the same way as other teachings we have already considered, it was popularised as the result of those conferences, and has recently been popularised still more by the Schofield Bible notes.

According to futurist teaching, the purpose of chapter 1 of the book of Revelation is simply to give us an account of the vision that was given to John. Chapters 2 and 3 unfold the moral history of the Church in successive periods from the close of the first century until the end of the Church era. In other words, the seven letters to the seven churches are prophecies of seven successive periods or epochs in the life of the Church. Today, it is said, we are in the period of the Laodicean condition and probably the Sardis period was that of the Reformation. Chapters 4 and 5 describe certain scenes in heaven and there, of course, we are all agreed. But from there on the message of this book is confined entirely to what is yet to happen. The prophecy from chapter 4 right to the end of the book will take place in that last seventieth week of the seven years referred to in Daniel 9, which lies in some unknown future. Most of those who accept futurist teaching believe that we are very near that end time, but whether we are or not, they are agreed in saying that the prophetic passages in Revelation have not yet taken place.

There are two main schools or sub-divisions of futurist teaching and I must mention them because there are many who belong to them. First, there is the school which believes in the preliminary rapture of the saints. They say that chapters 2 and 2 describe successive **[Page 147]** periods in the history of the Christian Church, ending with the terrible condition of the Laodicean church at the end of the Church era. Then, they say, between the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4 the Church is raptured, that is, the saints are taken out of the world and the Holy Spirit is withdrawn. From that point on, therefore, everything that is described in this book has no reference whatsoever to the Christian Church or to Christian people. Now they are perfectly specific about this. From chapter 4 on, the book of Revelation applies only to regathered Israel, the so-called tribulation saints.

It is important to realise that you can be a futurist without believing in the preliminary rapture of the saints. As we have seen, from the very beginning there were certain people, like B. W. Newton and George Müller of Bristol, who, though they were futurists, did not believe in the preliminary rapture. While they agreed in saying that everything from chapter 4 onwards does lie entirely in the future, they believed that the Church, the believers, will have to go through the tribulation and all that is described in this book.

Now you may ask: On what is futurist teaching based? Where is all this found? And there are two main answers. The verse that is often quoted is Revelation 1:19, where John is told, 'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.' There, it is said, lies the key to understanding this whole book. First of all, John is told to write about the things which he has seen, which, according to this teaching, is a reference to the vision that he has just been given. You may remember that John heard a voice and, on turning round, he saw seven golden candlesticks and in the midst of the candlesticks, 'One like unto the Son of man'. Then John gives us an amazing description of our blessed risen Lord and Saviour. Now it is said that the words, 'which thou hast seen' refer only to that vision and not to anything else in the book.

Futurists go on to say that in the second place John is told to write an account of 'the things which *are*'. These, it is said, are the things that he describes in chapters 2 and 3: the condition of the seven churches in Asia at that time. But John is not to stop at that, he is to describe 'the things which *shall be hereafter*'. And that means, according to this teaching, events during the tremendous gap—the Church era, the Church age. So again, 'hereafter' means an interval of at least two thousand years. The things that shall be hereafter are those things that will happen in Daniel's seventieth week, immediately prior to the manifestation of the Lord, or the day of the Lord.

[Page 148] The division into three stages is thus based on Revelation 1:19. But futurists also base their theory upon Revelation 4:1 where we read, 'After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was, as it were, of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.' And again they say that 'hereafter' means in some dim and distant future. A tremendous leap is taken across the centuries into the seventieth week of Daniel which is yet to be fulfilled.

Now it is on Revelation 1:19 and 4:1 that the futurist case is based, though, of course, it is buttressed by various other points, chiefly those we have already been considering. Futurists say that this theory fits in perfectly with the view that they take of Daniel 9 and 2 Thessalonians 2. In other words, if you start with a theory and say that there must be a gap between week sixty-nine and week seventy of Daniel and look for this in Scripture, then you will point out that John does not say 'at once', but 'hereafter', and you will conclude that 'hereafter' must mean a great gap, a tremendous interval of time.

There is, you notice, no statement in either Revelation 1:19 or 4:1 to the effect that there will be a gap. If the theory were true, one would have thought that we should have had some indication of it in Scripture—for example, the words 'after a long period' or 'after nearly two thousand years'. But Scripture does not say that. Similarly, as we saw, in Daniel 9, there is no explicit mention of a gap between weeks sixty-nine and seventy. That, however, is the futurist view of the book of Revelation.

The third view is called the *historicist* or the *historical view*, but historicist is a better term. The preterist view puts the main contents of the book entirely into the past; the futurist teaching puts the events entirely in the future. The historicist view does neither, but teaches that the book of Revelation is a

prophecy of the history of the kingdom of God from the first to the second advent. Now here again there are sub-divisions. One view, which is generally called the *church historical view*, was taught by Luther and the Reformers. They said that the main purpose of the book of Revelation is to give us some account of the chief phases in the history of the Church. A better way, perhaps, of putting it is to say that the book of Revelation is not detailed history but a kind of précis of the phases of church history between the first coming of our Lord and His second coming.

A second, and more popular, sub-division of historicist teaching is the *continuous historical view*, which teaches that the book of Revelation [Page 149] is a book of history without a break. It is a prophecy of the detailed history of the Christian Church and there is no overlapping between its various visions. The visions which are given here deal with the history of the Church in chronological order, each one following the previous one. Let me show you what I mean. In Revelation 6 we are given a vision of the opening of six seals; in Revelation 8 the seventh seal is opened. This is followed in Revelation 8 to 11 by a vision about seven trumpets and in Revelation 16 there are seven vials. According to this teaching, these passages are prophecies of what will happen to the Church in series and in order. First of all, that which is described in the first seal is to take place, followed by the events in the second seal, then in the third, fourth, fifth and sixth seals. Then we come to the seventh seal which, instead of telling us some specific thing in itself, is an introduction to the seven trumpets. So what happens in the seven trumpets follows on from the sixth seal.

Next comes the first event in the first trumpet, which is followed by the events in the next five trumpets, and then by the seventh trumpet. As the seventh seal included and introduced the seven trumpets, so the seventh trumpet now includes and introduces the seven vials. When the first vial is poured out, the events take place, following on from the events in the sixth trumpet. That is followed by the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth vials, and then we come right to the end.

Now I must repeat and stress that according to this teaching everything happens in chronological and historical sequence, and the friends who hold this view do not hesitate to say that we are undoubtedly, at the present time, in the period of the sixth vial. They say that everything prophesied in the six seals and the six trumpets has already taken place. They claim to be able to identify all these things with particular historical events and so they bring us right down through the centuries and the long history of the Christian Church. Now they say that we are on the threshold of the day of the Lord, the final judgment, and the end of all things.

The continuous historicist position has been popular at various times and has had many great protagonists. Of course, it makes a great appeal to many people. I believe that I would be right if I said that it certainly does seem to have been becoming more popular recently. Many people, very largely influenced by the events of the two world wars and by various other things that are happening in the world at the present time, have given up the futurist position to adopt the continuous historicist view.

[Page 150] That brings me to the last sub-division of the historicist view. This is sometimes called the *spiritual historicist* teaching, but some people prefer to call it the *philosophy of history* as outlined in the book of Revelation. This view maintains that Revelation is not a book which is meant to teach us some detailed continuous historical process. Neither is it, as the Reformers taught, a kind of précis of church history. No, it is an account of the principles which govern the life and the history of the Christian Church between the two advents. It is an unfolding of the history of the kingdom of God to its ultimate climax, not so much a description of particular things that have happened and will happen as a picture of the forces and the powers that are inimical to the best interests of the kingdom and are fighting against it. For instance, it is said, there is no difference at all in principle between the persecution of the Christian Church by the Jews or by the Roman Empire or by certain powers in the Middle Ages or by the Roman Catholic Church or by political forces, such as the Inquisition, or by false and apostate churches. The real function of the book, it is said, is to show us the principle, the kind of life, that the Christian Church is to live and to endure here on earth. She is always subject to oppression and persecution—now there is the first beast in Revelation. Supporters of this view say: Do not try to attach that beast to any particular government, or any particular nation or country. It stands for the principle.

Now I have given you the illustration of the beast in order to bring out the difference between the church historicist and the continuous historicist interpretations, and this third interpretation. As we have seen, Luther and the Reformers believed that Revelation was a précis, giving a synopsis of things that had actually happened, while the continuous historicists say that the book describes in detail actual nations and historical events. They believe, for example, that chapter 9 gives an amazing account of the whole attack of the Muslim dynasty upon the Christian Church. But the third view teaches that Revelation is a book which puts forward principles. Because the book prepares us in principle for whatever may actually be happening, we are able to understand it and to be encouraged and comforted.

15

The Preterist and the Futurist Views

As we continue with our consideration of the book of Revelation, there are, let me remind you, three main schools of interpretation: the *preterist*, which says that everything in the book happened in the first three centuries of the Christian era; the *futurist*, which teaches that everything after chapter 4 is yet to happen; and the *historicist* view, which can itself be divided into three sections: the *church historicist* view that the book is a précis of history; the *continuous historicist* teaching which says that Revelation is an actual chronological history; and finally the *spiritual historicist* view which maintains that Revelation gives the main elements in the life and history of the Church.

So we come now to try to evaluate these different views because we must do so if we are to arrive at any conclusion at all. I am sure that we all feel that we are engaged in something that is vital, and that we do not recognise ourselves in the description, 'those who spend a good deal of their time in investigating and examining the dustbins of biblical prophecy'. That is surely an utterly unscriptural, not to say an unchristian, view of biblical prophecy and of our interest in it. We look at these things because we believe that God has given them to us, not merely that we may be interested in times and seasons, not merely that we may be animated by some morbid carnal curiosity, but rather that, as God's people, we may have an understanding of the times. Above all, we study this subject that we may be strengthened in our faith to face the enemy that is confronting us, the battle that we are already waging, and the things that are lying in store for us. We are not interested in times and seasons as such, but we are concerned that we should have the full benefit of what God has graciously been [Page 152] pleased to give us.

First, then, let us look at the *preterist view*. We need not spend much time with this. It seems to me that the view is clearly impossible in terms of the book of Revelation itself. For the book takes us on to the very end of time and even tells us 'that there should be time no longer' (Rev. 10:6). It takes us on to the destruction of the devil and all his powers, and the instruments that he uses—the dragon himself and the various beasts. Revelation deals with that final destruction, so, obviously, it cannot be right to say that it only refers to events confronting the early Christian Church and things which would come to an end when the Roman Empire became officially Christian. As I pointed out to you in the last lecture, the preterist view was put forward by a Jesuit, and we can well understand his motives. His purpose was to direct attention away from the Church of Rome and the Protestant identification of the papacy with certain of the symbols in the book. There is no need therefore to waste any further time with preterist teaching. If you take the book of Revelation and let its message speak to you, you must agree that this cannot possibly be the correct interpretation.

So we consider next the *futurist* view. I reminded you that this was first put forward by another Jesuit in the early part of the seventeenth century, but the important question is: What do we make of it? I have given you the futurist interpretation of Revelation 1:19 and 4:10. In Revelation 1:19, the words, 'the things which thou hast seen', they say, refer to the vision recorded in chapter 1; 'the things which are' are given in chapters 2 and 3 and we are told that this is a progressive history of the Christian Church leading up to the very end of the Church age. Then, 'the things which shall be hereafter' are those events which, from John's standpoint, were going to happen at least some two thousand years later, after the tremendous interval of the Church era. You remember that futurists also base their argument on Revelation 4:1, where John writes that he heard a voice saying, 'Come up hither and I will skew thee things which must be hereafter.'

So let us consider some objections to the futurist view, and I would divide them into general and particular objections. First, the general objections. This view seems to rob the book of its main value for the saints of John's own age. Obviously John was writing to the men and women in the Church at that time and his book was meant to comfort, to encourage and to strengthen them. But according to the futurist view, it has no comfort to offer to the people of John's age, or, [Page 153] indeed, to the people of subsequent ages. It does not have very much comfort even for us. If the bulk of the book is to be

transferred to the future, how exactly does it help me in my fight now? Still more to the point, how could it have helped the people in John's own age and generation? Yet the book clearly was meant for the people to whom it was written.

Another, very similar, general objection is that there can be no doubt at all but that the main function of prophecy is to strengthen our faith by showing us that the things which have been foretold really come to pass. Let me give you an illustration. In his second epistle, the apostle Peter has been comforting the Christians, and he says, 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables ...' (2 Pet. 1:16). I can give you proof, says Peter. And his proof is that he and his two fellow disciples went up the holy mount with our Lord and were 'eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (2 Pet. 1:16-17). That is my evidence, says Peter. But then he goes on, 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place' (v. 19). 'You need not base your faith upon my testimony,' says Peter in effect. 'There is something even better, a word of prophecy made yet more sure. Read your Old Testament prophecies,' he says. 'See how they prophesy the coming of the Son of God, and then look at the facts. That's the thing to strengthen faith.'

Prophecy is designed for the purpose of strengthening the faith of the people who see its fulfilment. When the things that were prophesied actually come to pass, believers see something on which they can rest their feet as on an impregnable rock. Yet the futurist view of the book of Revelation seems altogether to deny to prophecy its task of strengthening faith because if it is true to say that all Christians will have been taken out of the world before the events come to pass, how can any Christian possibly be helped? The prophecies will be of no value at all to them because they will have been taken up, they will have gone out of the world. So from the Christian standpoint, this book has and can have no value whatsoever. I repeat, therefore, that this view runs contrary to the general function and purpose of prophecy.

The third general objection is that this view contradicts what we may call the analogy of the Scriptures. By this I mean that scriptures [Page 154] dealing with the same subject should be compared and should not contradict each other. In an earlier lecture, I tried to show that the first beast in Revelation 13 is identical to the fourth beast in the seventh chapter of Daniel, and everybody is agreed about that because the descriptions are so similar. Now the book of Daniel tells us that the fourth beast is the Roman Empire. So the people who take the futurist view have to say that the Roman Empire will be reconstituted. But that should surely make us pause. Other interpretations do not produce any such necessity and that view is therefore suspect at this point.

Take also the descriptions in the book of Daniel of the beasts and the kingdoms represented by the beasts. Each one of these empires, these dynasties represented by the beasts, takes quite a long time to appear, to develop, to function and then to disappear. But, according to the futurist interpretation, the beasts that are described in Revelation 13 have to come into being and do all that they do in the space of some seven years and perhaps not even that. But these powers, these forces, that operate against God's people in Scripture, do not suddenly crowd their activity into seven years. No, some of them extend over centuries. So, if you are governed by the principle of the analogy of scripture, it is quite impossible to accept that the events of Revelation 13 will be crowded into this short space of time. To hold such a view is to deny the ordinary method of Scripture itself.

Another general objection to the futurist view is that it destroys the unity of the book of Revelation by virtually turning it into three books: 'things which thou hast seen', 'things which are', 'things which shall be hereafter'. And there is an interval of almost two thousand years, and perhaps more, between the second and the third sections. These divisions are unnatural. Surely there can be very little doubt that this book is one.

I think I can prove to you that there is an essential unity to the whole book in this way: the vision in chapter 1 is closely connected with the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. If you look at the way in which the letters to the seven churches start, you will see that in each one there is a description of our Lord, and it is most interesting and important to notice that each description is borrowed from what we are told about Him in the vision in chapter 1. Take, for instance, the first church. We are told: 'Unto the

angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks' [**Page 155**] (2:1). That is a description taken from chapter 1. Then move on to the second church: 'Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna, write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive' (2:8). Again this description is borrowed from what we are told about Him in chapter 1. And it is the same with each letter. So I suggest to you that you cannot artificially divide the book and say that the vision in chapter 1 is one thing, and that chapters 2 and 3 are quite different. No, there is a unity. The same Lord appears in chapters 1, 2 and 3.

But still more striking is this: the same terms are even used in three verses in chapter 19. In 19:12 we are told, 'His eyes were as a flame of fire.' That is taken from 1:14. In 19:15 we read, 'Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations'; and in 19:21, 'And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth'—references to 1:16. Now surely that ought to be sufficient to establish the essential unity of the book. It is not three separate books, three separate messages that were simply stitched together, as it were. No, it is the same idea, it is the same person, and He is depicted in the same way. The book is a whole, and, therefore, a view or an interpretation which divides it up into three surely does violence to it.

Then the last general objection is that the futurist view postpones the kingdom to the future. It says that the kingdom of God has not yet come; this is the Church age. It says, let me remind you, that our Lord, when He was here preaching, offered the kingdom to the Jews, and because they rejected it, it was put into abeyance and the Church age came in. There is no more talk, it is averred, about the kingdom and there will be none until the end. But, surely, we must consider this view before we accept it. Take Revelation 1:6, which reads in the Authorised Version, 'And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.' Undoubtedly, however, the Revised Version is better. This reads, 'And hath made us a kingdom, priests unto God and his Father.' We have already been made a kingdom; the kingdom has already come. Indeed, John says that explicitly in verse 9, 'I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos.' There is John himself saying that he is in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, together with the Christian people to whom he is sending his message.

The Church is a part of the kingdom; we are in the kingdom already. It is not right to relegate the kingdom or to postpone it to the [**Page 156**] future. The kingdom of God is already present, and the kingdom of God is coming. It is yet to come in a visible, external form, but it is already here. The kingdom of God is where Christ reigns and He reigns in the hearts of all His people. He reigns in the Church, the true Church, the invisible Church, the spiritual Church. Any view that relegates the kingdom to the future seems to me to violate these statements in verses 6 and 9 of this first chapter.

Those, then, are the general objections to futurist teaching. Now let us come to certain particulars; they are very important and full of interest. There is a difficulty here, a great difficulty as far as I am concerned. The first verse of the book of Revelation reads, 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.' Now if you take the Greek word translated 'shortly' and follow it right through the Scriptures, you will find that it is always translated as either 'shortly', or 'quickly', or 'soon', or 'speedily'. If that is so, why should it suddenly be given the meaning of something which is to happen in, perhaps, two thousand years or even more? The book opens with '*must* shortly come to pass'. This does not mean that everything will happen shortly, but that what is contained in the book must start shortly and will continue.

Not only that, look at the statement in the third verse of the introduction to the book: 'Blessed is he that readeth'—and remember that applies to the people of John's time; they were to be blessed as the result of reading John's words, which surely, therefore, have some relevance to them—'and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.' Now, you will notice that the people of John's age were not only to read the book and to hear it but they were to 'keep those things which were written therein'. It applied to them, they were to do something about it, and then he adds, 'for the time is at hand'. But if the futurist view is right, 'at hand' means after an interval of perhaps two thousand years of the Church age. But it is at hand, says John. It is about to happen shortly. Now a view

which has to give an entirely new and hitherto never used meaning to these words must justify itself very powerfully in some other ways before we can be expected to believe it.

But let us go on to verse 19, which, as I have indicated, is the sheet anchor of the futurist view. You remember the threefold vision: 'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and **[Page 157]** the things which shall be hereafter.' Now notice that in verse 10 John says, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna ...' John is told to send what he has seen to all these churches *before* he sees the vision. So John's message is not only the message to the seven churches, and not only the vision that he was later given of the Lord Himself. No, surely, this is a reference to the contents of the whole book. Here, in general, he is told to write this in a book and to send it to the seven churches. He is to send it *all*, not simply one thing. The fact that this instruction is given before the vision seems to me to indicate quite clearly that it is a general introduction to the whole book: the vision, the messages to the churches, and the remainder of the book of Revelation. That is how I would answer the tendency to break up the statement in this verse into three separate books or messages.

Then we come to the second phrase: '*the things which are*'. Now at this point there is a slight self-contradiction in the futurist view. It starts by saying that this phrase has a reference to the condition of the seven churches of Asia and yet, you remember, it also says that the messages—the letters to the churches—cover the entire course of church history, starting at the beginning and going on, Sardis representing the time of the Protestant Reformation and the letter to the church of Laodicea being descriptive of the Church at the present time. If that is so, of course, the letters to the seven churches do not simply describe things that *are* but also 'that shall be hereafter'. So the view contradicts itself. But also, of course, the futurist view is entirely wrong for this reason: nothing in chapters 2 and 3 tells us that the letters to the seven churches are progressive. There is nothing which says that with Ephesus you have the state of the Church at that time and that the letter to the church at Smyrna describes the Church at a later period. Not at all! There is no suggestion whatsoever that each one of these follows chronologically after the previous one and that they take us up to the end of the Church age. And as we have seen, the moment you introduce that suggestion, you are in trouble, because it is no longer 'things that are'. Yet it is essential to this view to say that chapters 2 and 3 only deal with things that 'are' and have nothing to do with things that shall be 'hereafter'. Surely that is more or less a conclusive argument.

[Page 158] That brings me to the last statement: '*the things which shall be hereafter*'. Now, once more, we must indicate that the word 'hereafter' is, according to this view, given an entirely novel meaning. There is nothing here to tell us that 'hereafter' in this case means after a tremendous interval of time. The word is not qualified at all, it just says 'hereafter'. And surely that means 'following', 'the things that shall follow'. Weymouth in his translation translates it like that, very rightly. Yet you see the weight that is attached to this? The word 'hereafter' must mean, not things that are about to happen, but this tremendous gap of the Church period—'hereafter' spans the centuries. Surely it is straining the meaning of a word to ask it to carry such a signification without any indication that this is being done.

That brings us to the first verse of chapter 4: 'After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be *hereafter*.' There it is, the same word again. And once more the same signification is attached to it—it is said to mean after that tremendous long view of history, after the whole of the Church era, after the Church has been raptured, just before our Lord's final manifestation. But wait a minute! In a most amazing manner, the two Greek words translated by the word 'hereafter' at the end of the verse are also at the beginning of the verse—translated this time by 'after this'. In the Greek the words are *meta tauta* which is literally 'after these things'. Everybody agrees that 'after this' at the beginning does not mean after two thousand years because John would no longer be on earth and this happened to John while he was still alive and in the body. 'After this,' says John, after the things he has just been describing, 'I looked, and, behold ...' Why do we ask that the same two words should have an entirely different meaning at the beginning and the end of the verse? Surely John is told, 'I will shew thee

things which must be after this', things which are shortly to happen, the same meaning running all the way along. The word 'hereafter' means, therefore, 'after these things'.

I would again remind you that the words spoken by the voice do not mean that the things were all going to happen suddenly or immediately, but they do mean that the things which were shown to John would start happening very quickly. And I want to suggest to you—and I come to a positive explanation—that they did start happening very quickly. They began and they continued, and they are yet to be completed.

[Page 159] But as far as I am concerned, the most conclusive argument is the argument of chapter 12. I shall not go into details about this chapter now, I simply want to ask: Is it not quite obvious that that chapter gives us a description of something that happened at the incarnation? Now that is a very important fact because in chapters 10 and 11 the story is taken right up to the end of the age. Time shall be no more; it is the final end. And yet, in chapter 12, we go back to the beginning, to something that happened when our Lord first came into this world. That is quite impossible from the futurist standpoint. You cannot say that the whole of this book from chapter 4 to the end is entirely in the future when there is an outstanding description of the birth of our Lord and what happened to Him and what happened round about that time. Chapter 12 belongs to history and the past. That in itself is surely sufficient to refute the futurist view.

But, finally, there are expressions in the last chapter of the book, chapter 22, which seem to me to be quite conclusive. In verse 6 and verse 10 we read statements that are of extreme significance: 'And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done' (v. 6). There it is again, the very expression that is in 1:1, 'things which must shortly come to pass'. Again in 22:10 we read, 'And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.' Now contrast that with what Daniel is told at the end of his book. He is told to 'shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end' (Dan. 12:4). This is a very powerful argument. The command to 'seal up the book' made it quite plain to Daniel that the things he was shown were not to happen in his day and generation, that an interval was to pass, and we know that almost five centuries did pass before they took place. But here John is deliberately and specifically told *not* to seal up the book and the reason is added: 'for the time is at hand'.

Thus this great book ends in exactly the same way as it began—the things that are contained here are things that are shortly to come to pass, they are things that are at hand, on the very threshold, they are about to take place. That is given in the general introduction in chapter 1 and it is repeated in the summary at the end, in chapter 22. So for these reasons, I suggest to you that this book is one, it is a unity, a complete whole. The entire book was meant for and had relevance for the people of John's age; it is meant for and has relevance for Christian people in every subsequent age, and of course the history of **[Page 160]** the Church proves that. God's people in all times of affliction and adversity have recognised their situation in these things and have gained strength from this book. The Covenanters, the Puritans, and others said, 'We are going through these things as it was prophesied.' This was their book. So if you reject the interpretation which divides Revelation into three and says that the bulk of it has nothing at all to do with Christians, then you will see that the book will have a new meaning and a new function and will provide you with glorious comfort and uplift. When I come to give my positive exposition, I hope that will become still more evident.

16

The Spiritual Historicist View

We come now to the historicist position and there are three main divisions, you remember, of this view. There is the so-called *church historicist* view which says that the book of Revelation is nothing but a kind of précis of church history. You may read a great history book and then, for the sake of convenience, make a précis of it in order to have the complete history in a smaller form. Now there are those who have thought that that is the nature of this book. Most of the Protestant Reformers took that view, but it seems to me that it is a view we cannot hold because it is too precise and has some of the defects which I shall elaborate in connection with the next sub-division, which is the *continuous historicist* view. Having dealt with this second sub-division, we can perhaps return briefly to the church historicist theory.

The continuous historicist view teaches, as we saw earlier, that the things recorded here, these visions given to John, symbolise things that would actually happen. The seals, the trumpets and the vials represent historical events that follow each other in chronological order, and go on until the end. According to this view, it is estimated that we are now roughly in the time of the sixth vial or bowl which is described in Revelation 16.

Now as far as I am concerned, it is quite impossible to hold the continuous historicist view. I suggest to you that chapter 12 alone is sufficient to prove that this view cannot be right. Chapters 10 and 11 describe the final judgment and the end of all things. Yet you will remember that in the last lecture we saw that chapter 12 goes back to the incarnation. But if the continuous historicist view is correct, there can be no going back to the beginning again.

[Page 162] Then another defect of the continuous historicist view is that it obviously demands a detailed knowledge of the history of the centuries. If all these things have reference to particular historical events, then, as Christian people, we can only derive benefit from reading this book if we are experts in the total history of the whole world. That is, I think, sufficient to demonstrate that that cannot be the true interpretation of Revelation, for this book was written for Christian people, most of whom were not well educated, and the Christians who have benefited by it throughout the centuries have not by any means been great historians or experts in world history. Yet that view demands a detailed knowledge before the book can be edifying: surely a serious defect.

Perhaps another way of putting that same point is to say that if you read the writings of those who hold the continuous historicist interpretation of Revelation, you will find an almost endless diversity of opinion as to what the symbols mean. One person fixes on one great event in history to fit one particular sign, and another fixes upon another event, so that you are in a state of confusion. In the end you feel that you do not know what to believe, and the whole effort to understand is futile. Surely at that point the book has ceased to be edifying.

I would also argue that this school of interpretation opens a very dangerous door. We all know how easy it is to persuade ourselves that we can match certain statements in Scripture with certain facts. People have done this throughout the centuries, always coming to different conclusions. For instance, in the time of Napoleon they were absolutely certain that certain things here pointed unmistakably to Napoleon and could not possibly refer to anybody else. But in our time, of course, we do not even think of Napoleon. In the twentieth century people were quite sure that Hitler was meant; it was perfect, they thought, and a certain detail had been discovered by somebody that established it beyond any doubt. It was certainly Hitler. But we no longer think that.

Now any scheme of interpretation which produces such a result cannot be the true interpretation. It not only leads to confusion but it tends to bring the entire book into disrepute. As I have emphasised many times, I am increasingly convinced that large numbers of Christian people have ceased to read this book because they feel that explanations of it have become almost ridiculous.

The moment you try to attach the teachings of this book to particular **[Page 163]** persons or events, you are in grave danger of turning from the spiritual to the material. Indeed, I think it is true to say that most of the conversation or lecturing of many friends who belong to both the futurist and the historicist schools does seem to be more political than spiritual. I remember a few years ago going to preach in a place where a friend of mine who belonged to the futurist school had been preaching about a month before. In his sermon he had made a great announcement that certain secret information had come his way to the effect that Stalin, whom he identified with one of the symbols in Revelation, was suffering from a growth in his stomach and would soon die. Now I do not think that Stalin did die of a growth in his stomach but I am saying this to illustrate the point that here was a man of God who seemed to have spent most of the evening talking about Stalin! I repeat that once you begin to interpret this book along futurist or continuous historicist lines, almost imperceptibly you find that you are doing the same thing. You become interested in times and seasons, in particular events and in political events, and unconsciously your emphasis is there rather than upon the spiritual content of the book.

On another occasion, when I was travelling by train to preach in a certain place, at a station where the train stopped a young man got on. I observed at once that he was carrying in his right hand a copy of *The Times* and a Bible, and I was able to forecast exactly what he was going to do. And I was correct! He was going to a meeting to give an address on prophetic questions and he carried the symbols in his hands: not only the Bible but also *The Times*, because, you see, he understood *The Times* from the Bible. What he had been reading in *The Times* was in the Scriptures and he was going to give his congregation *The Times* as well as the Scriptures! Yet Revelation is a spiritual book with a spiritual message.

Now I feel that considerations like that are surely sufficient to make us reject the continuous historicist view and, again, I would say that in general the same thing tends also to apply to the church historicist view. You are up against the same difficulty of trying to identify particular historical events with the things that are recorded in the pages of Revelation.

So that leads us to consider the *spiritual historicist view*, the view which teaches that Revelation is a book which presents the spiritual principles concerning the life and the conflict and the final triumph of the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The exact historical **[Page 164]** detail is not given, but the great principles are illustrated. These illustrations applied in the days of the early Church, they apply now, and will be relevant until the end, the final judgment.

Let me, then, try to give you some sort of a positive explanation of the spiritual historicist view of the book of Revelation in order that we may compare and contrast it with the preterist, futurist and historicist views which I have already put before you. So let us make an experiment. Let us imagine that we have no theories at all, that we do not belong to any school but have come to read the book of Revelation for the first time. We take up the book and read right through. Let us observe certain general impressions that the book makes upon us. Now these, I suggest, are inescapable if you allow the book itself to speak to you directly.

The first impression is that Revelation is a book about the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. It starts off with the revelation that God gave to John and which he passes on: 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw' (Rev. 1:1-2). That is the great theme. And as we go through the book we see it everywhere. The Lord Jesus Christ is before us the whole time; His Church is before us the whole time. Revelation was written to the Church. It is written about the Church. And it is written to help, to comfort, to stimulate and to edify the Church, for John goes on to say, 'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein' (v. 3). Now never forget that! Some people seem to think that the book of Revelation is just a question of prophecy, of giving facts and details which can be fitted into a jigsaw puzzle. But always remember that we are told this: not only 'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy,' but also those who 'keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand'. There is a great deal of moral exhortation here. That is our first impression.

The second thing that I would emphasise is that it is a book of revelation. It is a book that is meant to reveal something to us; it is the apocalypse—the unveiling. It is a book in which the veil is drawn back and we are given insight and an understanding of certain things. I am very anxious to impress that because the interpretations which we have been considering seem, I suggest, to have almost the exact **[Page 165]** opposite effect. They land us in a state of confusion, so much so that people say, ‘I don’t know where I am. I’m absolutely muddled by these theories and by these details and by the way things are added which I don’t see in the text, and by all this historical knowledge. I’m really so bewildered that the book says nothing to me.’ And yet the book was not meant to lead to confusion, quite the opposite. There was the early Church suffering persecution and the Christians were bewildered. They did not understand. So the book was given to them specifically and especially to open their eyes to what was happening to them and to what was going to happen.

Yes, but I must hasten to add that the way in which Revelation gives us this unveiling and knowledge is by means of symbols, and signs. Did you notice a word in that first verse of the book—‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass’—then—‘and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.’ Now some of the more recent translations talk about ‘making known’, but there is no doubt, once more, that this old Authorised [King James] Version is very much nearer the original meaning. It puts ‘signified’ because the Greek word that is used here comes from the Greek word that means a sign or a symbol. So here at the very beginning it is stated that the revelation is given by means of signs. The meaning is not put absolutely plainly and directly. It is a revelation, but it is a revelation that also partly conceals. As we read through the book we come across this sort of expression, ‘And I saw another sign in heaven’ (Rev. 15:1); John constantly refers to signs. Now obviously this is a most important principle in the interpretation of Revelation.

Revelation starts off with lampstands, then talks about seals and trumpets and bowls and beasts and things like that. Truth is conveyed, but conveyed in a pictorial manner. And I think that so much of the trouble with regard to the interpretation of the book has arisen because people have tended to forget that. There is an innate desire in us to literalise everything. We do not see that the book itself tells us at the very beginning that it is an unveiling in this particular symbolical manner.

Not only does Revelation use visual symbols, it also uses symbolical numbers. We cannot read this book without being struck by the frequency of numbers. The number seven, for instance, is used fiftyfour times in the book: seven heads, seven eyes, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and so on. Now clearly these figures and other **[Page 166]** figures like, ‘time, times, and half a time’; three and a half years; forty-two months; 144, which is twelve multiplied by twelve; ten; and ten multiplied by ten multiplied by ten, meaning a thousand, and so on, make it obvious that we are dealing with a book which conveys its truth by means of symbols. The figures are obviously not meant to be literal figures.

The trouble arises when we forget and say that a figure must mean the exact number that it says—one thousand, for instance, or, ‘and his number is six hundred threescore and six’ (Rev. 13:18). Surely, if we read the book as a whole, we will see that at certain points we simply cannot, and are not meant to, take those figures literally. It is not merely 144,000 people who will be saved. No, that is a complete number—twelve squared—as is one thousand, which is a cube of ten. There are figures of completeness here and figures of a partial character: three and a half is half seven. That is the prophetic way, as we saw in our hurried consideration of Daniel’s prophecy, in which prophetic scripture always conveys its truth. It does not use a mechanical, literal exactness but gives us exact knowledge in a symbolical manner. We are given principles without being given detailed, particular knowledge.

I suggest that the book of Revelation does exactly the same thing as our blessed Lord and Saviour did when He used parables. Parables at one and the same time reveal truth and yet, as it were, conceal it. They do make straightforward statements of truth, but they were not clear to the outsider. They were not always clear to the disciples either, and when our Lord was on His own they would ask Him what he meant. That is the characteristic of a parable. It is meant to convey some great truth, and it does do that, but in a symbolic manner, by means of a picture, by a figure, by a sign. So when we are reading a parable we are not meant to press all the details. I think you have probably either read or heard examples of the kind of foolish and almost fatuous position at which you arrive if you begin to apply all the details in a

parable. When I was a boy I heard a man preaching on the parable of the prodigal son. He took hold of every single detail in the story and gave it a spiritual meaning. But the poor preacher ran out of time and had to give up. He told us that perhaps he would continue with the parable the next time he came to us, and deal with the fatted calf!

Let us, then, take hold of the great principle that our Lord *is* unveiling the truth here in Revelation but is choosing a particular way to do **[Page 167]** it. Of course, this should not surprise us at all. John was writing to the early Christians who were living in the Roman Empire and were suffering because of that. He wanted to strengthen them in their suffering but obviously he could not write openly because of the consequences, not so much to himself, perhaps, as to his readers. So he had to deal with the subject in principle, and he did this by means of symbol. The early Christians would understand his meaning by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, but the Romans reading it would understand nothing; and the same thing has applied throughout the centuries. The truth is here in principle. We can apply it to particular facts. We do not say that the book is dealing with those particular facts, no, but there is a common principle in these forces that work against the Church and are antagonistic to our blessed Lord.

My final point under this general heading is that we must never lose sight of the fact that the book of Revelation is meant to edify. It is not merely meant to give us interest; it is not merely meant to excite us or to play up to our curiosity and to our interest in political events. It is not a book that is meant to enable you or me or anybody else to be able to say, 'Of course, this is what I read of in the book of Revelation and I can tell you of all the current events and find it here.' That satisfies one's intellectual curiosity. We become interested in times and seasons, and are on the lookout for odd things, and we may appear to be very clever. We hear or read in a book about some person whom most people have not yet heard of, living on an island somewhere in the Mediterranean, who is said to be the coming Antichrist. We say, 'Haven't you heard it? It's marvellous!' People have been doing that sort of thing throughout the centuries.

No, that is not the function of this book. Revelation was written, as we have seen, with the object of comforting, consoling, giving instruction, exhorting, bracing Christians for what they had to face, and not only the first Christians, but all who would subsequently read this book. And as I have already reminded you, this book has been the strength and the support and the sustaining power of God's people in times of fearsome persecution. Read again the story of the Reformers and the Covenanters and the Puritans and others, and you will find that they were enabled to go forward because they saw here in principle the very thing that was happening to them. If you read the book, I think you will be forced to come to the conclusion that Revelation should not arouse a kind of unhealthy and almost morbid curiosity and make us more interested in persons and events than we are in the truth of God, **[Page 168]** the truth concerning our blessed Lord and His Church and the great purpose of God for the Lord and the Church throughout the ages and right up until the very end. Obviously, then, as we come to an interpretation, we must bear these things in mind. We must remind ourselves of its deliberate symbolism, and we must look for the edification that we are to derive.

Then, second, let us look at the outline of the book. As we read through, we cannot fail to be struck by the fact that it has certain natural divisions—natural, and not artificial, divisions. I want to put them before you now for your consideration and study. Take the first three chapters. As you read this book, do you not feel that these three chapters obviously go together and have a particular message? We see here the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ, if you like, in the midst of the churches, because the Church is divided into churches. We start with that great vision of Him among the lampstands which we are told signify the churches. 'The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches' (Rev. 1:20). Now the danger is to think that seven churches means seven particular churches. But remember that the numbers in Revelation are symbolic. Seven is one of the perfect numbers, so the seven churches, I suggest to you, stand for the Church as a whole. The Lord Jesus Christ is thus shown in the Church.

Notice also that this first section seems to span the entire history of the Christian era. In verse 5 of the first chapter we read, 'And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loves us, and washed us from our sins in his own

blood.' This starts with the blood of Christ, the death and the resurrection. But go on to verse 7: 'Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.' The beginning of the Christian era is the death and resurrection of our Lord; the end of the Christian era is the final judgment. And not only that, there is teaching here about the redeemed and about the lost. Now those are the essential characteristics of the first three chapters, which form the first section of the book.

But go on to the second section, which runs from chapter 4 to chapter 7, and notice that we find the same things again. In chapters 4 and 5 there is a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ: the great scene **[Page 169]** in heaven in chapter 4 and then in chapter 5 consternation because there is nobody big enough in heaven or earth to open the seals of the book. Then comes the announcement by the angel, 'Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda ...' (v. 5). The Lord Jesus Christ is in the centre of the second section as He was in the first section. And again we are made to look at Him, crucified and risen again, 'a Lamb as it had been slain' (v. 6). We are not to forget that, but He is risen also. He has triumphed.

So here in the second section we meet our Lord once more, and again He has a message for the Church. And what is the message? It is that He is the One who controls history. He not only controls the life of the Church, as we saw in the first section, but He has this great book of history which nobody else can unfold. He alone can break the seals. He is the Lord, the Master, of history. That is the message which He gives here to the Church. And so you find Him breaking the seals and unfolding the history.

And what about this history? In chapter 6 we are told that it is history that goes right on to the very end of the age and to the final judgment:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, to there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs ... And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places ... And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men ... hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us ... For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Revelation 6:12-17

The end of the age is also dealt with in Revelation 7:3-17 where there is a marvellous picture of the redeemed, a picture we have already seen in chapter 5. These people have come up out of great tribulation and have washed their robes. Do you not see that, in essence, the second section is an exact repetition of the first section? The Lord is again revealing things to His Church, and His revelation goes from the beginning right up to the end of the era, to the final judgment, and we are shown the difference between the redeemed and the lost.

Chapters 8-11 constitute the next section, and this again forms a **[Page 170]** distinct section on its own. In 8:1 we are told that after an interval of half an hour in heaven something fresh is again given and at the beginning of chapter 8 we are shown a wonderful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest, bearing our petitions and our prayers up to God. As a result, certain things are done, and we come to the extraordinary vision of the seven trumpets. A trumpet is always a warning and those seven trumpets are warnings of judgments. Read right through and once more you will find that, having started with the Lord in chapter 8, we again go on until the final judgment, the day of judgment, in 10:7 and 11:15-19. On the other hand, in chapters 10 and 11 we find a description of the Church. Once more we are obviously dealing with the same things—the Lord and His Church and what happens to them in the world, the final judgment, the redeemed and the lost.

The fourth section runs from chapter 12 to chapter 14. Here again we go back right to the beginning with an extraordinary description of the birth of our Lord, referred to as 'a man child' (12:5). We start with His beginning, and are shown the opposition to Him, His death and resurrection, how He was raised up into heaven and the beginning of the Christian era. Then the opposition comes in—the devil, the beast to which he gives power, and Babylon, all these enemies of the Church. But again the story goes right on until the final judgment. In chapter 14:8 we read, 'Babylon is fallen.' With this prophecy we are obviously again dealing with the end, but on the other hand, in chapter 14 there is a marvellous description of the

redeemed. In essence we are once more looking at the same thing: the Lord Jesus Christ in the centre, His people, His seed, the opposition, the final judgment, the redeemed and the lost.

We find the fifth section in chapters 15 and 16. Again this starts in heaven, and again we read about the Lamb, and His people who were with Him, and are always with Him, and He with them. Here we come, in chapter 16, to the amazing description of the bowls of judgment, the vials of wrath that are poured out, and the final great battle of Armageddon. Once more we arrive at the last judgment, and see the same distinction between the redeemed and those who are finally lost.

Then we go on to chapters 17 to 19, which is the sixth section. Here the theme is once more the way in which the enemies of our Lord and of His redeemed people are dealt with. There is an account of the final destruction of Babylon, of the two beasts and all their followers, and, **[Page 171]** on the other hand, the redeemed appear as the Bride of Christ. The great marriage feast takes place; the final judgment has arrived once more; and there is still a great distinction between the redeemed and the lost. In chapter 19 the Lord Himself appears in His glory, riding His white horse, with the sword coming out of His mouth. So the sixth section again has the same essential characteristics.

And that brings us to the last section, the seventh, which runs from chapters 20 to 22, and again we find the same elements. The particular features here are the final doom and destruction of the devil himself and, opposed to that, the final triumph of the Church, the eternal glorified state ushered in, and the city of God coming down. The whole thing is finished and complete. The Lamb is in the midst of the city, and there is no need for the sun or the moon because His light, the brightness of His face, is sufficient.

So that is what we find if we read through this book without concentrating overmuch upon any details, but are open to certain broad impressions. We suggest that in the different sections of this book there is a principle of repetition and recapitulation, a kind of parallelism, and that common features are to be found running right through. So I do plead with you once more to read the book in the way that I have indicated. Try to forget theories, try to forget anything in particular, and allow these broad impressions to be made upon you. If you do this, I think you will conclude with me that whatever else this book is meant to do, it certainly is meant to tell us about the conflict between the Lord Jesus Christ and the devil and his powers. It portrays the conflict between the Lord Jesus Christ, His Church and His people on the one hand, and those other terrible forces on the other. And as we look into the book more closely, we shall see that that conflict began when our Lord came into this world. It began with Herod, it has continued ever since, and will continue until His final victory, which is certain and assured.

17

The Suffering and Safety of the Redeemed

We looked in the last lecture at what we considered to be the natural divisions of the book of Revelation and it is important that we keep these in mind. To remind you, they are chapters 1–3, 4–7, 8–11, 12–14, 15 and 16, 17–19, 20–22. I think that I was able to establish that in these sections there is an obvious parallelism, a repetition of the elements of the story of the Christian Church from the first coming of Christ to the second coming. We see Christ Himself with His people, certain experiences they undergo, those who are against Him, and, at the end of each section, the final judgment.

We can therefore lay it down that there is parallelism in a number of sections. Certain other facts support that contention and ought, therefore, to substantiate it. There are certain other repetitions, for instance, the same symbols representing time are used in chapters 8–11 and in chapters 12–14. For example, in Revelation 11:2 there is a reference to forty-two months and the third verse talks of 1,260 days, which is actually forty-two months. Then in Revelation 2:6 the reference to 1,260 days appears again, and in verse 14 we have ‘time, and times, and half a time’, that is, a year, two years and half a year—three and a half years again, or forty-two months, or 1,260 days. And in chapter 13:5 there is also a mention of forty-two months. So the same figures are used, the same duration is indicated for what I suggest to you are the same events. I repeat, there is a parallelism. What has already been said in one form is being said again in a different form.

A further example of the principle of repetition lies in the references [Page 174] to a great battle which is to be fought. In the original Greek this is called *the* battle. We find references to that in Revelation 16:14, 19:19 and 20:8. The same battle is spoken of on the three occasions but in different settings.

Then another striking piece of evidence and, perhaps, most convincing of all, is that if we read the accounts of the blowing of the trumpets in chapters 8 and 9 and the pouring forth of the vials in chapter 16, we find that exactly the same things are referred to: the earth in the first trumpet and the earth in the first vial; the sea in the second trumpet and also in the second vial; the rivers and the fountains in the third trumpet and exactly the same in the third vial; and the sun in the fourth trumpet and in the fourth vial. Then comes the seat of the beast in the fifth trumpet and in the fifth vial, and lastly the river Euphrates in the sixth trumpet and in the sixth vial. Now that is something that ought to engage our attention at once. Why is it that the same things are affected? It is a very powerful argument in support of the contention first, that in Revelation there is a principle of repetition or recapitulation or parallelism, and second, that this is a book in which the different sections are about the same things but looked at in slightly different ways in order to bring out particular and differing aspects of the truth.

I do trust that as a result of the evidence which I put before you in the last lecture, together with this supporting and additional evidence, I am establishing this principle of parallelism. It is very interesting to observe that parallelism is not unusual in prophetic literature. Take, for instance, the book of the prophet Daniel. In Daniel 2 there is an account of a great image which is divided into different sections: the head, the chest and arms, and so on. Now that picture has reference to precisely the same thing as the four beasts in Daniel 7. Both these chapters obviously describe the same great empires, and everybody is agreed about that. But there are so many who accept that repetition in the book of Daniel and cannot see it here.

Why did Daniel use two images? Why did he say the same thing in two different ways? It is because he has additional things to say in chapter 7 over and above what he had said in chapter 2. Now that is typical of the prophets. They make a bold statement about something, then come back to it and take it up, using slightly different terms or different symbols, and add to what they have already said.

That, then, is what I would call a kind of general analysis of the book of Revelation. May I remind you again of what I am attempting [Page 175] to do at the moment. I am not proposing to take you through the book of Revelation in detail, that would be inappropriate in a course of addresses on biblical doctrines.

I am simply concerned that we may have the general message of the book, especially in its relevance to the question of the time of the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So I am trying to give an outline and a method of interpretation, leaving the details to be filled in.

Having gone so far, let me also state that while it is clear that the book is divided into seven sections which seem to be dealing with the same subject, the same events, it is equally clear that the book can be divided into two sections. In other words, the seven sections can be grouped again into two big divisions, and the dividing point is the beginning of chapter 12. So I suggest to you that you can think of the book in this way: the first major division consists of the first three sections: chapters 1, 2 and 3, chapters 4–7 and chapters 8–11. Then the second division consist of the four sections: chapters 12–14, 15 and 16, 17–19 and 20–22. I say this because it seems to me that the book of Revelation demands this division. Take the twelfth chapter. Is it not perfectly clear that this chapter takes us back to the beginning of the Christian era? It takes us back to the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the One who is described here as a man child who is brought forth. But we are told that the Devil had decided even before the incarnation that he would try to kill Him the moment He was born. And we remember, of course, from the Gospels how he tried to do that through King Herod.

Here, then, in chapter 12, we see the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and the failure of the devil's first attempt to kill Him. Then we are told that this 'man child' is taken up into heaven, caught up unto God and to His throne—surely a perfect account of the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord. And in connection with that we are told that there is war in heaven (v. 7) and that the great dragon, 'that old serpent called the Devil, and Satan' (v. 9) is cast out. And our blessed Lord Himself has already said, 'Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out' (John 12:31). You see the correspondence? This did happen at that time. The death and resurrection of our Lord were accompanied by the casting out of Satan from heaven to the earth. Then Revelation 12 goes on to say that the devil turns his venom and his wrath upon the woman and 'the remnant of her seed' (v. 17), which is obviously none other than Christian people, those who belong to the Son Himself, the man child [Page 176] whom she brought forth. So the devil begins to persecute the Church. Now that is surely the reading of chapter 12. It clearly takes us back again to the beginning. This suggests very strongly that there is this major division: the first eleven chapters, and the second eleven chapters.

Is there, then, any difference in these two sections of the book? I suggest there is a marked and striking difference, which it is most important for us to observe from the standpoint of the interpretation of the book. In the first section we have a great account of the struggle of Christ Himself and His Church against the world of men. That is the message of the first section. But when we come on to the second section, beginning at chapter 12, we find not so much the struggle of Christ and His Church against unbelieving people, as against the evil powers that are behind the world, that is, we see the struggle against the devil and all his assistants and associates. The devil is not mentioned until chapter 12. He is there, of course, behind men and women, but we are not told that until we come to chapter 12.

This second section thus takes us over the same history as the first section, but shows us the struggle at a deeper level. It is the same struggle, but in the first section we only see it in terms of human beings whereas in the second section we see it in terms of the fight 'against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12). And how important it is that the Christian Church should understand this! We all of us know something about persecution. We know what it is to be confronted by people who are unbelievers and anti-Christian, and how difficult they can make life for us at times. Yes, we know all that, but that is not the whole story. We need to be made aware of the fact that these men and women, these individuals, are but instruments of the great powers behind our world. The Bible impresses upon us the truth that it is the devil who is fighting God. So often we fail to remember that and, therefore, become confused and cannot understand things. What you and I see with our physical eyes is simply the visible part of a great spiritual war that is going on in another realm, in which we are being used, as it were, as the instruments.

So in a very interesting way, therefore, we find that in this book of Revelation we are given both the surface picture and the deeper picture. It is the same thing; the same history. That is why there is the recapitulation, the repetition and parallelism. If you look at it like [Page 177] that, I think you will see at

once that there is no more important book for us in the whole of the Bible than the book of Revelation. Its theme is the unfolding of this great struggle. But, thank God, the book does not present itself to us merely in order to give us that picture. Its ultimate object is to show us the final triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ and His people. And that is why this victory is shown in every single section. We are not asked to wait until the end for the victory. We are told: Yes, this will happen to you, but it is all right. He is with you and you will triumph and prevail. The purpose of Revelation is to unfold to us the glory of the triumph that is certain to be ours, and the assurance that in the meantime, though the world may treat us very cruelly, and though it may even kill us, it can never separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So Revelation is a book which in its own pictorial, dramatic manner tells us exactly the same thing as the apostle Paul in Romans 8. It is the message we find in all the Scriptures. And therefore Revelation is no longer a book merely for some people who will be here on earth after the saints have suddenly been raptured! It is a book which speaks to us in our present condition. It has spoken to Christians in all ages of the Church because they have all had to go through these things, and thus it becomes a living and a real and a spiritual book.

If you read Revelation again in the light of all this, you will find that you will understand it in an entirely new way because it not only tells you what is going to happen, it tells you what you must do in order to overcome, and warns you what will happen to you if you do not carry out its precepts. It is no longer a sort of jigsaw puzzle about times and seasons and dates which enables you to talk cleverly about political events. No, it is a spiritual book that speaks to your heart and to your experience and that helps you to live from day to day. It has warning and instruction as well as consolation, and thus it becomes one of the most practical and vital day-to-day books in the whole canon of holy Scripture.

That, then, is a general analysis of the book of Revelation, and I was tempted to leave it at that, asking you to work out the details for yourselves. But let me go a little further. Let me try to suggest to you some other broad headings which may be of value in a detailed interpretation. Look at the first section, chapter 1 to 3, in the light of all this. We have here a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ among the churches, the Lord Jesus Christ with His people. What, then, are these seven churches? Are they seven particular churches that were in **[Page 178]** existence then, or, as some would have us believe, are they descriptions of the general state of the Church in different eras, periods and epochs? I suggest that they are neither, but that since seven is the perfect number, here we are given an account of the whole state of the Christian Church from the first to the second coming. When we read back through the history of the Church, we find in the Church universal on earth, churches and conditions among Christian people corresponding to what is described in the letters to the seven churches. Laodicea is not the condition of the Church only at the end before our Lord comes. Before the Protestant Reformation there was Laodicea to perfection and Laodicea has been true of the Protestant Church many times since. The Church in this country before the evangelical awakening of two hundred years ago was typical Laodicea. And it seems to me to be monstrous to suggest that the Laodicean state of the Church is only now being entered into. Today there are also churches like the church at Ephesus. There are churches today like the church at Smyrna, and all the rest of them. All the churches of Revelation 1 to 3 are always present. And I will go further. I am quite certain that in any congregation today there are people who correspond to the description of the seven churches. And that is why the letters to the seven churches are always up to date. There, then, in essence, is the first section.

What about the next section—chapters 4 to 7? In chapters 4 and 5 we are given the great and glorious scene in heaven and see some dim picture of the glory and the might and the majesty and the greatness and the holiness of God. Then arises the major question in the history of the world—the book with the seals and nobody strong enough to take off the seals. It is all right, the angel tells John when he begins to weep because he cannot see anybody big enough and great enough to open the book. The angel says, ‘The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed’ (5:5). So John looks for this Lion to appear, and what does he see? A ‘Lamb as it had been slain’ (v. 6). Yes, it is the crucified Lord who is risen, who is the Conqueror, who is the great King eternal, as Paul tells us in the second chapter of Philippians: ‘He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name’ (vv. 8–9). We find the same teaching

at the end of Matthew 28: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (v. 20). 'All power is given unto me' (v. 18). He is in control. He is the risen, glorified Lord. **[Page 179]**

In other words, in chapter 5 we are told that our Lord is the Lord of history. He controls it; He is its Master. And I know nothing more consoling. That is what makes this book of Revelation so wonderful. Before it begins to tell us of the things that will happen to us as Christians, it starts by reminding us that our Lord is on the throne, that He is the Master, and that He is reigning until all His enemies shall be made His footstool (Ps. 110:1). The people to whom John wrote were told that, and they needed to be told. At one time they were being persecuted by the Jews, and now the persecution by the Roman Empire had started. They were going through terrible things, and do you think that John simply wrote to tell them of something that might happen after two thousand years had passed? How would that help them? It would almost be to mock them. No, John was writing to tell them what was already happening, but he told them: Your Lord is there and He is in control of history.

John then brings us, in chapter 6, to the opening of the seals. In the first seal we see a rider with a bow on a white horse (v. 2). Now I suggest to you that this rider is none other than the person who is described in a similar way in chapter 19. He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Our Lord is the rider and that is why His horse is white. He sets out, as it were, with the gospel, and He sends out His word. Now our Lord had already told us what to expect. He said to His disciples, 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword' (Matt. 10:34). He would, He said, 'set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother' (v. 35). He prophesied that the effect of His coming was going to be division. So here in Revelation He comes with a bow on His white horse.

The rider on the white horse is followed by a second horse. This horse is red, and its rider is given a 'great' sword (v. 4). What does this mean? Well, the red horse is a picture of the way in which Christian people, because they are Christians, are being persecuted, even killed. The Greek word here for sword carries the idea of slaughtering. It is a short sword, a broad sword used for a personal, direct attack. It does not symbolise a great general war, but persecution of the saints, even unto death. And has that not followed? Did it not happen to the Christians in the early centuries? Were they not butchered and massacred simply because they were Christians? Here in Revelation our Lord warns that it will happen. The rider on the red horse follows the rider on the white horse. That is the order. The word goes out, **[Page 180]** then comes the opposition. 'Yea,' says Paul to his young follower and disciple, Timothy, 'and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (2 Tim. 3:12). Some people will even think they are serving God when they put you to death, says our Lord in John 16:2.

Then the third horse, which comes with the opening of the third seal, is not a picture of famine, as some interpreters would have us believe, but is a vivid picture of suffering as the result of poverty. There is wheat and there is wine and oil, yes, but only the rich can afford it. In the early Church Christians were very poor people. At the beginning, most of them were slaves. Many others lost employment because they would not say, 'Caesar is Lord.' 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called,' says the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:26). No, no, Christianity began among the slaves and the poor and when difficulties arose they did not have the money to pay for the wine and the oil. So the picture here suggests shortage and poverty, and if you read the long history of the Christian Church you will find that Christians have often had to suffer poverty.

And the next picture, after the opening of the fourth seal, is of war leading to death. This is not persecution so much as literal war—sometimes religious war, the great clashes of belief in which Christians are involved. All these scenes in Revelation 6 are an account of what happens to Christian people. They describe the suffering of the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, those who have received the word that He sent out.

Then we go on to the fifth seal, and we are given a picture of certain souls under the altar crying out, 'How long, O Lord?' (v. 10). This is very natural. Christian people who have been martyred for their faith cry out, 'How long is this to continue? How long will you allow those enemies to do this to your people?' How inevitable this cry is! How naturally it follows!

And then, thank God, we go on to the sixth seal where we are given a great and dramatic picture of judgment upon the terrible powers that are opposing Christ and His people. We read about the sun becoming as black as sackcloth—often used in prophecy as a picture of judgment—and the moon becoming as blood, and the stars of heaven falling. This is a dramatic way of describing a great cataclysmic judgment with the sky departing like a rolled-up scroll, and every mountain and island moved out of their places. Then we read, ‘And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the **[Page 181]** chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks’—what?—‘Fall on us, and hide us from’—who? An amazing answer—‘from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?’ (Rev. 6:15–17).

Thus with the opening of the six seals in Revelation 6 we have been given a picture of what happens to God’s people throughout the whole of the Christian era, leading up to the final judgment. That is the message of the six seals. But we are also given a glorious statement in chapter 7, which is still a part of this second section. Here is a wonderful assurance that though all these great and mighty and terrible things are going to happen, God knows His own. Before the seventh seal is broken we read this:

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying [this is the promise], Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

Revelation 7:1–3

In other words, before these last judgments come upon the world, God’s people are to be kept safe, a seal is to be put on the forehead of each Christian. How many are there? This is what we are told: ‘And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel’ (v. 4).

‘But,’ you say, ‘that’s Israel after all, not Christian people.’

But I need scarcely remind you again that this is a book of *symbols* and again in case somebody may think that verse 4 gives a description of literal Israel, read verse 9: ‘After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.’ So the number in verse 4 is a symbolic figure and it is really almost ridiculous to suggest that it means 144,000 Jews.

[Page 182] You may ask: What is the meaning of this 144,000? And how is it arrived at? Let us look at the customary meaning given to symbolic numbers in the Bible. We start with the number three which stands for the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Four, the four beasts, for instance, represents the whole earth, the whole of mankind. Multiply three by four and you get twelve, which represents God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit concerned about the whole world. But they were concerned about the old world and the new. There are twelve tribes in the Old Testament and twelve apostles in the New Testament. Twelve multiplied by twelve comes to 144. Now ten is always a number of completion in Scripture. As you work through this book keep your eye on this figure and you will find that it always represents a whole, a completion. So ten cubed, that is, 1,000, represents absolute completion. I suggest to you, therefore, that 144,000 is the culmination of all that. It means the saving work of the blessed Holy Trinity, the saints of the Old Testament and the saints of the New Testament era—all of them brought together, perfect and complete. Chapter 7, in other words, is a description of all the glorified spirits in heaven, whether Jews or Gentiles, it does not matter. Whatever nation or kingdom or language or tribe they have come out of, they are Christ’s people. They are all saved and they are all with Him and will spend their eternity in His holy presence.

18

The Trumpets

We come now to the third sub-section of the first half of the book of Revelation. That is the section which runs from chapter 8 to the end of chapter 11 and it is a most important section. Here we no longer deal with the seals but we have come to the sounding of the trumpets. As we have already seen, the seventh seal introduces the trumpet series. First of all, in chapter 8 we are given a picture of the prayers of the saints ascending up to God; yes, but not in and of themselves, and not alone. The incense, which is provided by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, is added to the prayers, so that as we pray, our prayers are covered by the incense of the Lord Himself and so are acceptable to God. Our prayers go through Him, through the incense of His person and of His perfect work. It is interesting to notice the sequence that follows. It is as the result, as it were, of our prayers to God that the trumpet series begins.

Now it is important to observe certain things about this trumpet series. You will notice that all along the devastations that follow the blowing of each trumpet only affect a third part of the environment and the ships. For instance, we read that 'The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up' (v. 7). It is the same with the others, a third part of the sea, and a third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and a third part of the ships, and a third part of the rivers and the fountains. The destruction is not total, it is only partial. We must bear that in mind because in chapter 16, when the vials are poured out, the whole is affected, and not merely a third.

What does the trumpet series represent? Surely there can be no [Page 184] question at all about this. In the Scriptures trumpets always stand for a warning of judgment and a warning of punishment, so this whole trumpet series is an account of what happens to those who are opposed to God and to the Church. Under the seals we saw the things that the world of men does to God's people; now we are given a glimpse of what happens to these persecutors. Now we are given very definite proof of this. Towards the end of the ninth chapter we read, 'And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts' (vv. 20–21). In that summing up at the end of the trumpet series we are told that the whole series has a reference to the godless people who are opposed to God and His Christ and the Church and Christ's people.

The interesting thing that we must observe, therefore, is that all the things that are described here happen under the hand of God, and under the hand of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I emphasise that because often we tend to think that the things that come upon the ungodly men and women of this world are more or less accidental and happen in the course of nature. They do not. They occur very definitely as the result of an action taken by the Son of God. It is He who introduces the trumpets with their judgment and punishment, so that the things that happen to these people are ordained of God.

When the first trumpet was sounded we are told that 'there followed hail and fire' (8:7). These are signs of God's judgment: both hail and fire happened at Sodom and Gomorrah. Here, still more expressive, hail and fire are mingled with blood. 'They were cast upon the earth: and a third part of trees was burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up' (v. 7). Now in that symbolic way the book of Revelation—and all the Scriptures—tell us that calamities such as earthquakes, volcanoes and floods are under the hand of God and part of His way of punishing sin and of announcing to the world that it cannot persecute His people with impunity. He is the Lord and He will bring about punishment for such acts.

Let me give you an illustration. This whole trumpet series is a kind of parallel to the plagues with which Egypt was afflicted before God's people went out in the Exodus. 'Let my people go,' said Moses to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh would not, so God visited the Egyptians with [Page 185] various plagues of which these calamities in Revelation are reminiscent. Then, because the Egyptians would not listen to these preliminary warnings, destruction came upon them. The people of Israel were taken out and Pharaoh and

his entire army were destroyed in the Red Sea. Now ever since the first coming of our blessed Lord and Saviour it has been a simple fact of history that the world of human beings has persecuted the Church. Yes, but things have been happening to that world. There have been terrible events, calamities and pestilences, some happening on the earth but some of them in the sea: that is the second trumpet; and some occur in connection with rivers and springs: the third trumpet. Plagues have been visited upon the world of men and women; diseases have come from polluted rivers and springs, and there have been floods. Masses of people have been destroyed in these judgments of God upon the world when God has punished the sin of men and women and especially their sin of persecuting His saints.

Then we go on to the next trumpet, which is much more striking: something that happens in the sky. 'The fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise' (8:12). And this, again, is a way of describing certain calamities that have happened to humanity as the result of things happening in the sky—meteors falling down upon the earth, for example, and consuming masses of people. Thunder and lightning and other terrible calamities have visited the earth from the skies. Now at times these are used by God Himself in order to punish a godless and a persecuting world.

But when we go on to the fifth trumpet we find something which, in a sense, is still more sinister. Here we are told that to a certain angel 'was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth' (9:1-3). Now this is what we sometimes speak of when we say that at certain periods of history it has been 'exactly as if all hell had been let loose', as if every restraint of God were withheld and the devil and his forces were allowed to have free play among men and women in the world. The apostle Paul teaches the same thing in the second half of Romans 1. He takes the history of the world and he tells us **[Page 186]** how, because men and women began to worship the creature rather than the creator, God withdrew His restraint and 'gave them over to a reprobate mind' (v. 28). In other words, it is like the opening of the bottomless pit by the angel so that the stench of hell comes up without any let or hindrance, and seems to cover the whole world. We read the results in Romans 1: not only sin and immorality but foul perversions, men lusting after men and women after women. God permitted it; God gave them over to a reprobate mind.

If we read the history of the world since our Lord first came into it, we find that there have been periods like that when sin and vice and immorality and foulness were rampant, as it were, and God's cause seemed to be hidden altogether. Yes, but remember, it is *God* who does it, and I think that there is nothing more tremendous than the realisation of this, because we ourselves are undoubtedly living in such a period. Compare today with a hundred years ago, or even with thirty years ago. Does it not seem as though someone has opened the bottomless pit? Day after day we see in the newspapers horrible foul things as if every restraint has gone and vileness and crime are abroad throughout the whole world.

But I repeat that sometimes this is allowed and almost caused by God. He does not cause the sin, but He allows it to go unrestrained in order that men and women might be punished and come to their senses. And I have no hesitation in saying that the terrible moral problem of the twentieth century is undoubtedly God's punishment for the pride and the arrogance of people in the nineteenth century when they began to criticise the Bible and to pit themselves against God with their learning and their science and their politics, and felt they could make a paradise without God. In this century God is withdrawing the restraints. We are seeing one of the occasions when the fifth trumpet vision takes place. It is being verified before our very eyes.

The sixth trumpet is nothing but a picture of terrible war. Read about the horses and the stings in their tails and all the rest of it (9:13-21); it is a most graphic picture. But remember that everything in this book is expressed in symbols, and for people to interpret the horses or the locusts in a literal sense is so pathetic as to be tragic. These are all pictures and, remembering that it was written in the first century, one cannot imagine a more powerful description of a horrible war. It is almost a description of modern warfare with armaments, with tanks, with plate armour, and other modern instruments of war. The

symbolism suggests all that. But this is not only a reference to **[Page 187]** modern wars. The passage depicts some of the terrible wars of the centuries which have wiped out such masses of men and women.

Let me again emphasise that we are taught here that these great wars which have brought such calamities to humanity are sometimes God's punishment. You see, the idea of people of the world is always that if they can only get rid of God and of Christ and the Church, they can live their own life and do what they want to do. But when they try, what happens? They begin to fight one another and they destroy one another in masses. There have been terrible scenes on earth as the result of the great wars of history.

If you read this trumpet series in this way, I think you will be filled with great comfort, because you will see that God is controlling everything. I have no doubt in asserting, as I do repeatedly, that the two world wars which we have had in this twentieth century are to be explained only in this way. They were not caused by the Kaiser or Hitler; what a fatuous suggestion! They were not a matter of politics or economic conditions. No, no, it was much bigger than that. It was God addressing humanity, punishing the world of men and women that would not listen to Him. Yet notice what we are told here at the very end of chapter 9—in spite of all this, men and women will still not repent. Yet so many Christian people think and expect that if there is a war or a terrible earthquake or some horrible disaster people will be so affected that large numbers will turn to Christ and there will be a great revival. Many thought it at the end of the Second World War. 'Now,' they said, 'this will bring people to their senses.' Never! They became still more infuriated. Revivals have never come in that way. How materialistic we have become, and how antispiritual in our thinking!

No, the book of Revelation tells us that men and women are not converted by calamities. It takes the Holy Spirit to save a soul. So do not expect anything from wars and calamities and pestilences. They seem to harden men and women; they seem to infuriate them as they did here: 'The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils ...' (Rev. 9:20). History has verified this prophecy. This is not something that will happen in the future. These things have already been taking place in different forms at different epochs and eras in the history of the world.

That, then, brings us to the end of chapter 9, but what about chapters 10 and 11? There again we are given a picture of the Church. In **[Page 188]** chapters 8 and 9 we are shown what happens to godless people who persecute the Church, but what of the Church in the meantime? There is a very interesting statement in chapter 10. A book was given to John to eat, and when he ate it, it was sweet in his mouth, but it became bitter in his belly. That is a picture which we find in the Old Testament. It means that there is nothing so sweet in this world as the gospel of redeeming grace. When you first see it and appreciate it and know it, it brings a sweetness which nothing else in this world can give. But as surely as you have become a Christian, you will get trouble. The gospel leads to suffering; it leads to persecution. I have already shown you that in the seals and I have reminded you of Paul's words to Timothy: 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' (2 Tim. 3:12).

Do not listen to people who tell you, 'Come to Christ and all will be well with you. You'll never have another problem in your life.' It is a lie. It is not true! Do not be mistaken about this. Christ came not to bring peace—in that sense—but a sword. As you are enjoying the sweetness of this glorious gospel of redemption, you will find that it leads to bitterness between you and someone who has always been very loving to you but has now turned against you. It always happens, does it not? Every Christian knows that this is the simple truth. The sweetness becomes bitterness in that sense. It is not that the sweetness is gone, but it is followed by a kind of bitterness. So how glorious it is that we should be prepared for this. We must not be upset and shaken in our faith when we find that because we have become Christians, other people turn against us who used to be fond of us. No, rather we must expect it. It is a proof of our calling. They are bitter towards us because we are changed and they are not.

In chapter 11 the suffering experienced by Christians is shown in a still more specific manner. I shall not go into all the details. I am giving you the broad principles, as I have said. In chapter 11 we see two witnesses who, after they have finished speaking, are persecuted with terrible severity. Who are the two witnesses? Many answers have been given to that question and I cannot prove to you that my suggestion

is the right one. You cannot prove these things. However, I suggest that the two witnesses are the Old Testament and the New Testament, the law and the gospel that always go together. Remember that there are always two witnesses. Christ sent the disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7). And here are the two witnesses: the law, the gospel; and the one needs the other. The law prepares for the **[Page 189]** gospel and the gospel reflects its radiance upon the law. You cannot really understand one without the other.

Yes, and the two witnesses are persecuted in a most terrible and terrifying manner; indeed, we are told they are actually killed, and the world at this point is full of rejoicing and exultation.

And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt [symbols again], where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts to one another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Revelation 11:8-10

Whenever the attack of the world and the flesh and the devil is powerful against the gospel, the world rejoices. It thinks that this is marvellous. It makes fun of the Lord God Himself and of Christ and of Christian people. It has been doing this in the present century. Infidelity has been arrogant and boastful, indulging in a lot of braggadocio and ridicule. Yes, but things will get even worse. Our Lord Himself once said, 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8). A day is coming, prophesied by Him and prophesied here, when it will almost look as if Christian witness and testimony has finally been destroyed. Then the world will congratulate itself on its development, and on how it has outgrown this folklore, this childishness. God will have been put on one side. Christ and His cross will have been forgotten, and people will send presents to one another. 'Marvellous!' they will say. 'The world is such a glorious place! We are so amazing!'

So let us not be surprised if even we live to see something of that persecution. It is not quite as bad as that yet but we have known it up to a measure. We know something of the ribald laughter of the world, this utter ridiculing of us because we are Christians and still believe the Old Testament and the New. But it will get worse and worse before the end so that people will say that Christianity is finished. But it will not be finished because we are told: 'After three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them [the two witnesses], and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw **[Page 190]** them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them' (Rev. 11:11-12). Read to the end of the chapter and you will see the woes that will come upon this world that in its blasphemy thought it had defeated God and put an end to His Christ and the glorious testimony of salvation.

The concluding verses of chapter 11 once more take us right on to the final judgment and the end of the world. We came there at the end of the series of seals and, in exactly the same way, we come to that same end here at the end of the trumpet series:

And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Revelation 11:18-19

That, then, is the trumpet series. We have been covering exactly the same period of history as we covered in the seals, but this time our eye has not been so much upon God's people as upon those who persecute them. There are the warnings, the threatenings and the judgments, but still they will not repent, and on and on it goes, leading to a great climax at the end. And then, when they think they are triumphant, 'sudden destruction cometh upon them' (1 Thess. 5:3).

But we are still only at the end of our first major division, we are far from being as the end of the book. The second half of Revelation, as I have already reminded you more than once, goes on to deal with the

same things again but shows us all this at a very much deeper level. At the beginning of chapter 12, you remember, we go back to the incarnation, the man child that is born of this woman, Israel. He was born 'of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Rom. 1:3). He is the son of David; He is the son of Abraham. That is the woman who brings Him forth. And at once an attempt is made to destroy Him and eventually He is crucified. But He is taken up to heaven and then we are given a picture of the tremendous and mighty forces that are arrayed against Him, especially as He is represented by His people, His seed, this other seed of the woman who is in the wilderness. A **[Page 191]** great spout of water, a flood, is sent after them to destroy them, but it does not succeed.

Now before we move on, let me give you something to consider. In chapters 12 to 14 there are descriptions of the great antagonists of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. The first is the dragon, which is none other than the devil himself. Read chapter 12 for an account of him. He is driven out of heaven and comes down upon the earth where he begins to attack. We shall go into this again in greater detail. Then go on to chapter 13 where a beast is seen rising up out of the sea. The description we are given corresponds to the fourth beast in the seventh chapter of Daniel. But it is a composite picture; it is like that fourth beast but also has certain characteristics of the previous three beasts in Daniel 7. What is it then? Undoubtedly this is the great secular power of the world that is opposed to Christ and His people. That is, it stands for worldly governments, ungodly secular authorities and powers, kings and princes and dynasties and empires and governments throughout the centuries that have persecuted God's people. Persecution started with the Roman Empire and has continued in a measure ever since, and is happening today.

And then in Revelation 13:11–18 we read of a second beast that comes out of the earth. It has two horns like a lamb but does not speak like a lamb. It has a curious mixture of lamb-like qualities and other qualities which contradict that. It has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon. What is this? It is undoubtedly false religion. False religions have ever persecuted the Church of Christ and the devil has used them. It is he that gives power to the beast. The first beast gives power to the second—false religions. He is behind all the havoc they have wrought. At the very beginning Judaism persecuted Christianity terribly. Then came emperor worship in the Roman Empire, followed by Islam and all these other religions, including, sometimes, the papacy. How they have all hated the Christ and His people and how they have persecuted them! The devil has used all kinds of false religions—any false religion. They are all represented and symbolised in this beast that comes up out of the earth. He is able to make an image and appears to be able to perform miracles just like these false religions. They have always claimed and still claim to be able to work miracles and do marvels and in this way they entice people. They are the great antagonists, but there are more.

In chapter 14 we read of the fall of Babylon, which is later described as 'Babylon the great, the mother of harlots' (18:5). **[Page 192]** Babylon represents, surely, the seductive power of the world and sin; everything in the world that tends to attract us and to entice us and draw us from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ. We all know something about the way the world would seduce us and draw us from the simplicity and the purity that is in Christ. Anything in the world that draws us away and entices us is equally bad; it may be culture, it may be noble idealism. If it takes us from Christ, it is a manifestation of the seducing, attractive power of the great harlot.

Lastly, there are all the people who have the mark of the beast on their right hand or on their forehead (13:16–17). They are the opponents of the Church and they are headed up by the dragon, the devil. The devil uses secular power, false religion, the seductive power of the sin of the world, and men and women who belong to that realm, who have the mark of the beast on their forehead and right hand. The devil controls commerce. If you want to get on, you must have the mark, otherwise the world will not look at you.

So there is the description of it all, and, God willing, in the next lecture we shall go on to consider how these evil powers operate and what happens to them. Then, finally, we shall come on to the glorious victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over every one of them and see how they are all ultimately cast into the lake of perdition, and we shall see how the Christ and His bride become one and enjoy one another in the eternal glory for ever and for ever.

19

The Final Judgment

In our consideration of Revelation, we continue our study of the second half of the book, beginning at chapter 12 and going on to the end of the book. Here, as I have indicated, the theme is the conflict in which we find ourselves as God's people, as members of the Christian Church. This is not only a conflict against men and women; it is something much deeper. The apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6:12). That is the theme of the second half of this great book. Let me remind you that it is divided into four subsidiary sections: chapters 12-14, chapters 15-16, chapters 17, 18 and 19, and chapters 20, 21 and 22.

Now I want to give a general exposition of the message of these four sections because I know of nothing that is of greater importance for Christian people at a time like this than to understand this particular message. Certainly there is nothing that comforts one so much, there is nothing so encouraging, because, whether we like it or not, as Christian people we find ourselves subject to persecution and trials. Christian people are often depressed when they see the state of the Church and look at what is happening in the world. They do not understand, they are bewildered, and wonder whether God has forgotten His promises, and whether Christianity as we have known it is to come to an end. Many people are full of forebodings and uncertainty. Now the answer to all that is just this message of Revelation, and particularly of the second half because here, in chapters 12-14 especially, we are given an account of the antagonists that are behind **[Page 194]** the opposition faced by men and women. At the end of the last lecture, I just noted them and told you to consider them.

The first great antagonist is none other than the devil himself, described in chapter 12 as the great dragon: 'There appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads ...' (v. 3). Later on in chapter 12 he is described as 'that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world'. There, of course, is the primary power that is opposed to us and to our Lord and to God. This links us up with the Old Testament and with the story of the fall and of the whole doctrine of the fall as we have it in the book of Genesis. It was the devil who rebelled against God before even the creation of the world and his one object has been to ruin all God's work and all God's plans.

Supremely, the devil has sought to destroy God's work by attacking the human race, and he produced the fall of man. But God sent His Son—'a second Adam to the fight', and here, in this chapter, we are told of the devil's efforts to destroy the work of God. There is the picture of the woman giving birth to 'a man child' (v. 5) and you remember that the dragon tries to destroy Him but He is taken up into heaven. In a very brief compass we are given a picture of our Lord's coming, His earthly life, His death and His resurrection. But then the devil turns his attentions upon the seed of the woman, that is, upon the Christian Church, all who are born of the Lord Jesus Christ and belong to Him. Therefore, in the remainder of chapter 12 we are told, in symbolic language, of course, of the devil's efforts to destroy the Church. But even there we are comforted and are shown that Christ's people are enabled to overcome the devil 'by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony' (12:1). All is well: we are not only given a picture of the antagonists but also given the assurance of our victory and the way to obtain it.

The devil does not only act himself, but uses certain agencies, and they are described in chapter 13. First, we have the beast that the prophet saw rising 'up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy' (13:1). Now it is agreed by practically everyone that the description of this beast is almost identical with that of the fourth beast in Daniel 7, but with this difference, that the beast in Revelation 13 is a composite picture of the four beasts described by Daniel. In other words, this beast is meant to represent the secular powers of the **[Page 195]** world as they are used by the devil to frustrate God's plans and destroy the Church. The four beasts in Daniel represent specific secular powers. Now here is a beast that stands for all of them together—secular

power itself. In the time of John, of course, it was the Roman Empire, and perhaps even before that the Jews themselves. But since then it has been many other secular powers.

But then in a vision John sees a second beast and this time the beast rises up out of the earth. As we have already indicated, this is undoubtedly a picture of false religion in whatever form it may chance to appear. Here, you remember, is a beast that first of all gives a suggestion of a lamb, but it is not a lamb because it speaks as a dragon. That is the characteristic of false religion. It has the appearance of true religion, but there is always this contradictory element. When we expounded 2 Thessalonians 2 we suggested that here we have a description of the papacy with its curious attempt to combine secular and spiritual power, something which has also been imitated by other religions. The second beast thus symbolises the secular and the spiritual combined to form one religious power.

The Christian Church not only has to meet the devil in direct encounter and not only does it have to meet political and secular powers, it always has to wage a war against false religion. It is not for us to compare these powers or to say which is the most dangerous. The important thing is to realise that they all have the same object, they are all used by the devil, and a false religion or a perversion of the Christian faith is as dangerous as a secular power. Now that is something which many people today seem to forget. The Roman Catholic Church would have us believe that the major opponent of Christianity is communism, not realising that according to this symbol Roman Catholicism itself is perhaps as great a danger. Then there are people who hold a very liberal view of the Bible. These people deny most of the cardinal articles of our Christian faith, yet they say that communism is the great enemy of religion, seemingly unaware that according to this teaching they themselves are enemies of the true faith, posing as great a threat as communism or any other form of secular persecution.

Thus by understanding these symbols we are enabled to understand the times in which we live, and can avoid the pitfalls that open before us—the call, for instance, to *all* who call themselves Christians, no matter what they may happen to believe, to ‘stand together’ against the common enemy of secularism or of communism. Patently, if we understand these verses we cannot stand together with all these so-called **[Page 196]** Christians because to align ourselves with false religion is simply to put ourselves into the camp of our ultimate enemy, the devil, who uses the one antagonist exactly as he uses the other.

But wait a minute, there are still other antagonists. Notice that in this thirteenth chapter we are also told about certain people who receive the mark of the beast on their forehead or on their right hand: ‘He causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads’ (13:16). These people are just human beings who in their blindness and ignorance have failed to understand what is happening and make themselves the tools of both these enemies—the secular powers and the false religions—but they constitute a definite evil which we have to meet.

Then, finally, the last enemy that we are concerned about is described in chapter 14 where we read about ‘that great city’ Babylon. Fortunately, we need be in no trouble about understanding what is meant here because in chapters 17, 18 and part of 19 we are given a detailed account and description of the great harlot Babylon and it seems to me that there can be very little doubt about what it represents. It stands, surely, for the seductive power of worldliness, the power of the world to attract us and to draw us away from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The very term ‘harlot’ (17:5) suggests it all and if you read the detailed description in those other chapters you will see what a perfect picture it is. Babylon represents a superficial charm that is devilish and foul and ugly and pestilential and yet is so seductive that it deceives God’s people.

Now you cannot know your Scriptures at all well without realising how frequently they warn us against worldliness. ‘Demas hath forsaken me,’ says Paul, ‘having loved this present world’ (2 Tim. 4:10). ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,’ says the aged apostle John (1 John 3:15). He knew the danger, and oftentimes when the devil has not been able to get God’s people down by active, militant persecution, he has been able to bring them down by the enticements of the world. In the history of the Church there have been men and women who were ready to face death upon a stake, and could withstand open opposition, but who became the victims of a love of wealth or a love of ease or of pleasure or of comfort, of anything like that that belongs to the world, and without realising it were held captive. So

when the devil fails to destroy us by means of his military or secular power, or his false religions, he comes to us in this most pleasant and seductive manner, and perhaps suggests that we **[Page 197]** are working too hard or that we are being over strict or that we are really going too far and rushing to extremes. In this most plausible way he puts his case to us and, before we realise what has happened, we have listened to him and, for the time being, have become ineffective.

That is the great message of chapters 12, 13 and 14 but, thank God, once more we are given encouragement. We have seen that every single time, in every one of these divisions, God, in His infinite grace and kindness, not only gives us a picture of the enemy and the difficulties, but also gives us the comfort. In this section it comes in that great fourteenth chapter. You remember the 144,000 who were sealed and had the Father's name 'written in their foreheads'? We met this figure in chapter 7, and having defined it there we need not go back to it again. It represents the whole body of the elect, all God's people, who 'follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb' (Rev. 14:4). And what we are told about them is that they are safe. We know that in spite of all those enemies nothing 'shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:39). The best exposition of this passage in Revelation is that eighth chapter of Romans, where Paul is persuaded 'that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38-39). The antagonists are there in Romans 8 but the name of God is on our forehead and they cannot prevail; our salvation is certain and sure.

Revelation 14 then concludes with a picture of the final judgment which it describes in terms of the sickle reaping the earth and of the winepress of the wrath of God.

Chapters 12 to 14 present us with a series of most important pictures and unless we understand them we cannot begin to understand church history. Moreover, we will not understand the Church today or in the future. But further, having in that way described to us the real antagonists face to face with Christ and the Church, Revelation goes on to tell us how these antagonists will finally be judged and overcome. That is, indeed, the message of the remainder of the book from chapter 15 onwards. This is the part of the book which is most full of comfort and consolation and all I want to do is show you the order in which the vision shown to the prophet gives us the truth so that we may know how to apply it to ourselves and to our situation. **[Page 198]**

Chapter 15 starts with a wonderful vision of heaven: 'And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.' This is final. We have already seen, in dealing with chapters 8 to 11, how from time to time God has visited and meted out punishments upon those who oppose the Christian Church. But it was only a third part; the punishment was only partial. Now we are going on to look at the final punishment; the cup is filled up. Now we see the end of their destruction, and we are reminded of that in these terms: 'I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire' (15:2). Fire always stands for judgment. But in that very context John also saw, 'Them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints' (Rev. 15:2-3).

Now it is very marvellous that before we are given any account of the final judgment and the ultimate destruction of all these mighty antagonists, we again have this blessed assurance that we who belong to Christ and are faithful to Him need fear none of these things. Terrible things are going to happen on the earth, but we need have no fear. We are already saved from them. That does not mean that we may not have to go through many of them. It does not mean that we may not have to suffer shipwreck, earthquake, pestilence and many other things, but this is the truth: none of them can really harm us, none of them can really touch us. None of them can, even to the slightest extent, affect our relationship to God and to our blessed Lord and Saviour. There we are standing, as it were, on the sea of glass mingled with fire with harps in our hands and we are already singing the praises. It is the whole essence of this vision, and it is the very essence of our comfort, that whatever may happen in this world, we need have no fear of it. We

need never be filled with any alarm or terror because we have already passed from judgment into life. These things may affect us superficially but they will never affect us in the depth of our being because we are already in the position of safety or, in the language of the apostle Paul, He has already 'raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6). As the apostle John puts it, 'That wicked one toucheth him not' (1 John 5:18). He can often terrify us and alarm us, but he cannot touch us. We are **[Page 199]** secure in Christ. So here in the vision we are seen already standing around the throne, safe from all harm, and safe from these judgments that God will visit upon His antagonists. That, then, is the great message of chapter 15 and it is a chapter that we can never read too frequently. Read it and meditate upon it and realise this great message to you.

Then, having given us that, Revelation continues with the account of the judgments, and the thing to grasp at this point is the order in which they are meted out. First of all judgment starts with those who are least important. That is the interesting thing about this part of the book. In describing the antagonists, John starts with the devil, then comes down the scale, as it were, and the least important are men and women who have the mark of the beast on their forehead or on their right hand. But in giving an account of the final judgment and destruction, John reverses the order and, in a sense, it is natural that he should do so because his purpose is to show us that every conceivable antagonist of whatever strength will be judged and destroyed. So he starts with the weakest and in chapter 16 we have an account of God's meting out His final punishment upon men and women who have foolishly listened to the efforts of the devil and his assistants to draw them away from God and from His Christ and to lead them to destruction.

In chapter 16:1–2, therefore, we have the instruction given to the angels: 'Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.' Now when we dealt with chapters 8 and 9 we saw that in those two chapters exactly the same things are described as in this chapter: the trumpets are blown and certain devastations result, first of all on the earth, then on the sea, and then in the rivers and the fountains. Here, the first vial is poured out upon the earth, the second upon the sea, the next upon the rivers and the waters, then upon the sun, and so on. But as we have seen, it is no longer a partial visitation, this time the destruction is complete, and that, of course, is of very great significance.

It is a principle that is constantly repeated and emphasised in Scripture that God always warns before He finally punishes. We saw that in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. It happened in the case of the flood. It is seen in a very striking manner before the exodus out of Egypt. God **[Page 200]** sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians before He dealt with them in the judgment of the Red Sea. That is the principle. First of all, the plagues, and because they would not listen and because Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not repent, God finally punished him. And you get that same principle here in Revelation. God first of all sends particular judgments upon the world. He has been doing this throughout the centuries—as we saw in the last lecture. He has sent wars, pestilences and times of terrible immorality. But now we are told that all those are but shadows of what God is going to do. He will punish with a terrible fulness, and the destruction that will happen in the world leaves all the catastrophes of the past as mere nothings.

The final judgment is yet to come, but I believe that there are clear instances in the history of the world when terrible judgments have been inflicted, as if God's patience has at last ended. An instance of that, it seems to me, is to be found in North Africa. There was once a great and flourishing Church in North Africa but it is no longer there today. So God may already have turned His back upon certain situations. I do not know—this is partly speculative—but sometimes one is almost tempted to come to that conclusion. But I do say that it is a principle running right through the Bible that when God has warned and has threatened and there is no response, He metes out a kind of final punishment, and certainly that will happen to all unbelievers. All who have died in persistent rebellion against God will be visited with a final punishment, a final consigning to perdition. That is the message of chapter 16. Notice, therefore, the importance of drawing a distinction between trumpets and bowls. The trumpets are a warning while the bowls represent the poured-out punishment and the shedding out of the wrath of God.

Then in chapter 17 we come to the final judgment of Babylon—Babylon the great or Babylon the great harlot, mysterious Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. As we have

already seen, John, as a seer and a prophet, devotes a good deal of attention to this judgment. It occupies the whole of the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters and is the cause of the thanksgiving and the praise at the beginning of chapter 19. Of course, in a way, this is but natural, because Babylon speaks directly to our own experience. I have already described the subtlety and enticement of the world, and here we are given a detailed and terrible description of how all that will be destroyed and brought to nothing. It is almost incredible, but it is absolutely true. Think of the world, think of worldliness, look at **[Page 201]** it in the streets of any great city. Look at it reflected in the newspapers. Look at it in the so-called society papers in particular and then, having done that, come and read these illuminating chapters. Look at the dress, look at the wealth, look at the luxury, look at the world's vaunting of itself, look at its pride in itself and in its great men and women. This is all the seduction of the world, the result of the action of the great harlot that calls kings and princes and wealthy merchants and ordinary people alike. We are given a perfect picture of the world outside Christ, boasting of its wealth, boasting of its food, its banquets, its carriages, its equipment, its dress, and all its beauty and its glory. But then read what will happen to it. Read how it will be destroyed utterly and absolutely. Oh, if we only grasped this teaching we would never again be tempted by worldliness!

We are told in Revelation 17:16 that even the world's own devotees will turn against Babylon. When they see things going wrong, some of the so-called kings will turn against it; they always do. During a war, when there is an air raid and bombs are falling, you rather forget your fineries. In air raid shelters there are very few differences between duchesses and charwomen. That is all shown here in Revelation, but things will be infinitely worse in the future. Babylon will be stripped, it will be ridiculed and shown in all its foulness for the hag that it really is. The paint and the powder will be taken off and it will be revealed in its awful nakedness and filth. Read these chapters time and again and see the discomfiture of all who lived for Babylon and all who believed in it and all who said that this was everything. They have nothing left. They are bereft.

Then listen to the appeal that is made to us: 'Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her' (18:20). The world that has laughed at us; the world that has pointed its finger at us; the world that has called us fools; the world that has dismissed our lives as narrow, hideous, cramping and confining, and has boasted about its marvellous life. But suddenly it is destroyed. So we are told,

Rejoice over her ... for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee.

Revelation 18:21-22

[Page 202] The bands will stop; the jazz will end; the drinking will finish; all will be silenced.

And no craftsman, of whatever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

Revelation 18:22-24

What a mighty book Revelation is if you really understand its message! So John writes, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world' (1 John 2:15). It is all passing away. The world and its things and its kings and its princes and all who belong to it will all be destroyed in this unutterable manner.

Then, to complete this section of the general exposition, at the end of chapter 19 we are given an account of the destruction of the two beasts: the beast that arose out of the sea and the beast that arose out of the earth. Secular powers and all false religions will be cast into the lake of fire and destroyed for ever (19:20).

So we have seen the destruction of the people with the mark of the beast, the destruction of the great whore Babylon, the destruction of the first beast and the destruction of the second beast. But still one antagonist remains and he is given special treatment. A fresh section starts in chapter 20 because there we are given an account of the judgment and the final destruction of the devil himself—Satan, the head and origin of it all, the ultimate antagonist of God. Even he is taken and cast into the lake of destruction for ever and for ever. The last antagonist is judged and destroyed. In the remainder of the book, in chapters 21 to 22, there is nothing else left to do but to give a picture of the new heaven and the new earth ‘wherein dwelleth righteousness’. We are shown Christ’s people, the Church, as His bride. We are told of the marriage of the Lamb and the bride, and we are given a description of our final and eternal state in glory.

Because of the significance of chapter 20, I propose to return to this in the next two lectures, and look at its teaching in a little more detail. Then we shall go on to consider the resurrection and our final and ultimate state in glory.

20

The Premillennial View

We come now to Revelation chapter 20. Obviously this is a most important chapter and it is always, therefore, at the centre of interest. So we must take great care as we look at it, especially because of the history of the different views with regard to it. There are three main views—the premillennial, the post-millennial, and the spiritual view, and perhaps the best way of approaching the subject is to start with the most popular of the three—*premillennialism* or *Chiliasm*.

Now what does this teach? Well, it is part of a body of teaching, the elements of which we have already considered, but essentially it is this. Christ, it is said, intended to establish an earthly Jewish kingdom at His first advent. He says, for instance, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mark 1:15). But the Jews rejected both the kingdom and Christ as King, so the kingdom could not be set up and the Jews were punished and scattered abroad among the nations. Therefore the kingly reign of Christ had to be postponed until the second coming.

But now a mystery is revealed which the Old Testament saints had not dreamed of—the Church; and the Church, it is taught, has nothing to do with Old Testament Israel. In the dispensation of grace, the Church will be gathered out of Jews and Gentiles, but Christ is the head of the Church and not its King. The Church is to evangelise the nations through the preaching of the gospel, but the whole world will not be evangelised, and at the end of this phase Christ will appear and the rapture of the Church and the raising of the dead in Christ will follow. Then will come the time of tribulation and of the Antichrist and during this period the Jews will return to Palestine. They will be converted and will accept Jesus as their King.

At the end of the tribulation, Jesus and His saints will return to **[Page 204]** execute judgment on His enemies, and this is His second coming. At this time the living will be judged; the sheep and the goats separated; the Antichrist destroyed; and Satan will be bound for a thousand years. The saints who died during the tribulation will be raised and Christ will establish His throne in Jerusalem. The city and the Temple will be rebuilt and the ceremonial law with its altar and sacrifices will be restored. Jesus will now be supreme over all the nations of the earth. This is the Messianic age which will last for a thousand years and it will be a period of great prosperity and blessedness, with the desert blossoming as a rose and the solitary places rejoicing. The results of sin will be removed and the leopard will lie down with the kid (Isa. 11:6).

Furthermore, the premillennial view teaches that the Jews will be great evangelists, and there will be tremendous conversions, bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles. All Israel also will be saved. But at the end of the thousand years, Satan will be let loose for a little while and Gog and Magog will make an onslaught on God’s kingdom. But they will be destroyed by fire falling from heaven and Satan will be cast to perdition.

Then the rest of the dead will be raised and judged and the Church will be translated to heaven. But Israel will stay on earth and Christ will reign over them as their eternal King.

Now there are, of course, minor differences of opinion among those who belong to the premillennial school of thought and obviously we cannot go into them all in detail. Some say that the Jews will be converted before they return to Palestine, while others say that their conversion will happen afterwards. There is disagreement also about the thousand years. J. N. Darby says that it will be seven years, while Bengel thinks that two thousand is the number. But most hold to the one thousand years—hence the term ‘millennialism’.

Furthermore, people disagree as to whether the risen saints will be in heaven or on earth—or both—during the thousand years. Will the propagation of the race continue? Will there be sin or not, and will death still have its sway? But I have tried to give you a composite picture of what is held and believed by the majority.

Historically, this view was originally Jewish—as seen among the Jews in the time of our Lord—and for the first three centuries of the Christian era it was quite commonly, though not universally, held. Then St Augustine silenced it by interpreting the thousand years as the era of the Church. Premillennialism reappeared among the Anabapists at **[Page 205]** the time of the Reformation, but it was condemned by all the great Protestant confessions of faith.

Then it emerged again among the Fifth Monarchy Men of the seventeenth century and again in the nineteenth century. Since then it has become a very popular view and is found in the basis of faith of many evangelical bodies without even an alternative being provided.

Now premillennialism clearly implies and involves certain things. It involves a literal interpretation of Revelation 20. It also teaches at least two resurrections and at least two judgments. So now I should like to put before you for your consideration certain objections to that teaching. We have adopted this method right the way through in our consideration not only of this doctrine, but of all the other doctrines also. Nothing, to me, is more lamentable than that people should only know one view. Oftentimes they are not even aware of the fact that there is another possible view and do not know that the view they hold has only come into being, say, about a hundred years ago. We have tried, therefore, to put all possible views forward, giving the reasons for and against them, in order that we may be in a position to arrive at a balanced judgment as the result of prayer and a careful consideration of the teachings.

So then, having put premillennial teaching before you, let me suggest certain criticisms of it. There are quite a number. First of all—and this is very important—is the fact that it is a teaching which is found nowhere else in the Gospels or in the New Testament epistles. All are agreed about this. There are no other references to this idea of an earthly kingdom with our Lord reigning in person on earth for a literal thousand years. The teaching appears only in Revelation 20. That, of course, is obviously a serious point. Surely, if you believe in the unity of Scripture, you must believe that the Scripture acts as a whole. So when the doctrine of our Lord's second coming is dealt with in other parts of the Scripture, then if this earthly reign is an essential part of it, you would have thought that there would have been some suggestion or hint with regard to it, either in the teaching of our Lord Himself or else in the teaching of His apostles. But the fact is that there is not.

Second, the emphasis of this teaching is upon the earthly aspect of the kingdom with our Lord reigning physically here in this world. It is an earthly conception, and in their descriptions (as I have tried to show you) of the glory of this earthly reign, proponents of this view surpass one another in their attempts to paint its glory and wonder. **[Page 206]** But it is still material and materialistic, whereas, when we read the Gospels and our Lord's own teaching about His kingdom, we cannot but be struck by the fact that He constantly emphasises the fact that His kingdom is *spiritual*, and the same emphasis appears in the epistles. Now let us be clear about this: we do believe that, as 2 Peter 3 shows us, ultimately there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Yes, but that is after this present heaven and earth have been destroyed in the manner that Peter there describes. The premillennial view, on the other hand, talks about an earthly kingdom before that final reign.

Then another objection, it seems to me, is that premillennialism postpones the idea of the kingdom to the future. It is said that we are in the Church age, and, as I pointed out to you, Christ is not King at the moment, but is only the Head of the Church. Christ offered the kingdom when He was here in the world but it was rejected. Then came this interregnum and there is no kingdom now but it will come during the millennial reign. Whereas, surely, the Scriptures themselves teach us that the kingdom is already present and that those of us who are Christians are already in the kingdom of God. John in the first chapter of Revelation says, 'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ ...' (Rev. 1:9). Christians are already in the kingdom. In one sense, the kingdom is still to come, but in another sense it has already come. So Paul writes that God has 'delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son' (Col. 1:3). We are already citizens of the kingdom of God. So, then, to postpone the whole idea of the kingdom to the future is to contradict scriptural teaching.

Then I come to another objection which, to me, is one of the most serious of all: it is the view which tells us that not only will our Lord reign for a thousand years in the flesh, but that the Jews will be given a great position of preeminence. Here is something which is very serious for it reintroduces that distinction between Jews and Gentiles which, surely, has been abolished. There was nothing the apostle Paul in particular so gloried in as that there is 'neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free' (Col. 3:11). 'He hath broken down the middle wall of partition,' wrote Paul (Eph. 2:14). The kingdom is now open to Gentiles as well as to Jews. The whole glory of the gospel, wrote Paul, again to the Ephesians, is that the Gentiles are 'fellowheirs' (Eph. 3:6) and 'fellowcitizens with the saints' (Eph. 2:19) in this glorious kingdom of God. But here is a **[Page 207]** teaching that reintroduces a vital distinction between Jew and Gentile which, it is said, will last throughout the whole of eternity.

I must confess that I find it quite impossible to believe in a permanent separation of Jews and Gentiles. I would have thought that the eleventh chapter of Romans in and of itself would be enough to squash any such idea. There is only one olive tree, says Paul. The Jews were natural branches but they were cut off and others were grafted in. 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you,' said our Lord to the Jews, 'and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof' (Matt. 21:43). But the Gentiles were grafted into the one olive tree, and the Jews are grafted in again when they become Christians. There is no permanent distinction for all eternity between Jew and Gentile; that is gone once and for ever. The New Testament teaching is that all nations and tribes and tongues are to be in God's kingdom. Even the book of Revelation teaches that and, indeed, there is no suspicion of any difference between Jew and Gentile even in this twentieth chapter itself. Teaching about Jew and Gentiles has been imported into the chapter and is out of place there.

Then another point is that premillennialism teaches, as I have already suggested, several comings of our Lord. According to that view, there are to be at least two comings—three, if you believe in the preliminary rapture. But surely the New Testament teaches that there is only to be one second coming of our Lord—the one that will be associated with the general resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. Where is the evidence for more than one coming?

We have already considered the argument against several future comings of our Lord, and have looked closely at 1 Thessalonians 4 and 2 Thessalonians 2. Let me therefore come to something which we have not dealt with so thoroughly. The premillennial view also teaches that there are at least two resurrections, if not three. If you hold the preliminary rapture view there are three resurrections. But if you do not hold that view, and are a premillennialist, then there are two, with an interval of at least a thousand years between the resurrection of the good people and the resurrection of the bad. The teaching, you remember, is that believers, the Christians, will be raised at the beginning of the thousand years' reign but that unbelievers will not be raised until the end of that period and even a little beyond it. Here again is something which it is important to consider for it seems to me that this teaching is a direct contradiction of the teaching of our Lord and Saviour Himself. In John 5:28–29, He says, 'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, **[Page 208]** in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.' Where is the interval of a thousand years? Surely our Lord's words state clearly that there is to be one general resurrection for all people, good and bad together.

But then if we go on to the next chapter of John's Gospel—chapter 6—we find that our Lord Himself teaches that the good and the bad are to be raised up at the last day, not at the beginning of some millennial period, but at the very end. We find this first in verse 39: 'And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.' There is nothing after the last day: it is the *last* day and on the last day, and not before, our Lord will raise those whom the Father has given Him, the good, the believers, the Christians. Then He repeats this in verse 40, in verse 44, and in verse 54. We find exactly the same teaching in John 11:24. Martha says to Him, 'I know that he [Lazarus] shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' That was the current teaching, and our Lord adopted and used it. So to say that there are two resurrections with an interval of a thousand years between them is a contradiction of what our Lord plainly teaches, and of the teaching everywhere in the New Testament with regard to the resurrection, the last day and the final judgment.

Then there is another objection to premillennial teaching, and it should present a very real difficulty in the minds of all of us. Indeed, there are many premillennialists who admit quite frankly that it is a difficulty to them. If that teaching is right then we are confronted with this: at one and the same time there will be on the earth glorified saints—people who have died as Christians, and have been raised from the dead and whose bodies have been changed ‘like unto his glorious body’ (Phil. 3:21)—and at the same time other Christians who have not yet died and are still in the flesh. Both these groups will be living together. But I find that impossible to conceive. Indeed, not only that, but the Lord Himself in all His glory will be living on earth with men and women. Yet when Saul of Tarsus had just a glimpse of Him, he fell on his back to the ground. So this surely is a most serious difficulty.

Another incongruity is that during this supposed glorious period surely there must be some people on the earth who are still sinners? I say that for this reason: if there are no sinners left, then how can the things which are described in Revelation 20:7–9 ever take place? We **[Page 209]** are told that when the thousand years have expired, ‘Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.’ Are we asked to believe that by one stroke Satan can suddenly turn this tremendous multitude, which is as numerous as the sand of the sea, into enemies of Christ? No, the suggestion, surely, must be that they were enemies the whole time and that their sin was merely held in restraint. So this period is not as glorious as our friends would have us understand.

But not only that, here is another of these—it seems to me—insuperable obstacles. Is it conceivable that after our blessed Lord and Saviour has been living and reigning in this world for a thousand years (not now as the carpenter of Nazareth, remember, but as the King of kings and Lord of lords, in all His heavenly glory and with His limitless power), is it conceivable that after a thousand years of Christ’s rule, Satan can suddenly produce these hordes, these masses of people from all over the world, as numerous as the sands of the sea, to fight Christ and to be bitterly and violently opposed to Him? Surely it is straining imagination, let alone thought, to ask us to believe that such a thing is possible at all. Yet it is an essential part of premillennial teaching.

Now there are more objections, but let us turn for a moment to 2 Peter 3, where, it seems to me, the objections are more or less gathered together for us in a very convenient and clear manner. Peter was writing to comfort Christian people who were being bothered by scoffers who said, in effect, ‘You people say—and you’ve been saying it now for a number of years—that this King, this Christ of yours, is going to come back. Where is the evidence? Look around you,’ they said, ‘everything is going on as it always has. There’s no sign at all of His coming. It’s all nonsense. It’s a figment of your imagination. You’ve been fooled.’

So Peter writes to comfort the Christians on that very point. But there is not a word about any millennial reign. There is not a suspicion of a suggestion about a period during which sin will be kept in check and under restraint; none at all. All that Peter knows is that the day of the Lord will introduce a great conflagration which will mean the destruction of the world as we know it. Evil and sin will be burnt right out of it. ‘The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men’ (2 Pet. 3:7). It all happens at the same time—that is all Peter knows. And then there is the coming of ‘new heavens **[Page 210]** and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (v. 13). Peter says nothing whatsoever about a millennial reign, and he indicates that Paul also says nothing. In verses 15 and 16 Peter refers to the writing of his ‘beloved brother Paul’ who, Peter says, speaks in all his epistles ‘of these things’ but there is not the slightest hint of any premillennial teaching.

Notice also that Peter says, ‘But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night’ (2 Pet. 3:10). Our world will be burnt up with fire, says Peter. It will mean the end of the world as we now know it, and then there will be a new heaven and new earth. But how can all that come as ‘a thief in the night’ if it has been preceded by a thousand years of Christ’s presence in His glorified body here on the earth? We shall all be waiting for it. We shall have gone through the millennium and then through the short season when Satan is let free, and we shall know that the day of the Lord is at hand. This premillennial teaching directly contradicts the teaching of this important chapter.

Not only that, in 2 Peter 3 Peter tells us quite plainly what we are to look forward to. He exhorts us to look forward to the ‘coming of the day of God’ (v. 12) which will also be ‘the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men’ (v. 7), and the day of the great conflagration when ‘the elements shall melt with fervent heat’ (v. 10), and the world as we now know it will be destroyed. So that surely this chapter ought to be sufficient in and of itself to cause us to question most seriously the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20.

But now let me put before you certain objections which arise from Revelation 20 itself. So far I have been dealing with what I would call general objections from the analogy of Scripture—and we are always to compare scripture with scripture. In 2 Peter 3:16 the apostle Peter tells us that there are some people who wrest the writings of the apostle Paul to their own destruction. Such people are ‘unlearned and unstable’ (2 Pet. 3:16). Not having a real knowledge of the Scriptures, they are ready to believe anything that is told them. We avoid that by growing ‘in grace and the knowledge of the Lord’ (3:18). Scripture is one, and we must never interpret any one passage in such a way as to produce a blank contradiction of the teaching of other passages. That is the rule by which we are working.

So now we come back to Revelation 20. There are, it seems to me, certain objections to this premillennial view in the chapter itself. Surely as we read it, we must come to the conclusion that the scene depicted by John the seer does not take place on earth at all; it is a scene in heaven. **[Page 211]** ‘And I saw an angel come down from heaven’ (v. 1). If we go back through the book we will find that John starts most of his fresh sections in a similar way, with phrases like, ‘And I saw ...’ The scene is, surely, in heaven, and let me support that argument. John says in verse 4, ‘And I saw thrones ...’ Now as we read through Revelation, we find a number of references to thrones and without a single exception the thrones are in heaven, not on earth.

That, then, should cause us to pause, but added to that, as I have already pointed out, there is not a single reference to the earth in this chapter, still less is there a reference to Palestine. Jerusalem is not mentioned at all. The Jews simply do not figure here in any sense, and yet the premillennial interpretation puts the earth, Palestine, rebuilt Jerusalem, the Temple and the Jews in a position of preeminence. The friends who hold the premillennial view admit the absence of references to an earthly Jewish kingdom. They say that in the Old Testament there are prophecies about the glorious time that is coming, and it must be here, so they put it in here. But the question is: Does John put it in here? Is there even a suspicion of a suggestion that it is meant to be here? I suggest to you that in the whole of Revelation there is nothing whatsoever which suggests earth or Palestine or Jews—the scene is in heaven.

Then we read in Revelation 20:1–2, ‘And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.’ Now even the friends who hold the premillennial view are prepared to agree that all this about the chain is obviously symbolical because Satan, after all, is a spirit. But from there on, they reject the use of symbolism. But surely that is inconsistent! Surely everything we are dealing with here is symbolic. It is not the way of true interpretation to pick and choose to suit the convenience of a theory. If this chapter starts with symbolism why should it not continue in the same way?

I would put this point to you: the numbers in this book, as we have seen many times, are obviously symbolic. And surely the same thing applies here in verse 4. The number one thousand, as we have seen, suggests a period of completeness, a whole period. It suggests a long period, yes, but above all a complete period—ten cubed. There are many uses of the word ‘thousand’ in Revelation. Turn them up again for yourself and you will see that elsewhere this number is always used symbolically. So why should we suddenly literalise it here?

Then another, to me, very cogent argument is this: again in verse 4 **[Page 212]** we read: ‘And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them’—then notice—‘and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus ...’ John deliberately says that he saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, which surely suggests that the people were in a disembodied state. He does not say that he saw those who had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus,

raised and in their glorified bodies. If he meant that, why did he not say so? He says he saw their souls. It may be argued that often in the Scriptures men and women in the flesh are referred to as souls. Acts 7:14 says that the children of Israel who went down from Canaan to Egypt were 'threescore and fifteen souls'. Yes, that is done sometimes, but we cannot adopt that explanation here because John says, 'the souls of them'. If he had only said 'souls', then that would have been a possible explanation, but he adds 'of them'. If someone said to me that he had seen the soul of a person, I would only draw the conclusion that he had not seen the body of that person. Otherwise why did he not say, 'I saw the person'? This again suggests that the scene is in heaven where John sees the souls of those who are in Christ, those who have been true and faithful and have suffered for the witness and the testimony of Jesus.

Then another point which strikes anyone reading chapter 20 without any presuppositions must be that this period of a thousand years—whatever the interpretation of it may be—obviously precedes the final judgment. In this chapter we do not come to the final judgment until verses 11 and 12 where we read, 'And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away'—how reminiscent of 2 Peter 3 that is—'and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' Then John goes on to say, 'And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works' (v. 13).

In Revelation 20 the final judgment comes after this thousand years. Therefore it involves supporters of premillennial teaching in the most serious, not to say impossible, difficulties, because they have to reverse the order of events. Yet Revelation 20 is not only in line with 2 Peter 3, it is equally in line with the great teaching in Romans 8 about the creature being made 'subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope'—notice—**[Page 213]** cause the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now' (Rom. 8:20–22).

In Romans 8 Paul is comforting people who are having a hard time and the encouragement he holds out for them is not that there will be a glorious period of a thousand years' reign with Christ on earth. No, he writes, 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting'—for what? For the millennial reign? No—'for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body' (vv. 22–23). Our hope lies in this final victory when the whole of creation has been rid of evil and of sin by this conflagration which is coming, and the new heaven and the new earth have been ushered in. And again in Acts 3:19–21 we get a reference to the period when Peter, preaching after the healing of that lame man, talks about the regeneration that is coming, 'the times of refreshing' (v. 19), and, 'the times of restitution' (v. 21).

And that brings me to the last of the objections which I find in the chapter itself. Surely when we come to the binding of Satan for a thousand years, the premillennial view presses its interpretation too far. We are told that the angel 'laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled' (Rev. 20:2–3). Now if the interpretation of that is pressed to mean that there will be no sin and evil at all in this world during that great period, then, as I have already indicated, it is very difficult to explain how Satan can so easily, at the end of the thousand years, persuade so many people to obey him, so many people, indeed, that it seems as if the Church and Christ will be almost over-whelmed, and in order to save Christ and His people it is necessary for God to send down fire out of heaven (v. 9).

So there, it seems to me, are the objections to the premillennial interpretation of the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation. It remains now for us to consider two other possible interpretations and then to make a final statement about the question of the time of our Lord's coming. This will lead us on to a brief consideration of the doctrine of the resurrection and the ultimate state of glory in which we who belong to the Lord shall spend our eternity.

21

Post-millennialism and the Spiritual View

We come now to consider a view which is more or less directly opposed to the premillennialist view. This is generally known as the *post-millennial view*, the view which teaches that the second coming will take place, but at the *end* of the thousand years. Proponents of this view do not teach that the millennium means a reign by our Lord in His glorified body on the earth, but that He will come as King at the end of the millennium. They teach that towards the end of the Christian era there will be a period of unusual and special blessing which will dwarf everything that we read of in Acts chapter 2. There will be, they say, such a tremendous outpouring of the Spirit, leading to such missionary and evangelistic activity, that most of the people on the face of the earth will be converted and will become Christians. In post-millennial teaching, there is no break between what is happening now and what is to happen in the millennium, but the present era will lead into this tremendous period. Some say it will last exactly a thousand years, others that the figures are symbolic, but they all agree that there will be a long period when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Is. 11:9). It is during that period, they say, that the Jews will be converted and (as I have suggested) the great fulness of the Gentiles will also come in. At the end of this glorious period, this golden age of the Church, there will be a short season when the Devil will, as it were, be let loose. Then there will be great persecution, trouble and trials which will be ended by the coming of the Lord and by the final judgment with the destruction of the heavens and the earth as they are now, and the [Page 216] ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth 'wherein dwelleth righteousness'.

That, essentially, is the post-millennial view. It is a view which is found now and again throughout the long history of the Church, but it has certainly been most popular from about the early part of the eighteenth century. It was popularised by a man called Whitby who lived in the early years of that century, and from about 1720 until about 1830 it was easily the most popular view. Indeed, it was the view that was held by practically all the great Protestant and conservative evangelical commentators during the nineteenth century. It was, for example, the view of the millennium held by the great theologian, Charles Hodge and by his equally distinguished son, A. A. Hodge.

So, then, what is to be said for the post-millennial view? Is there anything in the Scriptures to confirm or support it? Well, it is said that there is a great deal. The tendency is to say that the second chapter of the book of Daniel is enough in itself to support post-millennial teaching. In Daniel 2, you remember, we read about the image that came in a dream to Nebuchadnezzar. The image is struck by a stone which begins to develop and grows so large that it becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth. That is a direct prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His kingdom—everybody is agreed about that. Yes, but post-millennialists add that we should notice what the passage says. It tells us that the stone becomes so great that it finally fills the whole world and therefore, they say, you must teach that the gospel and the kingdom must spread to cover the whole world. Then they quote many other passages such as the verse from Isaiah 11 that I have just quoted about the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth as the waters cover the sea. They also quote some of the parables in Matthew 13: the parable of the yeast, for instance, which spreads until it makes all the dough rise. Then they point to the parable of the mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds, but it becomes a great tree and the birds of the air nest in its branches, and so on. They say that these parables teach quite clearly that the kingdom, as the result of the preaching of the gospel, will be extensive and world-wide and they point out that so far we have had nothing that corresponds to that.

And in the same way, post-millennialists say that Romans 11 confirms their view. Earlier, when we were considering the interpretation of that great chapter, I pointed out that Dr Charles Hodge and others said that, according to their understanding, the words 'all [Page 217] Israel shall be saved' (v. 26) meant that in the golden era of the Church the Jews would be saved en masse, as it were. All the Jews then alive would come into the kingdom. They would all believe the message, or at any rate, so many would believe that one would be able to say, 'All Israel has been saved.' They said that the same would also apply to the fulness of the Gentiles.

Those are the arguments that are generally put forward and, of course, many other scriptures seem to teach the same thing. Yet it seems to me that post-millennialism is a point of view which we must also reject. Now I suppose it is almost inevitable that all of us in our interpretations of Scripture should be somewhat subject to influences from the times in which we live. We should not be, I know, but we are in the flesh and we are all human, and no commentator or expositor is perfect. So I think there can be little doubt but that Charles Hodge and others were influenced by what was happening in the world when they lived. Charles Hodge died in 1878 when the great missionary enterprise, which had started about 1804, was still growing. Country after country was being opened up and the gospel was going to places where it had never been before. So people felt that the millennium was not far off. 'Just wait a few years,' they said. Alas, they could not foresee what would happen in the twentieth century. If you had told them, they would not have believed that there would be two world wars and that in a hundred years people would be talking about 'closing doors' and would be saying that fields of opportunity were going and we must hurry because soon we would not be allowed to preach the gospel in perhaps most of the world. In the nineteenth century Christians could not see that. They saw a wonderful missionary movement and it looked to them as if the golden era of the Church was indeed at hand. I may be doing them an injustice, but if you read their works I think you will sense that an element like that came in and probably they were partly influenced by it.

But, apart from that, the difficulty that I personally find with the post-millennial view is that there seems to be such clear teaching in the Scriptures that far from there being a golden era just before the end, there will be a time of great tribulation, when the Church is subjected to terrible trials, and there will be awful and terrible warfare. Indeed, there is one verse, one statement, which, as far as I am concerned, is enough to put the post-millennial view right out. It is Luke 18:8 where our Lord says, 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' And faith there means *the* faith. He seems to **[Page 218]** prophesy there that when He comes, there will appear to be no faith at all left in the world. Now I find it very difficult to believe that there could ever be such a condition as that immediately after a tremendous golden period. We have already encountered this difficulty in connection with the premillennial view. It is straining the imagination too much to ask us to believe that, after such a period, men and women could so quickly and almost overwhelmingly suddenly turn against the gospel. I feel, therefore, that on those grounds I cannot accept the post-millennial interpretation of Revelation 20.

Furthermore, the whole post-millennial idea militates against our Lord's clear teaching that the end will come in an apocalyptic manner. This idea of an apocalypse is surely everywhere in the New Testament; our Lord Himself constantly emphasised it. There is no suggestion of a gradual increase of the message leading to a golden era which will conclude with just a slight difficulty before the end. No, rather, the New Testament suggests a sudden coming, a dramatic and an apocalyptic coming. I find it difficult to reconcile the post-millennial interpretation with that. That, then, is a brief review of postmillennialism. I have not considered it in such detail as the premillennial view because it is not so commonly held.

The third possibility is neither premillennial nor post-millennial. It is, as we have seen in interpreting other parts of this book, what I would claim to be a *spiritual interpretation*. It pays great attention to the symbolism of chapter 20, as it does to the symbolism of the whole book, and emphasises particularly the spiritual aspect. Let me put it like this: I feel that very often the trouble with premillennial and post-millennial views is that their advocates have not accepted what we have called 'the principle of parallelism or recapitulation' which, I suggest, is evident in Revelation. You remember I suggested that there are seven sections, with each section describing the same thing. The book takes us from the beginning to the end of the Church age, and each section concludes at the second coming and the final judgment. Now I feel that post-millennial and premillennial teaching has failed to see that there is a definite ending at the end of chapter 19. The tendency is to say that chapter 20 continues the theme of chapter 19 and, because we are told of the coming of the Lord in chapter 19, then, it is said, this millennium (whatever it is) must be after or before our Lord's coming.

I would reply to this that chapter 19 takes us right up to the very end. We read in verse 15, 'And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, **[Page 219]** that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' That is the

end, the last judgment. Similarly, verse 21 reads, 'And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceedeth out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.' Chapter 19 also describes the destruction and the throwing into the lake of perdition of those two beasts of whom we read in the thirteenth chapter: 'And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone' (Rev. 19:18–20). The great whore and the people with the mark of the beast have already gone.

So there is an end. Yes, the end of all the forces against our Lord and the Church is shown in chapter 19, but not the end of the devil. This, surely, is something which is so important that it merits treatment on its own, and I suggest to you that that is what we have in the twentieth chapter. Chapter 20 gives an account of the destruction of the devil, not his assistants, not his emissaries, not the people whom he has deluded—they have all been dealt with. The devil is so important—he has been the cause of all the trouble in God's perfect world—that he is dealt with alone, and this chapter is mainly given over to an account of his final punishment and destruction. So chapter 20 is parallel with all the other sections.

Now certain problems at once arise when we come to the interpretation of Revelation 20. First, John sees an angel coming down from heaven, 'having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand' (v. 1). This angel 'laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan ...' Notice the emphasis. It is as if John is saying to us: 'Now listen to what I'm saying. I'm now going to deal specially with this one being and these are his names. He's an important person—the dragon, that old serpent the devil, Satan. Be quite clear as to who he is.' '... and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more' (Rev. 20:1–3).

So the first question for us is: What does the binding of Satan mean? What does this casting of Satan into a bottomless pit mean? I [Page 220] reminded you in the last lecture that Satan, being a spiritual being, cannot be physical. Since he has no body, we are obviously dealing with symbols. There is not a literal pit and a lid put over it; there is not a literal chain—obviously not. What, then, is he? Now when we deal with a difficult passage like this, surely the thing to do, always, is to search the Scriptures. This is a rule of interpretation, and a very good one. If ever you come across a difficult passage, then try to find something similar that will help to cast light upon it. Is there any other reference in Scripture to Satan being bound? There is—this very term is used in Matthew 12:29. Our Lord has just cast out a dumb spirit from a man and some of the Pharisees standing by say, 'This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub' (v. 24). But our Lord turns upon them and denounces them. He asks, in effect, 'If I'm casting out devils by Beelzebub, by whom do your children cast them out? How do the Jewish exorcists do it?' Then He goes further and gives the parable of the strong man who keeps his possessions safe, until a stronger man comes, and robs him. Jesus asks, 'How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house' (Matt. 12:29). Now remember, our Lord is talking about the devil, about Beelzebub. He says that hitherto the devil has ruled over all these evil spirits; he is the strong man armed. How can he be dealt with? There is only one way: somebody stronger must come and *bind* him. Our Lord applies to Beelzebub, the chief of the devils, Satan, the very term, 'bind', that is used here in Revelation 20. He says that when He casts out the evil spirit from the blind and dumb man, He is binding Satan and rendering him incapable of continuing his work.

In Luke 10:18 there is another reference to Satan. The disciples have come back from their first journey. Our Lord has sent them out to preach and to cast out devils and they return full of elation and say, 'Even the devils are subject unto us.' And our Lord says to them, 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.' You notice the term—He beheld Satan as lightning *fall* from heaven.

But there is another reference, and this is perhaps the most important and most significant of all. How often we forget these words of Jesus in John's Gospel: 'Now is the judgment of this world'—notice—'now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die' (John 12:31–33). He is talking about His own death. *Now*,

he says, the hour has come. And what is going to **[Page 221]** happen now? Well, not only will He be lifted up on the cross, not only will He die, but at this selfsame time the prince of this world will be cast out. It is our Lord who says this; and we have the same teaching here in the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation.

Teaching about the destruction of Satan also appears in Hebrews 2:14 where we are told that our Lord had to take flesh and blood for this reason—‘that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.’ Our Lord’s work when He was here on earth, Hebrews tells us, was ‘to destroy’, and there ‘destroy’ does not mean literally to end and cause to disintegrate but to render null and void, to render ineffective. We find exactly the same teaching in 1 John 3:8 where we are told, ‘The Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.’

And as we have seen, the downfall of Satan is also described in the twelfth chapter of the book of Revelation itself. ‘And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ...’ (Rev. 12:7). When was this? Well, you remember that this chapter describes the incarnation, the child born of the woman. ‘She brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne’ (v. 5). And in connection with that, ‘There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan’—the same terms we find in Revelation 20—‘which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him’ (Rev. 12:7–9). So what we have in the twentieth chapter of Revelation is precisely what is described in the twelfth chapter and repeats the teaching given in other New Testament passages.

Clearly, then, the ‘binding’ of Satan began at our Lord’s first coming, and that is what Revelation 20:2 means.

‘But wait a minute,’ says someone, ‘don’t these verses go on to say that Satan is bound and cast out and a seal set upon him so that he should deceive the nations no more “till the thousand years should be fulfilled and after that he must be loosed a little season” (v. 3)? Are you suggesting that that is a description of what has been happening in this world since the first coming and the death, resurrection and ascension of our blessed Lord?’

Yes, I suggest to you that these verses can be explained in this way. **[Page 222]** Notice that we are told that ‘he should deceive the nations no more’. Who are the nations? Well, all expositors are agreed that in prophecy the term ‘the nations’ always stands for the Gentiles in contradistinction to the Jews. The Gentiles are ‘the nations’; Jews are ‘the nation’. Jews are God’s nation, God’s holy people; the others are the nations. So we are told that the objective of this binding of Satan is so that he shall deceive the nations no more.

Another thing that happened to the devil was that our Lord upon the cross put Satan and all his followers to an open shame ‘triumphing over them in it’ (Col. 2:15). There is no question at all but that by His death upon the cross our Lord defeated Satan and, in a special manner, put him to an open shame, exactly as our Lord has prophesied in the twelfth chapter of John. The prince of this world is there cast out.

Not only that, we read in Matthew 28:18–20 that at the very end our Lord said, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach’—who?—‘all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ... and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’ You see the picture? ‘All power is given unto me.’ Go now, our Lord says, and disciple the nations. This means that before our Lord’s first coming the nations were in absolute darkness. The truth about God was solely to be found among the Jews. The nations were deceived and bound by Satan in utter darkness. That was their condition right through the Old Testament. But as the result of our Lord’s first coming, and the work that He did, the message of the kingdom was to be preached to all the nations, and the devil, who was defeated by the cross, could no longer deceive them. He had deceived them absolutely until then, but from the Day of Pentecost something absolutely new began, the darkness of the nations was enlightened.

Our Lord had told His followers that they should be witnesses unto Him 'both in Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts 1:8). And He sent them out to disciple the nations in the power and the might and the authority of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it can be said with literal truth that ever since the nations of the world have not been deceived; the light of the gospel has permeated; the news of the kingdom is preached in all nations and is continuing to be preached. It began then; it has been going on ever since; and it will eventually be completed. So I would say that the history of the Christian period, the Christian era, is a verification **[Page 223]** of the statement that Satan has been bound, cast out, and cannot deceive the nations any longer in the way that he had been doing in the past. The history of the spread of the gospel is a proof of this statement in Revelation 20:3.

Those, then, are some of the preliminary questions. But now we come on to another question which often engages people's attention, and must, of course, engage it. I indicated to you in the last lecture that the word 'souls' is used deliberately in Revelation 20:4: 'And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded ...' Not 'them', not these people in their glorified bodies, no, there is no mention of bodies; it is 'the souls of them'. And the fact that they are sitting upon thrones clearly suggests that they are in heaven.

Yes, but what exactly do verses 4 and 5 mean when they say, 'They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection'? What is 'the first resurrection'? Well, it is obviously something that applies to the 'souls' of these people reigning. Another thing we know about it is that in the fourteenth verse we read, 'And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.' And verse 6 tells us of these people, 'Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.' So the first death is a natural death in a physical sense; the second death is to be cast into the lake of fire.

Who are the people who have a part in the first resurrection? Only those who are not to be cast into the lake of fire. But what does that suggest to us about them? Surely this is a way of describing regeneration. These 'souls' who are reigning with Him are not in the body, they are souls, but they are alive. They are the regenerate who have passed through death and have gone to be with Him. Now in the Bible there are many descriptions of regeneration in terms of resurrection, so we are not straining Scripture when we interpret these words in Revelation 20:5 in this way. Take John 11:25-26: 'I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.' Now people are often stumbled by that. They say that our Lord says categorically, 'Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die'—and yet Christians do die. So obviously He is not referring to physical death. This is a reference to spiritual death which leads to **[Page 224]** that second death. Again, in Romans 6 we are told repeatedly that we have not only died with Christ but we have been buried with Him and are also risen with Him. 'Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God' (Rom. 6:11). That is the whole argument of that sixth chapter of Romans.

Then we read in Ephesians 2:5-6, 'Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' We have been resurrected with Him, raised with Him, and we are seated with Him in the heavenly places. As we read in Revelation, the souls of them were sitting on the thrones and reigning with Him. It agrees perfectly.

Furthermore, in Colossians 3:1-3 Paul writes, 'If ye then be risen with Christ'—then—'... For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.' Now in those passages, the term 'resurrection' is patently used to describe regeneration. Anybody who is regenerate has risen with Christ—and that is the first resurrection. The resurrection of the body is to follow, that is the second resurrection. The phrase 'the first resurrection' refers to the spiritual resurrection, it is a way of describing the 'new man' in Christ who has been regenerated. And so, looking at it like that, we begin to understand what Paul means when he says that 'to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21) because it means being 'with Christ which is far better' (Phil. 1:23). We understand what he means when he writes to Timothy, 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him' (2 Tim. 2:12). We understand what Revelation 3:21 means when it says, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.' What a

perfect description of what we have in this fourth verse of the twentieth chapter of Revelation. Surely it is all quite clear. Here we are given an account of those who have believed in Christ and are born again with Christ. He has fulfilled His promises to them. They are with Him in heaven which is far better, they are seated with Him, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

So then, what does the thousand years' 'reign' mean? Well, I have already been suggesting its meaning, but let me give you a passage of Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 15:25 we read, 'for he [the Lord Jesus Christ] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.' That is what it means. 'Then cometh the end' (v. 24), the final judgment and the end of the world. This is the fulfilment of the prophecy in Psalm 110 which is quoted so frequently in the New Testament. God the **[Page 225]** Father says, 'Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool' (Ps. 110:1). We find the same teaching in Philippians 2: 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him'—in view of what He has done—'and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil. 2:9–11). Our Lord is now reigning and will reign until His enemies are made His footstool, and those who died in Christ go to be with Him and reign with Him during this very period. Once again, this is the teaching that we see at the end of Revelation 3. The thousand years' reign means our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven reigning over the earth. And, I repeat, He is doing that now. Go back again to Matthew 28: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' He is not going to have this power—He *has* it! 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.'

My final objection to the post-millennial view is that it detracts from the glorious truth that Christ is reigning in heaven now. It tells us that the kingdom has not yet come; it seems to think that the world is in the hands of the devil now and that the Lord Jesus has no power and will not have until He comes again. But the Scripture tells me that He is reigning *now*. At this minute He has all power over heaven and earth. All things are in His hands and those who have died in Christ, the souls of them that were beheaded and have not received the mark of the beast, are now enjoying the reign with Him.

What, then, is the thousand years? I suggest to you that it is a symbolical figure to indicate the perfect length of time, known to God and to God alone, between the first and the second comings. It is not a literal thousand years, but the whole of this period while Christ is reigning until His enemies are made His footstool and He returns again for the final judgment. Of course, at the end of this period there is to be a short time of persecution which will be very severe: Matthew 24 talks of 'great tribulation' (v. 21). We find the same teaching also in Luke 21, and we have already seen that it is suggested in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians. There will be an intense period of tribulation at the end of this period while the Lord in heaven is reigning, seated at the right hand of God. When all His enemies have been made His footstool, then He will come and Satan and all the others will be taken. Here in Revelation 20, we are especially given an account of how Satan is taken. He will be bound and, we are told, 'cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the **[Page 226]** false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever' (v. 10). Satan destroyed! The great judgment, the final judgment, ushers in the conflagration of 2 Peter 3, the new heavens and the new earth and the eternal and everlasting state of the saints, God's people.

There, I suggest to you, is the third way of interpreting this great twentieth chapter of Revelation. Consider the three views. Go through your Scriptures again, testing them. Observe the correspondences which I have tried to indicate to you, and then see which view would give the greatest comfort to the first-century saints to whom the book was written and which is most likely to give comfort and encouragement to the saints who have lived ever since. Which interpretation is most likely to encourage us in these days? May God give us all wisdom and understanding and, above all, humility as we consider these great, notable and marvellous things.

22

The Resurrection of the Body

We have been considering the doctrine of the second coming of our Lord at great length and our conclusion is that this will happen at the end of the age; that there is only one coming of our Lord, which is at the last day; and that that coming will be associated with certain events, one of which is the resurrection of the dead. We have said that, as we understand the teaching of the Scriptures, there is only one general resurrection of the dead. We do not accept the teaching which says that there are two, or perhaps even three, with an interval of a thousand years, and perhaps even more, between the two main resurrections and I have already given you evidence to show that our Lord Himself taught that the good and the bad would rise together. As the creed puts it: 'We believe in the resurrection of the dead', and we believe that it will take place at the last day, when our Lord returns visibly, and in bodily form, in glory and surrounded by holy angels in the clouds of heaven.

So we must approach this doctrine in the way we have approached all the other doctrines. First of all, we must look at the scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the resurrection, and we begin with the Old Testament. We do that because the Old Testament is a part of Scripture, but also and particularly because there have been those who have tried to teach that there is nothing at all about the resurrection in the Old Testament. That, of course, is just not true. If they had said that there is much less, or not very much, teaching, then that would have been true. But there are many Christians who are rather stumbled by just that fact. They wonder why there is this difference in the teaching of the Old and New Testaments with regard to the resurrection. There is a striking difference but, to me, it does not constitute a **[Page 228]** problem at all because the whole doctrine of salvation is not as clear in the Old Testament as it is in the New. It is there, of course, and if we read the Old Testament with New Testament eyes and with a New Testament understanding, we can find the doctrine in all sorts of places. But if we can transpose our minds, as it were, back to Old Testament times, then we can see very clearly how much that is plain and obvious to us could not possibly have been so clear at that time. Let me give you one illustration: the curious inability of the disciples to grasp our Lord's teaching about His death and resurrection. Every time He spoke to them about His death, they were in trouble. They could not understand it. Somehow they could not receive it. And they seem to have entirely ignored everything that He said about the resurrection. When He told them that He was going to be crucified, He always went on to say that He would rise on the third day, but they did not grasp that. That is why they were all so miserable when they saw Him being crucified and after His body had been laid in the tomb.

So, if that was true even of the disciples, who had been with our Lord for three years, how much less were the saints of the Old Testament able to receive the doctrine of the resurrection, so I would not expect to find it there in a very plain and emphatic manner. And it is not—as the apostle Paul puts it in 2 Timothy 1:10. It was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, by His own resurrection, who 'abolished death', put it out of gear, as it were, and 'brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'. The fact was there, the fact was known, but our Lord brought it to light. Therefore you would expect teaching about the resurrection to be much clearer in the New Testament than in the Old.

There is, however, evidence of a clear belief in the resurrection in the Old Testament itself. Take, for instance, the famous statement in the book of Job, a statement which is familiar to most of us: 'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me' (Job 19:25–27). Then Psalms 16 and 17 give clear evidence of belief in the resurrection and for that reason they were quoted by Peter and Paul in their preaching in the early days of the Christian Church. Take the ninth verse of Psalm 16 in which the psalmist is speaking more directly about himself: 'Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.' And verse 10: **[Page 229]** 'For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption,' quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost because it is such a wonderful prophecy of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Then take Psalm 17:5: 'As for

me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' That, surely, is very striking.

Then consider Daniel 12:1-3:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

There is also further evidence in the book of the prophet Hosea. So there is more than sufficient evidence to prove that this notion that the idea of resurrection was unknown in the Old Testament is quite wrong; it *is* there. Indeed, you find it in the words that we read about Abraham in Hebrews 11, where we are told that when he was on the point of offering up Isaac, he had faith to believe that God could even raise him from the dead (v. 19).

But let us come to the New Testament because it is here that, quite inevitably, we have the greatest amount of evidence for the resurrection, starting in the teaching of our Lord Himself in the Gospels. There is a most important statement in Matthew where we read, 'The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise seed up unto his brother' (Matt. 22:23). And then they presented that famous case of the seven brothers who married the same women. The first brother married the woman, but then died, so the second brother married her. When he died, the third brother married her, and so on. The Sadducees thought that this really was going to be wonderful, and they asked their question: 'Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her?' Jesus answered them, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures ...' And, remember, the Scriptures [Page 230] there mean the Old Testament, so our Lord pointed to the evidence of the resurrection in the Old Testament. 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures'—which you think you know so much about and of which you claim to be authorities—'nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living' (Matt. 22:23-32). In other words, our Lord's argument is that when God proclaims Himself to be the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, He is proclaiming that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are to go on living in resurrected form. It is His proof of the resurrection.

This is a most important statement and I shall have to return to it again. For now, I am picking out certain places at random. Take a statement in Luke 14:12-14. A man again puts a question and our Lord says in reply, 'When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the *resurrection of the just*.'

There are a number of statements in John's Gospel. I referred to them earlier, but let me remind you of them—chapter 5:28-29 and chapter 6:39, 40, 44 and 54, where our Lord keeps on saying He 'should raise it up again at the last day', or, 'I will raise him up at the last day.' The evidence is there in great abundance and in the parallel passages in the other Gospels.

Then, of course, we come to the mighty evidence in all the Gospels about the fact of our Lord's own resurrection, and it is staggering in its importance. And when we go on to the Acts of the Apostles, we have the preaching and the teaching of the Christian Church after the resurrection and the Day of Pentecost. When the disciples were sent out, they all preached 'Jesus and the resurrection' (Acts 17:18), but they did not stop at that. Paul in his preaching says that he had 'hope toward God, which they themselves [the Jews] also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust' (Acts 24:15). That was the kind of thing that they all preached, not only the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but our resurrection

also, as Paul put it in his famous sermon at Athens: God 'hath appointed a day, in the **[Page 231]** which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead' (Acts 17:31).

And then, of course, we come on to that great and mighty chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. Surely there is no greater piece of literature in the world than that for thought, for sublimity of expression, for argument, for the cogency of the case presented, and for the profoundly moving character of the whole statement. I do not know what you feel, but for myself it would have been more than sufficient just to read that section of scripture. If that does not warm your heart and make you feel like rising to your feet to praise God and to worship Him, then I confess I do not understand you.

Further, there is Philippians 3:20–21: 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.' And we have the statement in 1 Thessalonians 4 in which the apostle is concerned that the Thessalonians were mourning and grieving as 'others which have no hope' (v. 13). So he writes to comfort them, and to cheer them with his great assurance about the resurrection, both of those who are already dead and those who remain and will be changed. Some of the Christians in Thessalonica were beginning to think that the dead were finished, as it were, that they would not share in the glories of that great reign of Christ which is to come. But Paul says that it is all right because 'the dead in Christ shall rise first' (v. 16). We shall not go before them. They will rise first and then we shall rise, 'and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (v. 17).

So there, very inadequately, is some of the evidence that is to be found in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New. But now let me come to deal with certain points about which people sometimes find themselves in difficulties. What is the nature of the resurrection? When I talk about the biblical doctrine of the resurrection, what do I mean? And the answer is that I mean the literal resurrection of the body—your body and mine. Resurrection is not only something spiritual. Now that is not always made as plain as it should be. Of course, many people say it is only spiritual, and what they mean by resurrection is that somehow or another we go on living after we die. There are many who hold that view about our Lord Himself. They make a great deal of Easter Sunday, and they preach on **[Page 232]** the resurrection, but all they say is that Jesus gave proof that He was still there, that He was still alive. They do not believe in what they call the nonsense and the rubbish of the empty tomb. Yet they still think that they are believing the doctrine of the resurrection. But they are not, they are denying it—the doctrine of the resurrection is a doctrine which asserts the literal raising of the body, not only the continuation of the human spirit, but the continuation of the body as well. In Luke 24 we read about some of our Lord's resurrection appearances. When He came to the disciples in the upper room on the evening of that first Sunday, He could see the scepticism in their faces. They were frightened, Luke tells us; they thought they were seeing a ghost, a spirit, so our Lord said, 'Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.' That is enough in and of itself to prove that the resurrection is the resurrection of the body, and not merely something spiritual. And, of course, there is the same argument in John 20, in the case of poor doubting Thomas, who was told that the Lord had risen and appeared. He said he would not believe it. 'Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe,' said Thomas. Then our Lord appeared again and said to him, 'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing' (Jn 20:25, 27). Our Lord's body, the same body, had risen. It still had the mark and the imprint of the nails and the hole in the side.

And then take the great argument of 1 Corinthians 15. This is not a discussion of some spiritual rising; the whole case, the whole wonderful argument that the apostle works out, is about our physical bodies. Indeed, there is one statement that is enough in and of itself to show that the physical body rises: 'For as in Adam all die'—and there Paul means mainly physical death—'even so in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Cor. 15:22).

And, of course, if we go on to 2 Timothy 2:18, we find that the apostle there deals with precisely the same matter. There were some who were saying that the resurrection was past already. They were trying

to say it was spiritual, and Paul condemned this view. But in a very interesting way our Lord Himself draws a distinction between what *may* be called a spiritual resurrection, what I spoke of in the last lecture as ‘the first resurrection’, referred to in chapter 20 of the book of Revelation, and the literal bodily resurrection which we are considering **[Page 233]** now. In John 5:25, we read this: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.’ That is undoubtedly spiritual. But go on to verse 28 and there we find: ‘Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the *graves* shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation’—that refers to the body. Verse 25 refers to this first resurrection, to regeneration, when the spiritually dead are raised, but then in verse 28 the resurrection is literal, bodily, physical. I have already quoted Philippians 3:21, where Paul says: ‘Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.’

So that is the evidence for a physical resurrection of the body. But why must we insist upon this? And why must we say that it is terrible heresy and a denial of truth to reject it? Well, here is the answer: salvation is not complete without the resurrection of the body. That is why the apostle wrote that fifteenth chapter of the first book of Corinthians. There were people going around who said that there was no resurrection of the physical body but the resurrection was only spiritual. ‘But,’ says the apostle, ‘if Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain; ye are yet in your sins’ (1 Cor. 15:17)—there is no salvation. He says in effect, ‘If you don’t stand in this faith which I preached to you when I first came to you, then you’ve got nothing at all, you’re not saved and you’re not Christians.’

Christianity includes the resurrection of the body. Why is that? It is because there were heresies in the world then, as there are still, which taught that sin applies only to the body, that sin is something physical, and that salvation, therefore, means escaping out of the body. That is the teaching of Hinduism and of Buddhism. The great thing is to escape out of the body, to get rid of the flesh, and the moment you get out of the body, it is said, you leave sin behind. That is the exact opposite of Christian salvation which teaches not the escape out of the body, but the redemption of the body.

When Adam and Eve sinned, the effect of sin was that it did something to their spirit, their soul and their body. The whole person suffered. When they fell, they fell in every part, the body included, and therefore to be complete, salvation must include the body as well as the soul and spirit. If it does not, the works of the devil have not been undone. Christ, we are told by John in his first epistle, came ‘that he might destroy the works of the devil’ (1 Jn 3:8).

[Page 234] So Christ must redeem the body, and He will do so. Paul brings this out in a particularly clear manner in the important verses in Romans chapter 8. Take the eleventh verse; ‘But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.’ If the Holy Spirit is in you, it is a guarantee of the fact that your very body will be quickened and be raised up and glorified. Paul says this again in verses 22 and 23: ‘For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together unto now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.’ The body will be redeemed, never forget that; it is a part of our salvation.

Then as I have been showing you, the whole of 1 Corinthians 15 is a mighty argument to the effect that the body will be saved. But in 2 Corinthians 5, the apostle brings this teaching in again—how we tend to miss these glorious statements in the Scripture! The apostle says, ‘For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened’—notice this—‘not for that we would be unclothed but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life’ (2 Cor. 5:1–4). There it is once more. The whole of that chapter deals with the same thing. And do not forget Philippians 3:21. So we must insist upon the resurrection of the body itself because otherwise our Lord’s work is not complete. As He was raised Himself, He will raise us; that is the complete salvation.

Some people are in trouble about this doctrine because they say that the old scriptural teaching of the resurrection of the body was believed in days when people died and were buried. In those days nothing was known about bombs which could blow a body to pieces, to atoms. If people had known about things like that, it is said, they would not have believed in the resurrection of the body. That, of course, is a stupid argument because bodies buried in graves decay and worms come and devour them. People have always known about decomposition and putrefaction, and they also drowned in time past. We know nothing that they did not know.

So that leads to the question: What is the nature of this resurrection **[Page 235]** body that we are speaking of? Now, there are certain things we can say. One is that the Scripture teaches very clearly that our identity will be preserved. My body will always be recognisable as my body. It is as our Lord said to the disciples in the upper room, 'Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself' (Luke 24:32). I will be myself and you will be yourself for ever and for ever.

The other thing that is quite obvious in the teaching is that there will be an organic connection between the body that is buried and the body that is raised. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 about placing the seed in the ground is an absolute proof of that. There is an organic connection between the seed of grain that is sown and that which comes up.

'But wait a minute, how is this possible?' asks someone. 'What about the case of a man who's been cremated and his ashes are scattered and carried away by the wind?'

People try to ridicule the doctrine of the resurrection by asking whether we must believe that these particles will all be gathered together from somewhere.

'But haven't some already passed into other forms of life and perhaps been eaten by animals?' they ask.

Well, the doctrine of the resurrection does not teach that the same particles will be raised. It is a scientific fact that the actual particles of our body are always changing. Some people teach that our bodies are absolutely changed every seven years. We do know that the cells of the body are constantly being broken down and disintegrating. I do not have the same particles in my flesh that I had twenty years ago. That is an obvious fact, and yet I have the same body. It is not composed of the same particles as such, but it is the same body. Not only that, take a little child—a baby—and then think of that same person as an octogenarian. You would not recognise it, but it is the same body, even though the particles are obviously not the same and they are not arranged in the same way.

That illustration, I think, enables us to see what is meant by the resurrection of the body. The body must be thought of in terms of particles, 'flesh and blood', as Paul puts it. Do not think in that materialistic sense. That is not what makes my body, my body. The body is, in a sense, the particular order of the particles, or the particular organisation of the particles, that is what makes my body my body, and your body yours. The human body is very remarkable. When it is analysed down to its ultimate component parts and elements, **[Page 236]** it is the same in every one of us, flesh and blood is the same, and yet bodies are not the same. And there are all these odd things in the bodies—the different size of the two eyes, the distance from the corner of the eye to the corner of the lip even on the two sides of the same person's face—all these make my body my body and they are not dependent upon the continuation of the same particles. The body is not static, it is constantly changing in its elements, in its constitution, yet the body remains a constant. That is what will continue and that is what is asserted by the Scripture when it asserts the resurrection of the body.

With regard to the actual constitution of the resurrected body, we do not know, and Scripture does not tell us. But surely the argument of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 is to the effect that there will be a change in the constitution, as happens in the grain of wheat that is buried and disintegrates, yet leads to life. But let me give you further evidence that will help to make this point clear. What will be the character of the body which we shall have after we have been raised? Now here I must just mention that it is remarkable that the Scriptures tell us nothing about the resurrection bodies of unbelievers. The Bible writers are not interested in that. All we know is, as we shall see in the next lecture, that unbelievers are to be cast into the

lake of destruction, but we are told nothing more. We are, however, told a great deal about the resurrection bodies of believers.

Here I shall especially confine my attention to 1 Corinthians 15. Paul writes, 'This I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.' That is verse 50. Notice that there is evidently a difference between flesh and blood, and flesh and bones. After His resurrection, our Lord calls attention to the fact that He is flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). So we know that the body will not be flesh and blood, but will be flesh and bones.

Second, we are told in verse 42 that the resurrection body will be incorruptible. 'It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.' When I have received this resurrection body I shall no longer be subject to disease; I shall no longer be subject to age; I shall no longer be subject to death. My body will never decay, it will never change in any way. This body is corruptible; that body will be incorruptible. What a glorious prospect!

The third thing we are told is that the resurrection body will be glorious: 'It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory' (v. 43). Paul's [**Page 237**] expression, 'our vile body', in Philippians 3:21 can also be translated 'this body of our humiliation'. There is nothing very glorious about our bodies, is there? We are poor specimens physically. It is the result of sin. Yes, but when we are raised, we shall be like Him, with a wonderfully glorious body, like unto the body of His glorification.

We are also told that the risen body will be a very powerful body: 'It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power' (v. 43). Again, what a wonderful thing! There is nothing, in a sense, that I covet more than that. The greatest hindrance to my preaching is the weakness of my body. Oh, that I had a body to preach! I can understand Charles Wesley crying out, 'Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise!' We are so weak; we are so feeble. But the body will be 'raised in power': full of power, no vestige of weakness.

The next thing, and this is very important, is that the resurrection body will be a spiritual body: 'It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body' (v. 44). What does Paul mean by that? What is the difference between the 'natural body' and the 'spiritual body'? Remember that spiritual there does not mean, as I have been emphasising, that there is not a body at all. No, there will be a body but it will be a spiritual and not a natural body. A natural body has the characteristics of an animal nature. We are related to the animals. Our physical nature is animal and it corresponds to the life that we live in this world. We are soul in this world and we live in relationships where the soul exercises itself, so that here we need and are given a natural body. But when we go to the glory we shall be in a spiritual realm and there we shall be given a spiritual body.

One difference between the animal and the spiritual has been described by our Lord, as we have seen, in His reply to the Sadducees about the seven brothers and the woman. 'Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven' (Matt. 22:29-30). There will be no sex life in heaven, in the risen, glorified, resurrected body. There is in this life; this is the natural body, the animal part. But there will be no procreation in heaven; we shall have no children there. So you see the importance of emphasising these things? There are some people who think that if you are to be a really spiritual Christian you must not be interested in the natural body. But that is rank heresy. God has given us these natural bodies and He means us [**Page 238**] to use them. He has put the sexual instinct, and the other instincts in us, and they are to be used in God's way. A false asceticism is a denial of scriptural teaching and is condemned by Scripture itself. But in heaven, we shall be in the spiritual realm and, of course, we shall not need the animal nature.

The last thing that we are told about these resurrected bodies of ours is that they will be heavenly: 'As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly' (1 Cor. 15:48-49). That must be so, because we ourselves shall be in heaven. So when that day comes, says the apostle John in his first epistle, 'We shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). Yes, thank God, 'we shall be like him!' May I venture to add, therefore, that because of this doctrine we shall know one another. You will not

lose your identity, though you will be absolutely changed by an amazing miracle. Your identity will be preserved, it will be *you*, your salvation completed, your spirit already saved, your body then also perfectly redeemed, the whole person entirely delivered from sin and evil. Oh blessed, oh glorious day! Oh wonderful redemption! Oh ineffable Redeemer!

23

The Final Destiny

We have finally arrived at the last in this series of lectures on biblical doctrines, and we now turn to the last judgment, a doctrine against which all others should be understood. Now, it seems to me that the lack of understanding regarding this particular subject is largely responsible for the lack of interest in doctrine today. If men and women only realised the truth about this last judgment, they would 'flee from the wrath to come' (Matt. 3:7) as they were exhorted to do by John the Baptist, by our Lord Himself and by all the apostles. It is because they do not realise that the whole time they live and have their being they are under the eye of God and, in a sense, under the judgment of God, it is because of their failure to grasp this doctrine, that men and women are so concerned about their own subjective moods and states and merely want something that will help them in this world.

There are, I think, certain reasons for the general failure to pay attention to the doctrine of the last judgment. Some people dislike the whole idea of judgment. Those who take the so-called 'liberal' view in theology abominate the very concept. 'That has been the difficulty in the past,' they say. 'God has been pictured as a judge, but judgment is alien to any idea of God as a God of love.' Some may believe in judgment in general, but there is, they feel, a sort of differentiation in this life between the good and the evil and they think that that will be perpetuated in the next. But the vast majority of people do not even believe that. The popular notion today is what is called *universalism*, which is the view that everybody will at last be forgiven and will be saved, and that nobody will be punished in an ultimate sense, but God in His love will save everybody. So if you believe that, you will not be [Page 240] interested in the doctrine of a last judgment.

There are others who think that the only judgment we face is the judgment that comes while we are in this life and that is meant to be remedial. They think that all punishment should be remedial. This is an idea that comes in from the secular realm and it is the basis of the modern treatment of prisoners. But it is an utterly unscriptural idea. There is nothing at all in the Bible to suggest that, quite the opposite, in fact. You do not *improve* men and women by punishing them. According to the Scriptures, they are changed by grace, and punishment is punishment. However, the popular idea is that punishment is remedial, and this has even crept into Christian thinking.

It is interesting to observe that many people whom one can describe as evangelical Christians are also in trouble about this question of judgment, and their difficulty arises in this way. They say that surely one's fate is decided in this world because one's eternal destiny is determined by whether one does or does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation, and the one who believes has already passed from judgment into life. 'And,' they add, 'judgment happens while we are still here because you've already shown us that there is nothing in the Bible to substantiate the idea of a second chance or a period of probation beyond this world. Therefore where is there the need of a final judgment, at any rate as far as God's people are concerned?'

So for those reasons, and others, too, there does seem to be some confusion with regard to this whole idea of a final judgment and, therefore, perhaps the best thing for me to do is to define clearly what the Bible means by this. The important thing is that the last judgment is not represented as something that will determine our fate. It is simply the great occasion on which our fate is announced, when the verdict is promulgated. It is not the occasion on which the verdict will be arrived at. Now I think the misunderstanding about that is the cause of the questions and doubts of the Christians to whom I have just referred. They think that the idea of judgment must of necessity involve people coming to the judgment with their fate uncertain and undetermined. They assume that a charge will be made, they will attempt to reply, and then a judgment will be arrived at. But it is not that at all. They are perfectly right when they say that our fate, in this sense, is already determined before we go out of this world, before the resurrection. The last judgment is the occasion on which the fate of the saved and the lost will be pronounced by the Judge eternal. But He will not arrive at it then; He will simply state it. [Page 241]

The thing to grasp about the last judgment is that it will be a great public event. I emphasise the public aspect because many seem to have the idea that the last judgment takes place every time a person dies. Of course that, again, is quite wrong. There is a sense in which our going out of this world into the next is a momentous event because by then our fate is sealed, but that is not the last judgment. That will be right at the very end, at the second coming, when the dead are raised, when our bodies are resurrected. It will be a great public occasion when the whole world will be assembled together and the fate of every single individual will be announced. It is, I repeat, the public pronouncement of the eternal and the final judgment.

What is the purpose of the last judgment? There is only one answer: it is for the glory of God. It is the final assertion of the glory of God in the presence of those who have not given Him the glory. The Bible says this, and for this reason: the essence of sin is that it refuses to give glory to God. When Satan stood up against God, he was attempting to detract from His glory. But the glory of God is supreme, it is over all, and redemption, salvation, will not be complete until the glory of God is again finally and completely established. And the glory of God is manifested not only in the salvation of those who belong to Him, but also in the punishment of those who have persisted in rejecting Him. The purpose, therefore, of the final judgment is that 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28), that His glory, His majesty may be asserted in this striking and signal manner. And, of course, when I say 'the glory of God' I mean the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The next thing to establish is the scriptural basis of all that I am saying and, of course, it is abundant. I shall not attempt to give you all the scriptures, you can look them up for yourselves, but they are to be found in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Abraham asked, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25). The Judge of all the earth. Similarly, in Psalm 96:13 we read, 'For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth.'

God's future judgment is made still more explicit in the New Testament. Two of the most important references are first of all, Acts 17:30–31 where the apostle Paul, in preaching to those learned Athenians, the Stoics and the Epicureans, was careful to point out to them as a part of his message that 'the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.' Why? 'Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the **[Page 242]** whole world in righteousness by that man whom he hath appointed; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead'—a great assertion of this last and final judgment. Second, there is the famous statement in Hebrews 9:27: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.' And in the book of Revelation, as we have seen, the subject of the last judgment is to be found everywhere, explicitly in the twentieth chapter beginning at verse 11. These are explicit, definite and clear statements of the fact that there will be a day of judgment. I repeat, it is not something that happens when we die, nor is it a mere perpetuation of a division in this life, but it will be a great public occasion, an event which will take place and to which we are all moving.

That leads me to the next question: Who will act as the judge and make the great pronouncement? And here there can be very little doubt but that the judgment will be given by the Lord Jesus Christ. God will judge but He has deputed the actual judging to the Son. In the same way, in some passages of Scripture we read that God the Father is our Saviour—'who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe' (1 Tim. 4:10). Yes, He is the Saviour, but He saves through the Son. This is the division of labour in what, as we have seen, is sometimes called the *economic Trinity* (see volume 1, *God the Father, God the Son*). The Father, then, has committed judgment to the Son because He is the mediator, because He is the Son of Man, so as to preclude any possibility of people complaining that they are not having a fair opportunity because God is judging human beings. Here is One who is man as well as God and judgment has been committed to Him.

That it is the Son who is to be our judge is taught in Matthew 25:31–32: 'When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.' But it is still more explicit in John 5, which is very important in this respect: 'For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he

will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him' (vv. 21–23). We are told that the Father has 'given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment [**Page 243**] also, because he is the Son of man' (vv. 26–27). Then Peter, in preaching to Cornelius and his household, says this: 'And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead' (Acts 10:42). I have already reminded you of Acts 17:31 where Paul explicitly says that the judge is to be the Lord Jesus Christ. And the same idea is found in Philippians 2:9–11: 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and give him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Consider also 2 Timothy 4:1: 'I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.' Now there this teaching is given in as explicit a form as you could ever wish to have. And if you read 1 Corinthians 15 you will find that it all links up together: the kingdom is being handed—for the time being—to the Son and He is waiting until His enemies shall be made His footstool. When He returns, He will exercise this judgment and then He will hand His perfect kingdom back to God the Father that 'God may be all and in all' (1 Cor. 15:28). The mediatorial kingdom of the Son includes this element of judgment so that He may hand the kingdom back in its entirety and its perfection to the Father.

So the next question that arises is, therefore, who are to be judged? And here there is no universal agreement. As we have said, there are some who say that believers will not be judged because they have already passed from death to life, and it is only unbelievers who will be judged. But surely that cannot be quite right, because, to start with, the resurrection, as we saw in the last lecture, is of the evil and the good together and at the same time. Not only that, but in the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation we are told that *books* were opened: 'The books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works' (Rev. 20:12). Of course, this is symbolic, but the symbol does stand for something, and the symbol must stand for the judgment of two groups of people.

The final statement in Revelation 20 is: 'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire' (v. 15). And, of course, if you accept the idea that the final judgment is only [**Page 244**] the occasion of the promulgation of judgment, there is no difficulty about this. So taking all those things together, it does seem to be clear that, on this great day, believers and unbelievers will stand together, and judgment will be pronounced out of these records. Then you and I, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall hear the words: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant' (Matt. 25:21).

Now according to our Lord in Matthew 25, there will be some who will be very surprised to hear God say to them, 'Well done.' There are some Christians who never have assurance of salvation. This is quite wrong, they should have it, but for some reason—faulty teaching, perhaps, or because of their temperament, because they look so much at their own imperfections, they have never really rejoiced and been sure of their salvation. According to our Lord, such people will have this great surprise. When they hear that they are among the redeemed, they will say, 'When did we do this?' and our Lord will say, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Matt. 25:40). That is the importance of the announcement of the judgment. They will hear this wonderful word. They will know for certain, and will enter into the great glory that awaits them. It seems, therefore, that we must understand that the redeemed and the unredeemed, the ungodly, will appear to hear the promulgation of the verdict and there will be a final separation.

But it is also taught in Scripture that the fallen angels will be judged on the day of judgment. We are told in 2 Peter 2:4 that these fallen angels are 'reserved unto judgment'. Now there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that the good angels will appear in this sense on that great day, but it is very clear that judgment will be promulgated on the fallen angels, on those who listened to Satan and who went after him and belong to him.

I am sure that there is a question in the minds of many at this point. They say, 'What about the judgments that we read of in Luke 12, in 1 Corinthians 3 and in 2 Corinthians 5? In Luke 12:47–48 our Lord speaks about servants being beaten with many stripes and few stripes, and so on. There seems to be a differentiation in the sentence. Then Paul, very explicitly, in 1 Corinthians 3:13 says, 'Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it.' That is why we must be very careful how we build upon the only sure foundation, which is Jesus Christ and Him crucified, because we can build with wood and hay and stubble or with precious metals. What we do will be tried—every person's work will be tried as by fire—and wood, hay **[Page 245]** and stubble will all be burnt away, there will be nothing left. Yes, says Paul, but though a man's work may be burnt away like that, 'he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire' (v. 15), and that seems to suggest some special kind of judgment for believers.

Again, in 2 Corinthians 5:10 we read, 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body ... whether it be good or bad.' Now Paul is clearly writing there to Christian people and has only Christian believers in his mind, so Paul's words must mean that there is a differentiation among believers. This is not from the standpoint of salvation—Paul has established that quite clearly in 1 Corinthians 3:15, as we have seen.

Though a man's work may be entirely burnt away, 'he himself shall be saved'. How will he be saved? By the grace of God. He is on the foundation which is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That is what saves us. Our actions, our works do not save us. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). It is our trusting to the Lord and His perfect work that redeems us and saves us. Ah yes, but our works do make a difference, and they do count. Though we are all saved, we shall not all be identical or in identical positions. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul puts it like this: 'One star differeth from another star in glory' (v. 41). Do not misunderstand me at this point. We shall all be in glory, we shall all be saved. Nevertheless, there is this clear teaching that our works subsequent to our salvation will be considered, not in our justification, but in this matter of our reward.

It is difficult for us to understand how we shall all be supremely happy when there is this difference, but it is clearly taught in Scripture that there will be a difference, and that is why I have to put it before you. And that is why the apostle Paul uses language like this: 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men' (2 Cor. 5:11). It is because Paul knows that he must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of his stewardship as a preacher that he is so zealous and so constant in his labours.

So let us keep those two ideas separately in our minds. We are not told whether this judgment for rewards, as we may describe it, takes place in connection with the great day of judgment or afterwards. All we are told is that there is this discrimination, this differentiation, according to what we have done as Christians. And it is right and good that as Christian people we should always bear this in mind. We shall all have to give an account of 'the deeds done in the body'. In **[Page 246]** Revelation 14 we are told of the blessed dead that 'their works do follow them' (v. 13).

There is a danger, I sometimes think, that in our emphasis upon justification by faith only, we fall into the error of forgetting this further differentiation on the basis of our works, of our faithfulness as Christian people. We have to fight for the great doctrine of justification by faith, it is constantly being attacked, but it would be a very grievous thing if, in asserting that, we in any way detracted from this other teaching which reminds Christian people that all their works are observed by the Lord, the righteous judge, and that what you and I do as Christians in this world will have an effect upon our life in glory in the next world.

Again, do not misunderstand me. In heaven there will be no sorrow, no sighing, no unhappiness, no misery and no weeping. We shall all be perfectly happy and full of bliss and joy and yet there will be these differences. I must not speculate, but I have sometimes wondered whether it means something like this: that the one who has been most faithful will be a little nearer to Him. We shall all see Him, but perhaps some will be nearer than others. I do not know, but that there is a difference, is made plain and clear in the Scriptures.

There, in essence, is the biblical teaching on the last, the final, judgment, and that, of course, leads to the final or the eternal state. First there will be the promulgation of the great sentence. There will be unbelievers and they will go to hell—the second death. They are described as ‘outside’—‘For without are dogs, and sorcerers ... and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie’ (Rev. 22:15). These are all who work abominations, who are liars (Rev. 21:27), and they are ‘without’, outside the life of God, continuing in this sinful state and condition, wretched, unhappy. We have already considered the question of eternal punishment so we need not go into it again. I gave you evidence which seemed to me to be sufficient to reject entirely the teaching about conditional immortality. I take the word ‘eternal’ to mean what it says, both as regards eternal life and eternal or everlasting destruction out of the presence of God.

But let us not end on that note. One of the great objects of the book of Revelation is to help us to see the final fate of those who have believed, those who are in Christ; and here it is in all its glory. It is seen to perfection in that twenty-first chapter of Revelation. Remember that the language is symbolic, but what a picture we are given of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’! Peter has spoken of this in **[Page 247]** his second epistle in the third chapter: ‘We ... look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (v. 13). And you and I shall be there. We shall have been raised; our bodies will have been raised and glorified. Yes, the complete person—body, mind and spirit—will have been redeemed, entirely delivered from sin.

What shall we do in this perfect state? Why is my body raised and redeemed? Evidently I shall be using it in this new earth under the new heavens. Remember that the present earth and heavens will be destroyed. The elements will ‘melt with fervent heat’ (2 Pet. 3:10) and there will be a great disintegration. People have disagreed about this. Some say that the entire present earth and heavens will be completely and finally destroyed and that God will create a new earth and new heavens. But others say that what will happen will be that all evil and sin will be burned out of the present earth and heavens and the change will be so profound that it can be described as a regeneration, a new beginning in a sense, because it will be so different.

For those who are interested in the history of the debate, the Lutherans have always taught a new creation of heavens and earth, whereas the Reformers have generally taught that the present earth and heavens will be so delivered from evil and sin that they are virtually completely new. It does not matter, of course, which it is, and we cannot finally decide. The important thing to realise is that we shall dwell in the kind of condition that is described in Revelation 21—no sorrow, no sighing, a perfect state of affairs.

Again, we must avoid speculation about our future life, but it does seem to be quite clear that our heaven will be living in this perfect world where God has made His tabernacle with men and women. The new Jerusalem descends on to the earth (Rev. 21:2) and it is there we shall live, in this wonderful city. Then will be fulfilled what Isaiah prophesied in chapter 11 of his prophecy and again in chapter 65, when nature will no longer be ‘red in tooth and claw’, but ‘the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb’ and ‘the lion shall eat straw like the ox’ (Isa. 11:6–7). The whole creation will have been delivered from the bondage of corruption and will be enjoying ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21). Everything will be glorified, even nature itself. And that seems to me to be the biblical teaching about the eternal state: that what we call heaven is life in this perfect world as God intended humanity to live it. When He put Adam in Paradise at the beginning Adam fell, and all fell with him, but men and women are meant to live in the body, and will live in a glorified body in a **[Page 248]** glorified world, and God will be with them.

Whether we shall also share that ultimate heaven in which God dwells, we are not told, and there is a sense in which we do not need to know, for what is important for us is to know that we shall ‘ever be with the Lord’ (1 Thess. 4:17), ever enjoying the glory of God, basking in it, reflecting it, growing in it. That will be our eternal state, our final destiny, our everlasting and eternal condition.

Well there, my friends, having started away back at the beginning with Adam and his fall and the tragedy of it all, we see men and women in Christ ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, raised, glorified, perfected. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God’ (Matt. 5:8). And that is the destiny that awaits us if we are in Christ. No need of a sun. No need of a moon. No need of stars. No need of a temple. The Lamb in the midst, and God Himself. You and I here in the body with our feeble frames, our aches and

our pains, our struggle against the world, the flesh and the Devil, with our groanings and complainings and perhaps even our mutterings and our uncertainties, you and I, my friends, are destined for that, we are going to that. This is a part of God's programme. As certain as is our salvation, our rebirth, as certain as is our resurrection, this also is certain.

Oh blessed day! May God grant us grace to see these things so clearly that we shall ever live in their light, and ever, therefore, live lightly and loosely to this passing, condemned world which is to be destroyed. May we live as children of the light and children of the day, as children of God, as those who are going to see Him, to be with Him and share His eternal glory with Him. Amen.