

# **Glorying in the Lord**

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## **Chapter 1 - The Wisdom of the World**

*Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-31, 2:1-5, 3:18-23.*

As we meditate in the first letter to the Corinthians, it grows upon us that the background of the letter is represented by the word "wisdom". It seems quite clear that it was that which took hold of the apostle as summing up the situation at Corinth, and demanding rectification.

Undoubtedly to the Corinthians wisdom was the pre-eminent, the most important thing. Indeed it was so with the whole Greek world. As the apostle says in this letter "...the Greeks seek after wisdom," and the Corinthians were a very strong expression of that fact, the quest for wisdom. That which was their natural disposition had been brought by these believers into the realm of the things of Christ, into the realm, shall we say, of Christianity, and that quest, that element, that disposition, that craving, lay behind the whole occasion of this letter. With them wisdom determined value. According to the measure of what they would call "wisdom", so the value of a thing, or of a person, stood or fell. The whole question of power hung upon the matter of wisdom. For them dimensions were always determined and governed by the idea of wisdom. That is to say, in their eyes a thing, or a person, was great or small, powerful or weak, to be taken account of or to be entirely set aside, according as what of them was accounted "wisdom" was possessed or evidenced by such. It was that domination of the "wisdom" idea which influenced their attitude toward men.

### **A Wisdom That Issues in Division**

It would seem that this is the explanation of the divisions in the Corinthian assembly. The apostle writes, "*Each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*" These respective attitudes were governed by this "wisdom" idea. For some Paul was the embodiment of wisdom; for others Peter; for others, though still in a natural way, Christ was the embodiment of wisdom. Thus their attitudes were influenced and governed by this dominating, shall we say, this obsessing, idea of wisdom. The whole tendency of it was to make Christianity a philosophy, and to separate it from the living Person. When that is recognized it is possible to understand and appreciate this letter to a far greater extent, and to see that the whole letter has a bearing upon that issue.

### **A Wisdom That Issues in Unrighteousness**

Further, notice the effects morally of this wisdom obsession, remembering that with them it was natural wisdom, the wisdom of the natural man, or, as Paul calls it, the wisdom of this world. What is the nature of that wisdom? There is one passage in the letter of James which will greatly aid us in understanding this first letter to the Corinthians, and in our answer to that question. The statement is as follows:

*"This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual (the margin reads 'natural', though more literally the word is soulful, or soulish, psychical), devilish."* (James 3:15 R.V.)

There we have the wisdom of this world strongly defined. Look at it. It is "earthly": that sets it over against the heavenly wisdom. It is "sensual", soulful, psychical: that makes it entirely of the fallen nature of man and not of the nature of God; not divine nature, but fallen human nature. It is "devilish": finally, therefore, it is not of God but of the devil.

Carry that back into the first Corinthian letter and you have an explanation of what is found there along those very lines. You see these Corinthians being strongly influenced by their natural propensities, their natural inclinations, their natural desires in the sphere of wisdom, and bringing all that into the realm of Christianity. The outworkings of such a course is that you have sensuality making its appearance in the realm of divine things, and with just such a condition of affairs this letter has very strongly to deal. You know some of the grave touches in this letter, how far even these who were in the assembly, in the Church, went in the matter of sensuality. And the wisdom which led them that way led them into this further state, where they failed to discriminate between what was of Christ and what was directly of the devil, inasmuch as they came into an active touch with demon idolatry in its intrusion into this world, and opened a way for it into the very assembly of the Lord. The wisdom which is from beneath will go that far. What sort of wisdom is this? Sensuality, leading imperceptibly into touch with what is directly of the devil! The temple of God, and idols! The

Lord's table and sacrifices offered to demons! Oh, the blindness of this thing, the utter blindness! Yet they were in the Christian church, in the Christian assembly.

These divisions are another outworking of this "wisdom" matter. Wisdom worked out in schisms. The apostle touches the deepest depths when he says that this wisdom led those who were its devotees to crucify the Lord of glory, and therein is a veiled suggestion that that may happen even in the assembly of the saints, if the same thing is governing, namely that which is of man; that which is of uncrucified natural man brought within the compass of the things of Christ. Even there the cross of Christ may be made of none effect, may be made void, and all that the cross stands for may be countered, contradicted, and these things obtain. The "wisdom" question pervades this letter from start to finish, is the background of it all, and because of the serious outworkings and effects of it the apostle wrote this letter, in order that he might show what the true wisdom is, the wisdom which is from above.

We will not deal with the wisdom itself for the moment, but give our attention to this first chapter of the letter under consideration, which sets for us the basis of everything. Here we have the question of stature, worldly and divine. Firstly the worldly standard of value is presented, stature as viewed and determined from the standpoint of worldly wisdom, and then stature as judged from the divine point of view.

We have dealt with the worldly side. We have seen enough for the moment of what its valuation is, and we are not very impressed. If what we have noted is the stature of worldly wisdom, then indeed God has made foolish the wisdom of this world, and God has made weak the strength of this world. We are not impressed with those dimensions of a man.

### **Divine Wisdom: Stature According To This Wisdom**

We now turn to look at the divine side. *"For behold your calling, brethren (that is, behold God's call, what God has called), how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world... and God chose the weak things of the world... and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised... and the things that are not..."* (1 Cor. 1:26-28). This is very strong, very positive. God chose! The force of that is "to pick out". This has nothing to do with eternal election. The apostle is not touching here upon election in relation to God's purpose in Christ. This has reference to the natural caliber of those who were chosen in Christ. God picked out foolish things. God picked out weak things. God picked out base things. God picked out things that are not, (literally, things which have no being); God picked out things which are despised, or considered nothing. Why? That He might put to shame wise men of this world; that He might put to shame strong things of this world; that He might bring to naught, or make void, things that are. Let us grasp the situation as presented to us here. Foolish things set over against wise men: weak things set over against strong things: things which are not set over against things which are: things which are despised set over against things of repute. God did this deliberately.

That word "chose", or as we have translated it "picked out", is very interesting. In a book by Dr. Deissman called *"New Light on the New Testament,"* he makes much of this section of the chapter before us as a means by which the caliber of the first believers is established, and he says that in the rubbish heaps which have been turned over in recent years in the East a great deal has come to light as to the Greek language which was used in New Testament times. He tells us it is amply proved by the disclosure of these rubbish heaps that communication was very largely in the language of the ordinary people, and that the New Testament language — the Greek of the New Testament — is that of the common people. He takes this word "chose", or as we have called it "picked out", and says the very ordinary people, not the educated, of those days used this particular Greek word when they were making a selection from a number of things, getting something which they were set upon. They would turn over a number of things, and when they found the best thing they took hold of it and picked it out from all the rest and carried it off. It was the common language of the people, and this particular word related to turning over things and finding just that thing which was wanted and picking it out.

That is a good commentary. It is as though God looked over the mass for something that He was after, and when He lighted upon it, He picked it out from the rest and separated it, and made it His. God picked out, like that, foolish, weak, despised things, things which are not, for His own purpose.

There is an inclusive reason given, which is found in verse 29: "That no flesh should glory before God." We have seen that God in part picked out things of no worth that He might bring to naught, or make foolish, the wise of this world, the mighty of this world, the things which ARE of this world: but inclusively the governing principle of His choice was, "that no flesh should glory before God".

Then a quotation from Jeremiah 9 concludes that part of the chapter: "*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*" There you have the explanation of everything. What is God after? On the negative side, He is undercutting all the glory of man; on the positive side, He is providing Himself with a basis by which He Himself shall receive the glory. That is the governing factor in all God's dealings with us; on the one hand, to undercut that natural tendency to glory in man, and, on the other hand, to constitute a basis for glorying in the Lord.

What are God's men of stature? We see what the world's men of stature are, but what are God's men of stature? They are, on the one hand, foolish things, weak things, despised things, and things which have no being. That is the negative side, and it is essential to the positive side. The positive side is only possible in so far as that obtains. What is the positive side? Glorying in the Lord; that is, an utter, complete appreciation of God, where the Lord is everything. Of course, the further statement of the apostle has to be put in there, over against his enumeration of God's choice of the foolish, and the weak, the despised, and the things which are not — "*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption...*" That covers this whole book again, and takes you through it on this other line. You see how natural wisdom takes you through this letter, and mark the consequences, which are sensuality, devilishness, divisions; now come on to the line of God's wisdom, and you find wisdom of another order, working out, not in sensuality, but in righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

We must leave that; but you see that for all the deficiencies and lack on the natural side God has made full provision in His Son. He is made unto us wisdom. The outworking of that wisdom is its own vindication, just as the outworking of the wisdom of this world is its own condemnation. The condemnation of the wisdom of this world is that it leads to schism, to sensuality, to devilishness. It leads to all these things. That is its own condemnation. The vindication of this wisdom from above is that it leads to righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. The men of stature from the divine standpoint are those in whom this wisdom is working out in that way, who are standing in the value of that wisdom, even in righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

### **Zero in Man — The Divine Starting-Point**

All that we have to say at this time is this one special thing, that stature from God's standpoint is a matter of the utter nothingness of man in himself, and the absoluteness of Christ for man. Do you want to know what stature is? It is not to be something big, and important, and noble, and wise, and strong from this world's standpoint, but to be the negation of all that in a relationship with Christ, in which He alone is value to the vessel. The deliberateness of God's act is seen here, with a view to giving men a stature. He chose, He picked out, He went over everything, He turned over everything, He scrutinized everything, and then He deliberately picked out what He was after; and when He had secured it, He said of it, so to speak, "Poor stuff!" Where is the wisdom of that? Where is the strength of that? What is there to glory in that? God deliberately lifted that out of the mass with an object, and bringing that into living relationship with His Son, He deposited in that thing of poverty something that infinitely transcends all the wisdom, and the power, and the glory of this world. Then of this He says, That nothing, that foolish, weak thing in a living apprehension, appreciation, enjoyment of My Son is stature from heaven's standpoint, from My standpoint, from eternity's standpoint.

This is calculated to revolutionize conceptions of things. The apostle Paul so thoroughly accepted that position himself, that no sooner has he summed up the position in the words, "*He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord,*" than in respect of himself he continues — there should be no break in the text between chapter 1 and chapter 2 — "*And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom... I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*" I ask you whether your own heart, and whether history, bears record to the fact that Paul was a man of stature. We covet some of his stature; but here he is taking that position of a foolish thing, a weak thing, a despised thing, a thing which has no being from this world's standpoint. But, oh, how that nothing has counted! How God has registered Himself upon the course

of this world through that nothing! That is stature from God's standpoint. It is the measure of Christ. The measure of Christ entirely depends upon the little measure of ourselves, or the no measure. God can do things when He gets us there.

### **The Cross — The Divine Means**

Paul puts the cross right at that point — "...*Jesus Christ, and him crucified...*" "*The word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness*" "...*the foolishness of the thing preached...*" (R.V. margin), not as otherwise rendered "*the foolishness of the preaching.*" What is the foolishness of the thing preached? It is the cross, which brings us to foolishness in ourselves, and causes us to glory in Christ. The Lord Himself acts in a way that makes it possible for the world, as it looks upon believers in themselves, to regard them as very foolish things, things which do not count at all. The world is quite right, if it takes that view of us naturally. But the world is very far out in its calculation, if it thinks that that is where the matter ends because the world is going to discover, as it has already discovered, that that which it is quite justified in regarding as weak, and foolish, and nothing in itself, will nevertheless utterly overthrow the world, will challenge the world in such a way that the world cannot answer the challenge. The history since Paul's day has been that in the "*nothings*", the foolish things, God has established a challenge which the world cannot get over, a force mightier than all the force which this world in its totality of wisdom and power can possess.

Why always try to be important? Why want to be somebody or something? Why want to be seen and known and heard? That is the way to counter your spiritual effectiveness. Shall we not covet rather to be in ourselves nothing, that Christ may be more gloriously displayed by this? Shall we not in a new way say Amen! to God's choice, and recognize that that is the way of His glory? "*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*"

## **Chapter 2 - The Wisdom Which is From Above**

*Reading: 1 Cor. 2:1-16; 3:1-4, 18-23.*

The real trouble at Corinth was that the habit of looking at everything as a philosophy, which had reached such a height of development amongst the Greeks, had been carried into the realm of Christianity, and Christianity was being considered by them in the light of philosophy, was in fact being reduced to a new philosophy. In practice, therefore, at Corinth, Christianity was set forth as a philosophical teaching, as opposed to a spiritual state.

There is always that peril lurking amongst God's people. It is not a thing peculiar to the Greeks, nor to the Corinthians, nor to a bygone age. Somewhere not far off from any assembly of God's people there lurks the same danger of Christianity becoming a matter of teaching, wisdom of words. From the reverse side the danger is seen as something which merely gratifies the mind. The natural man loves to be in the know. Knowledge to the natural man gives a sense of strength, of power, of importance, and that peril of the natural man creeps into the realm of Christian teaching. Thus to have good teaching, clear teaching, systematic teaching, the presentation of Christian truth in a manner in which the mind can grasp it, become informed and enriched, has always this peril associated with it.

That is why a great many people do not like reiteration. They like something fresh. To such the novel preacher is the attractive preacher, the one who is "original", that is, who is not saying things well known, but something quite fresh, something unique, something that is not so familiar. There is an attractiveness about them which makes its appeal to this appetite. But should anyone get up and emphasize, and re-emphasize, and constantly hammer home one point people get upset. They get tired of it. They want something fresh for the mind. Very often they have not recognized the importance of that truth to the heart. All this belongs to the same dangerous realm of Christian truth and teaching becoming something for the mind. The peril is never far away from the place where much truth is given, or a teaching ministry fulfilled.

The Greeks were experts in that realm. That was their make-up, and they had brought that over into Christianity, and were reducing Christianity to a human philosophy, a system of worldly wisdom. The consequences were very, very serious indeed.

### **Wisdom's Fruits**

The point we want to emphasize is that you can always tell whether truth possessed is possessed as a teaching, a doctrine, a philosophy, or possessed as a living thing in relation to Christ, by the results that issue from it, by its effects. In Corinth they had the Christian truth in a very great fullness and richness, but they had it in the natural mind as teaching, as truth, as doctrine, as a philosophy, and the terrible consequences were that there was that which was sensual, earthly, and even devilish; so much so that the apostle had in one case to hand over a certain individual to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of Christ, so devilish was that thing in the assembly.

It is terrible to contemplate that such could be the case in a Christian assembly, where the Holy Ghost is, where Christ is, and yet here is not only the awful possibility but the actuality. The apostle puts his finger upon the cause when he says: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). What is carnality? It is the bringing over of the natural tendencies, the dispositions of mind and heart, into the things of the Lord, and that is a very dangerous thing to do, and has very pernicious consequences.

When the apostle introduces the heavenly wisdom he shows that it is pre-eminently marked, not by words, but by a state. Of his own visit to them he declares: "*I... when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom... that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*" (1 Cor. 2:1-5). It is a spiritual state. The wisdom which is from above produces a state which is altogether the opposite of that produced by the wisdom of this world, even though the wisdom of this world operate in the realm of Christian truth.

Paul wrote, "*I hear that divisions exist among you...*" (1 Cor. 11:18). Whence do they come? They come from the intrusion of human wisdom into the realm of Christian truth. Let us put that in another way. We find believers divided because they get teaching apart from a living state: yes,

Christian teaching, the doctrine of Christ, resulting in schism amongst believers, because they only have it as a teaching and not as a living state.

What is true of divisions is true of all these other unhappy things at Corinth. Why such things? How do sensuality and the very mark of the devil come to be found in a Christian assembly? This has been the sad history of the Church again and again, that right in the midst of a Christian assembly something perfectly devilish has sprung up, as well as these other things — which are, of course, from no other source than the devil — divisions, rivalries, jealousies, factions. This, I repeat, has been an unhappy history in the Church at large. Why? Because of Christian teaching being handled merely as a philosophy instead of both proceeding from, and producing, a spiritual state.

We cannot be too emphatic about this matter. We do not want to run the danger of anything so horrible and so gross, and if not, we must face it. We do not want to get into a position like that. We want everything in our relationship with the Lord to become a living and outworking reality.

Now the wisdom from above, of which the apostle speaks, produces a state just the opposite of that state produced by this wisdom which is from below. James 3:17 gives the definition of the wisdom which is from above: — *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubtfulness, without hypocrisy."* (R.V.M.)

There we have seven things marking the wisdom which is from above. And do you see how closely this passage in James runs parallel, though in striking contrast, to things at Corinth. We will not at this time dwell on these seven features, but only in the briefest manner touch on one or two.

*"The wisdom that is from above is first pure..."* At Corinth there was a state the very reverse of this, because worldly wisdom had come in. There was sensuality, uncleanness, and oh, strong word, *"It is actually reported that there is fornication among you..."* (1 Cor. 5:1).

*"...Then peaceable..."* *The wisdom which is from above is peaceable."* But of the Corinthians the apostle has to write: *"...I hear that divisions exist among you..."* (1 Cor. 11:18).

So we might follow the comparison and the contrast right through, but what we are seeking to say is this, that it is a state which is produced by heavenly wisdom, a spiritual state. That is the ground of the apostle's use of the words in the second chapter, *"he that is spiritual"* (verse 15). This state is here said to be Christ.

### **Wisdom Solving the Supreme Problem**

We want to get closer to this wisdom which is from above. What is the object of wisdom? For what is wisdom required? It is to solve problems, to see your way through, to get through your difficulties. Sin has set up the greatest problems that this universe has ever known, and sin in man set God His greatest problem. If we may speak, and I think we can rightly speak, of God having a problem, then sin in man confronted God with the greatest problem He has ever met with. What was the problem with which God Himself became confronted when sin entered into the very nature of man, and man became, not only a being with sin in him, but himself sin? God's problem was as to how He could overcome Himself. The position is that sin must be destroyed if God is uncompromisingly holy. If God cannot recognize, let alone condone, sin; if God in His very being, is in absolute antagonism to sin, and it is war to the death if God has made man and man has become sinful in his nature, God, by reason of what He is, is compelled to destroy man utterly as a sinful thing. God has either to do that, and destroy man completely, destroy His creation, or He has to find a way of overcoming Himself, of overcoming His own nature, and the demands of His own nature and being. To destroy man utterly, and to wipe out the whole sinful creation, would spell defeat for God, and give occasion for Satan to rise up and say: I have won. I have destroyed the work of God beyond repair.

That is one side of the problem for God. For God to spare sinful man is to violate His own nature. How is a problem like that going to be solved? There is wisdom wanted: on the one hand, wisdom to know how to do it, and, on the other hand, power to accomplish it.

This is where glorying in the Lord comes in. You can see the answer. You are living in the enjoyment of it. Christ is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, Christ crucified. God has solved His problem by Himself becoming Man, and in a great representative and all inclusive Manhood taking the full and

final consequences of sin so that the very nature of God is satisfied in an inclusive Representative. What mighty power there was in destroying the dominion of sin. There was wisdom in finding the way, and there was the power in executing the work, and it was all in Christ crucified. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

How can God save sinful man and be true to Himself? *CHRIST IS THE ANSWER*. This is a heavenly wisdom, and Christ is made unto us of God wisdom. What is that wisdom? Righteousness, sanctification, redemption ... how is there righteousness from God to us in Christ? Because Christ has fulfilled all righteousness ... because in His death He has carried the judgment upon all unrighteousness, and therefore satisfied the highest standard of divine righteousness. Sanctification is something more. Redemption is something more still.

Let us think for a moment of each of these. The three are an exegesis of the one. That is to say, wisdom is defined in the other three. Heavenly wisdom is righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

### **Righteousness**

What is righteousness here? God's laws are judgments. They carry with them the absolute demands of God, which if violated result in the judgment of God. There is no escape. Every man and woman entering into this creation comes by birth under the rule of God's judgments through God's laws, and becomes responsible for the laws of God. But every man and every woman coming into this creation is totally incapable of meeting those demands, answering to those laws, and escaping those judgments. There has come one Man into this world, Who also was made under the law, Who came under the laws and judgments of the infinitely holy God, but who was *ABLE* to stand up to them, to fulfil them, to satisfy God. Not only did He do that as for Himself, but there was a point in His career here on this earth where He stepped right into the place of other men, accepting all the weakness of all the race of men, and was then made sin, and tasted death in the behalf of every man. But because of that sinlessness which was inherent in Him, He could survive and not be engulfed in the condition which He had voluntarily accepted for other men, and through the eternal Spirit, the indestructible Spirit, the timeless Spirit, and therefore the deathless Spirit of God, He overcame that condition which He accepted in a voluntary way, swallowed it up in all its power, its awfulness, its blackness, and its consequences of judgment, and overcame, not only in an isolated way for Himself in what He was, but in a related way for all men ... God having taken that One into His presence, and made Him the Head. Faith in the Lord Jesus, we are taught, means that the righteousness which is true of that Man is put to the account of those who believe, and thus He is made from God righteousness to us. That is a state in Christ for us.

Righteousness goes beyond justification. Justification brings us into a standing, but righteousness in Christ means that that standing could be eternally maintained. Justification means that we stand acquitted. But what is our hope that we shall not again go back onto the old ground and lose that position? It is the righteousness of Christ which is eternal, indestructible, deathless, incorruptible. The case, then, is not one of faith only for a standing, but faith in a righteousness which abides, abiding righteousness to keep us there in that position with God. It is one thing to be brought to a position. It is another thing to have put to our account that which can keep us there eternally. Righteousness is that which establishes justification as an eternal thing. It is ours through faith. He is made unto us righteousness from God.

### **Sanctification**

He is made unto us sanctification from God. Notice the direction of this. Where does sanctification originate? From whence does it come? Does it come from our effort, from our struggle, from our endeavour? Does it come from our consecration? No, it does not! Sanctification comes from God: in this sense, that before ever we could be for God, God Himself singled us out for Himself. God singled Israel out from the nations for Himself. That was their sanctification. It came from God — "*Ye did not choose me, but I chose you*" (John 15:16). Sanctification originates with the initiative of God, and all that we shall ever be or do in a sanctified life will be because God started it, God initiated it, God singled us out, chose us to be His own.

The foundations of sanctification are not in our efforts to be holy, nor in our decision to be holy. The foundation of sanctification is in God's laying hold of us to be all for Himself. All our efforts would be

in vain if God had never made us His own. But to be the Lord's carries with it the fact that we are wholly separated. Separation is not unto sanctification; it is because of sanctification.

Let your reason for not having anything to do with what is not of the Lord be that you are the Lord's. Do not break off this and that so as to be the Lord's, but recognize that you are His, that He has chosen you, and you have then the basis and the dynamic for a holy life. It is in Christ. To be in Christ means that we are the Lord's, and carries with it the truth that we are wholly the Lord's. There must be no violation of that: and this implies the recognition of a position which carries with it a state. The recognition of that, and the acceptance of it by faith, is the power of a holy life. We are sanctified by faith, even as we are justified by faith. How are we sanctified by faith? By believing that in Christ we are holy, that God has purposed we should be holy through our being in Him. Anything unholy is a contradiction, and God is against it. God is for holiness, and would have us recognize the fact, and receive that holiness in His Son Whom He has given.

## **Redemption**

Redemption is more than justification, more than righteousness, more than sanctification. Why does it come last? Surely, we might say, Paul has made a slip! He ought to have said, Now Christ is made unto us redemption, righteousness, sanctification! Surely that is the order of doctrine! No! there is no mistake. The order is correct, and the statement accurate as it stands. We so often think of redemption in the limited sense of the ransom paid at the beginning by which we are set free. But that is a mere fragment of redemption. Look at 1 Corinthians 15 and see to what point redemption leads. It leads right out of this body of humiliation, right out of the last remnant and vestige of corruptibility, into a spirit glorified in a glorified body. Go back to Romans 8:23, where you have that stated emphatically — "...*waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*" Redemption is the full and final consummation of the whole work of new creation in spirit, soul and body, and in the whole creation outside: for "...*the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption...*" (verse 21). That is redemption. Redemption carries you right on to the end, and that is why it comes last here.

Redemption is an immense thing. And Christ is made redemption unto us. In Christ that is secured to us. It is beautiful to know that we are justified and stand before God. It is good to know that that righteousness, unimpeachable, incorruptible, is put to our credit. It is good to know that in Christ we are sanctified. But, oh, see to what that is leading. It is leading to glorification in every part of our being, and in every part of this creation, this universe. That is redemption in Christ Jesus. "*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*"

The Lord brings all this and gathers it up into one word "grace." While the word itself is not used, you can never have a more beautiful exposition of grace than you have here. "*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom...*" God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the despised, and the things which are not, and brought them through to that. God chose! That is repeatedly stated. It is of Him that we are in Christ. Is that not grace? Foolish, weak, despised nothings in this world brought through to that in Christ: and it is all of God — "*Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God (out from God unto us), and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.*" It is all the divine work. All comes from God. All is grace.

What an argument that is against this wisdom of this world! It argues in these two ways. In the first place all this says that the wisdom of this world is intended to make something of man. Man wants to be something in himself. He wants to be wise, and by his wisdom he wants to have power, to be able to do because he knows, and it is all the bolstering up of man. Thus the Greeks came to worship the most perfect man that they could find. The best philosopher was worshipped. The best athlete was worshipped. The man of wisdom and strength was the object of worship amongst the Greeks. It was making something of man, and wisdom was all to make man something.

That rules Christ out, and it rules out everything being of God, if it is all of man. Which will you have? Are you going to have this inflation of humanity? Where will it end? To what will it lead? Perhaps a few years of fame? "*Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown...*" How true that is: "*a corruptible crown!*" So you come to the Pantheon, and you find that one wise man, one philosopher, and one athlete, succeeds another. Every year the one who was at the top is superseded, and that is how it goes on. Fame and influence may last for a year, but you will be very lucky if you get beyond

that. That is the value of this world's wisdom and power, a transient thing, no more permanent than the laurel crown of its reward. But here is a wisdom established upon the weakness, the foolishness, the nothingness of the human element: fadeless, immortal, eternal, heavenly. That is the argument between the wisdom from above and the wisdom from beneath. And when these are compared, which is wisdom? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world, seeing what the heavenly wisdom is? What does your heart say to that? When you see the heavenly wisdom, and its possibilities, and its fruit, do you not say that the wisdom of this world is foolishness compared with that? God *HAS MADE* foolish the wisdom of this world, and God *HAS MADE* weak the strength of this world, by a revelation of the heavenly wisdom, the heavenly power in Christ.

It all resolves itself into a matter of whether we are prepared to accept the working of the cross of Christ crucified. Of course, facing it like this you agree, you assent, you say: Yes, of course, there is no other choice to be made. Are you prepared to be regarded by the world every day that you live as utterly foolish, as nothing, as having no existence? That is literally what the words mean. You might say in an hour of enthusiasm, Oh, yes! Ah, but it is not so easy. Many a battle has to be fought against the proneness of this human nature to be something, against its desire to be able to hold its own, to make an equal show with others. How against this nature weakness is! How we cry out against weakness. It is, then, a question of whether we are prepared to have the working of Christ crucified in the whole constitution of nature, so that the result is the complete ruling out of ourselves and the utter ruling in of Christ.

Paul relates all this to the living person of Christ. As Chrysostom said in his own quaint way, "Paul always nails it with nails to Christ." He meant that Paul always brings it in in relation to the living Person: not talking doctrine, not things, not sanctification, redemption, righteousness as doctrines, but the living Christ. It is, after all, the question of how far Christ is to eclipse us, totally eclipse us.

In the Greek world in these New Testament days a slave was regarded as having no existence apart from his master. He dare not have his own thoughts: he dare not have his own mind, his own will, his own ways, his own plans, his own workings. He was but the shadow of his master. He had completely to sink his own personality into that of his master. That is why Paul constantly calls himself the bondsman of Jesus Christ. In effect he means, I have sunk my own individuality, my own personality, into Christ — "For me to live is Christ," the shadow of my Master! "We have the mind of Christ," His thoughts, His ways; and that implies the transcendence of Christ over ourselves at every point. Paul gloried in that He did not think it something of great cost and sacrifice to let himself go to Christ. He gloried in the fact that he was a bondsman of Jesus Christ, because he gloried in Christ. It is, once again, what Christ is from God to us, and this it is as much our glory to accept as our necessity.

We may talk much about the cross. It is necessary for us to speak about the working of the cross, because it is necessary for us to be reminded of the method. But what is far more than all is the utter and absolute Lordship and dominion of Jesus Christ. That carries with it the cross. You will never know that relationship apart from the cross. The cross is the way to that, but the object in view is not to be crucified. Do not live as though the one thing in life is to be constantly crucified, to have to die, die, die, and to be shut up with this as the only subject to which your thoughts are ever given. Let us be concerned with the positive side, which will include the former, with Christ all, and in all, the complete eclipsing of ourselves by Him. The eclipsing work will be by the cross, but the end will be Christ! And what a Christ! "*Hallelujah, what a Saviour!*" "*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*" The Lord put more glorying in Him into our hearts.

## **Chapter 3 - The Supreme Importance of a Living and Clear Apprehension of Christ**

*Reading: 1 Corinthians 3.*

These words are carefully chosen: the supreme importance of a living and clear apprehension of Christ. If it were necessary to show how supremely important that is, it could be done very easily without going outside of this first letter to the Corinthians; for undoubtedly all the sad, the tragic, the terrible conditions with which the apostle had to deal in the assembly at Corinth were due to an inadequate apprehension of Christ. But there is very much more than what we find in this letter to prove this necessity, and it is upon perhaps one aspect of the necessity that we shall dwell more particularly at this time.

In the third chapter there occur the familiar words about the foundation and the building. The apostle says: "I laid a foundation... other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is." (verses 10-13) — *"the fire shall prove each man's work of what sort it is."*

We need to ask the question: What work is it that is referred to there? To what does that relate, "...each man's work?" I do not think the apostle is here referring to Christian service. That is the common idea about this passage, that it relates to the work which we do for the Lord. Of course, that comes into the category of things tried by the fire, and of things manifested in that day. But I do not think that is the thing which the apostle has in mind when he writes this. I believe he is rather thinking of the substance of faith. We are building a Christian life: we are building ourselves up on Christ; we are constructing and constituting Christianity in ourselves. We have been doing this for a long time, and this superstructure of our Christian lives is composed of the things which we believe, the things which we accept, the things to which we give assent; everything that we gather in to make up the Christian life. We are Christians, and the make-up of ourselves as Christians is going on, is increasing, and in that way we are building. It is the substance of our faith that is in question, using the word "faith" in its largest sense.

### **The Nature of the Building**

It is at that point that the whole argument of the apostle has its application, so far as this letter is concerned. Just there in the make-up of the Christian life of every one of us, that which constitutes the substance, the material, the elements, the features, it is there that the apostle is applying this great difference between earthly and heavenly wisdom. These Greeks at Corinth, because of their natural inclination and disposition to reduce everything to a philosophy, had taken up Christianity very largely in that way, regarding it as a philosophy, and handling it as such: examining, dissecting, appraising according to the standards of worldly wisdom, philosophical thought, and interpretation. So they looked at the preaching, the teaching, from that standpoint, and in a mental way, an intellectual way, took hold of Christian truth and made it, with human, worldly-wise interpretation, the substance of being Christians, the constituents of a Christian life. They were building on the right foundation. Christ was there as the foundation laid by the apostle. But they were building upon that foundation, a worldly interpretation of Christianity, a philosophical structure in Christian doctrine, terminology, phraseology, ideas, conceptions and it was becoming a purely mental, intellectual, academic thing. That is what they were building up. It had no living relationship to their inward condition. It was purely external. The result was that, while they had all that worldly structure of Christianity, Christian thought, and Christian ideas, and Christian doctrines, they were behaving in the most shocking manner amongst themselves and in holy things.

It was at that the apostle launched this word: "...let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon" (1 Cor. 3:10). In other words, that which is of supreme importance is not Christian doctrine, mentally appraised and apprehended, but a living and clear spiritual apprehension of Christ. That is the work. What are you building? Are you, through a living, clear, inward, experimental relationship with the Lord Jesus, building a structure which comes out of that inward spiritual knowledge? Is it by that you are growing? Or are you growing by things said and mentally judged, appraised, dissected, accepted, assented to? What is the nature of the building? The work in which we are engaged, to

which this phrase "*each man's work*" applies, is the building of Christ livingly into the very substance of our being, into the very fabric of our lives. It is not a question of getting to know a great deal about Christianity. Let us note that. The heart of the whole matter is the difference between the philosophy of Christianity, of Christian doctrine and the spiritual knowledge of Christ.

### **The Nature of the Trying Fire**

Now we come to a further point. "*Each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is*" (1 Cor. 3:13). What is the fire? We have, as we see, the clause "*for the day shall declare it,*" which no doubt applies to the day of the Lord's appearing, but I think there is an application of the words "*the fire itself shall prove*" in that day, which is specific, which is along a certain line.

Passing over to another part of the Scriptures, let us ask what the nature of the devouring by the dragon is in Revelation 12:4. There we see the great red dragon standing waiting to devour the man-child the moment he is born. What is the character of the devouring? How will the dragon seek to devour? I do not think it would be an adequate answer to say that this is a way of describing a great persecution from without, a physical persecution of the saints. That is not an adequate explanation; because the Blood of the Lamb is not the ground upon which you overcome physical persecution. You go through physical persecution, you are not delivered out of it. You can appeal to the Blood of the Lamb as much as you like in the day of persecution from without, and the Blood of the Lamb does not avail to release you from it. There is a support through it. But here in this twelfth chapter of Revelation the man-child is seen escaping the jaws of the dragon, being delivered from him, and being caught up to the throne. It is an absolute deliverance from the dragon who stands waiting to devour. Now what is the nature of the devourer? The nature of the devourer is explained by the nature of the victory. "*And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony...*" It may be outwardly they suffer death, loving not their lives even unto death, but there is something inward which means that, even while they are delivered up unto death outwardly, they overcome spiritually.

Here is something in which these escape the dragon and are not swallowed up by him; and that will tell you, if you think for a moment, what the nature of the devourer is. It seems to me that the devourer is related to the faith of the overcomer. It is a matter of swallowing up their faith. Faith in what? Faith in all that upon which they stand for their eternal salvation. The accuser is there, and if, with no more multiplication of words, we reduce it to this, you will see what we mean. It is a question precisely of an inward spiritual, living relationship to Christ Himself. In that day, when the enemy moves in that intensified form against an overcomer-company to swallow that company up, there will be the most severe and intense testing and trying out of an inward relationship to the Lord.

It will certainly come along one line, if not entirely along the one line, namely, of being tempted to believe that the whole foundation has given way. In other words, the great effort of the adversary will be to bring to a place where the hope of salvation is gone, where the saints have had cut from under them their assurance in Christ. The devouring will be in relation to their faith, the awful blackness of being out of the pale and hope of salvation. That is not mere hypothesis; that is an actuality. There are many true children of God in that affliction now, and the enemy is pressing that, and will press that more and more toward the end. You and I, beloved, by reason of being given certain conditions and circumstances: physical, circumstantial, mental, will be tested on that matter, tested right out as to what we have been using to build with. What does your building represent? Is it so much teaching, so much doctrine, so much theory, so many meetings, so many prayers, so much Bible reading, Bible study, so much activity in the Lord's work? Is that the structure? Supposing it all goes, and you are no longer able to do anything: no longer able to pray, no longer able to study the Word, no longer able to go to the meetings, no longer able to work for the Lord outwardly, what do you have left? Supposing all that structure is all that you have, and your whole Christian life is represented by that, and it all goes, what do you have left? Do you have Christ inwardly? That will be the test.

"*Each man's work shall be made manifest... the fire shall prove each man's work of what sort it is.*" (1 Cor. 3:13). The work is that which we are doing now in the building up of our Christian lives. What are we using? What are we working with? I believe that the only thing which will satisfy the Lord is that we should be able to stand with Him in any place, though it be in hell itself. The Lord might test

us by the fires in that way, as to whether we are able to stand not merely when we are in the good fellowship of Christian people, with all the helps around us, with all advantages at our disposal spiritually, but when we are alone, cut off, shut up, or in some place where it is ninety-nine percent the devil and hell.

What is it that will make it possible for us to stand in such an hour? Nothing but an inward, clear, living knowledge of Christ Himself. Each man's work shall be tried; the fires shall make manifest of what sort it is. The work relates to the building up of ourselves as Christians. What is it that is represented by our Christian lives? Is it the place in which we meet? Is it the teaching we receive there? Is it anything like that? You may be assured that that is going to be put in the fire, and then the question will be how much of Christ has through that become a living, inward reality, a part of your very being, so that you do not say: I know of certain teaching, and I belong to a certain fellowship! but, *I HAVE CHRIST!* That is our work, and each man's work shall be tried.

The enemy will stand ready to swallow up, and he will swallow up all that he can. He cannot swallow up Christ. If Christ is in us, in a closer relationship with us than any human relationship, so that Christ has become a very part of us, the enemy cannot devour that.

### **Only What is *Christ* Will Endure**

The foundation is Christ, and the structure must be Christ. The foundation is not our decision, our beliefs, our attainments spiritually; not our accuracy, not our works, not the measure of our knowledge, not our spiritual ability, not our measure of strength, not our mind or our will, not our activities for the Lord, and not our persistence. It is nothing of ourselves, it is Christ. When you come to think about it, is not that just where the enemy gains his advantage? So many of us have thought that unless we can do certain things, or be of a certain mind, we can have no assurance. The Lord would teach us — and this is the lesson that my heart is bent upon learning, and that I would urge upon you to make your quest also — that the ground of assurance is not in our having decided for Christ, nor that we persist in the Christian life, nor that we feel strong, nor that we have certain ability as Christians and are able to do this or that. It is not the measure of our activity in the work of the Lord, nor any one of these things which constitutes our Christian life. These are simply the outworkings. The thing which constitutes us is that Christ is the foundation, and that we are inseparably linked with Him by faith. Everything else can be suspended as a secondary consideration until that is settled. It is as though God, if we may put it this way to try to simplify the truth, had given us His Son and had said to us: In Him you have everything, and the first thing is not what you are, what you can do, or anything to do with you; it is what He is! If only in the face of all you may see of a multitude of contradictions in your own life in weaknesses, and imperfections, and lack of attainment, you will persistently believe in Him as having it in Himself to bring you through to the end, you will go through in spite of all. We begin to take stock of ourselves, measure ourselves up, and say: I am not this, and I am not that, and I am not something else; or else, I am this, and I am that, and all this goes against me. Nothing of all this is to the point at all. The totality of every divine requirement in us is in Christ.

The very last stroke of our sanctification and glorification is finished now in Christ, and by faith we have to receive the end of our salvation. The only way in which we are related to the matter at all is by faith. Of course faith is always proved in obedience. Perhaps someone will say: You are simply ignoring and ruling out our responsibility entirely! We are doing nothing of the kind. We are saying that our responsibility is faith, and faith works out in obedience. But never let us think that it is our faith or our obedience that saves us. It is Christ who saves, Christ who is salvation, and there is nothing more dynamic unto a life of consecration than seeing what Christ is for us. The dynamic of consecration is not in struggling to be something; it is in seeing Him.

Perhaps none of us have realized that the Holy Spirit never co-operates with our struggling. The Holy Spirit never comes along and assists in our endeavours to be good. Have you not proved that? The Holy Spirit never comes along and lends His aid to us to solve our problems concerning ourselves while we dwell upon our own problems. Have you not discovered that? Why not let that be settled? The Holy Spirit stands back while we struggle to solve our own spiritual problems. What is He waiting for? He is waiting for us to apprehend Christ by faith, and then He will come in and work on that ground. The Holy Spirit works because of what Christ is, not for any reason to be found within ourselves. Faith's apprehension of the perfection of Christ, in His Person and work, provides the

ground for the Holy Spirit to come and make that good progressively in us. Stand apart from the perfection of Christ, and you will make no progress. Stand on the ground of the finality of Christ, and the Holy Spirit begins His operations to make it good. There is all the difference between seeing Christianity as a system of life to which you have to conform: a standard to which you have somehow or other to attain; an objective Christianity presented in a systematic doctrine, and seeing that Christ is that fully and finally; and Christ livingly in you is the ground of your conformity.

It is not found in anything that can come from us. God chose the foolish things. Why? To make the wisdom of God everything. God chose the weak things. Why? To make His power in Christ the only power of which such weak things have any knowledge. God chose the base things. Why? In order that that which is noble in Christ should be the only honour of which they know, which they have. God chose the things which are not. Why? In order that He should be the only reality. God's activities are not directed toward making something of us, but God takes account of the fact that no matter how much we struggle and strive we never can be anything. He takes account of the fact that there is a nothingness upon which He can put His all. But you and I have to recognize that that is the place of the Cross, if we have not come to it. It opens up such tremendous possibilities when we see that God does begin at zero, that everything of God is bound up with the place where we see, as to ourselves, that we are out of it. But how we are concerned with ourselves! We must settle it that we in ourselves are of no account, and that Christ is all.

The order in this first letter to the Corinthians is, firstly, Christ crucified, as over against the wisdom of this world, the wisdom of men. The latter, to the Greeks, represented everything that man cares about. I do not know whether Paul would have written the same thing to this Western world that he wrote to them. When he wrote to the Hebrews he did not write about the wisdom of this world, because other things were pre-eminent with them. If he were writing to this Western world, I wonder if perhaps he might speak more of financial acquisition, and would say: Now, when I came to you, brethren, I came not to talk about financial acquisition. I determined to know nothing about financial acquisition amongst you! just as he said to the Greeks at Corinth, And I, brethren, when I came unto you... I determined not to know anything among you about worldly wisdom, philosophy. That was the import of his declaration. Whatever it may be, and in whatever part of the world, the principle is that the fundamental obstruction has to go and Christ crucified has to take its place.

Related to that, the next thing to be noted is the utter nothingness of those who are in Christ. We are said to be *"in Christ"* — *"...of him are ye in Christ..."* (1 Cor. 1:30). Who is the "ye?" The foolish, the weak, the ignoble, the things which are not, the nothings, all those whom God has chosen.

The sum of the whole matter is the importance that is given to life in the Spirit, or a spiritual state. Read again the second and third chapters.

*"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit"* (verses 9-10).

*"For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God."*

*"The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,"* and he that is spiritual, that is, who has come into a spiritual state by renewal and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, comes into the realm of the knowledge of Christ as God's fullness, the things which God hath laid up in Christ for them that love Him. A life in the Spirit is what is signified, which means, firstly, a spiritual state of government by the Holy Spirit. From this in turn there results a condition in which the Spirit is found revealing Christ and making Christ everything. *"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."*

If the devourer is going to be cheated of his object, if you and I are not going to come under that awful onslaught of the prince of darkness to rob us of our assurance of salvation, so that the time comes when we doubt whether we are saved after all, doubt whether there is any salvation for us, we must recognize that there is a place in the innermost chamber of our being where we have to know the Lord. Does it seem impossible to you that you could ever reach a point where you doubt your salvation? There are possibilities for every one of us along that line which are fearful. You have only to have a nervous breakdown and, as the entail of it, the devil strutting in to becloud your mind and trade upon your melancholy, to know the truth of this. You have only to be cut off from all your

activities, where you cannot pray any longer for some reason or other, where you cannot do your accustomed work in the Word of God, where the Christian service which has been such a delight is taken away from you, and you are shut up in a state of weakness, aloneness, with loss of vitality, and depression to which these minds and bodies of ours are prone, and then have the devourer, encamping upon it all, and beginning to say: God has left you, you have sinned against the Holy Ghost! and to listen to that once, to find yourself engulfed. We have to know the Lord in that innermost chamber of our being, so that, be it mental and physical breakdown, circumstances all against us, all these things, there is that inward grip, that inward reality of Christ which is adequate to stand up to this situation. That is our need.

It must not be ninety percent of externalities in the Christian life, or seventy-five percent, or fifty percent. These things are good: let us make the most of them. But let us continually go to the Lord on our knees and say: Lord, these meetings are good, and it is gracious of You to give us these fellowships and helps: but I must know You in my own heart, lest the day come when the fellowship is blown upon and scattered to the four winds and all these things are taken away, and I am left stranded because my life has stood in the power of outward activities and not in knowing the Lord. Plead with the Lord about that. Have an understanding with the Lord about that. Let us see to it that the building which is going on where we are concerned is the building of Christ Himself into the very fibre of our being. Then the devourer will be eluded, the overcomer will be caught up to the Throne, and the devourer will go away to the wilderness to persecute the rest of the woman's seed. What kind of wilderness is this? It is the wilderness in which some believers are found now. They have lost the assurance of their salvation: and that is an awful wilderness. God save us from that.

## Chapter 4 - The Appeal of God's Full Thought

*Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-10.*

Two things remain to be said about this introductory section to this letter. One is that it represents the position of the Lord's people in Christ. Quite clearly all that is said there does not directly apply, so far as conditions were concerned, to the whole Corinthian assembly. But the letter is written to the whole assembly, and this salutation is addressed to the whole assembly, and therefore it represents a condition in Christ to which that of the church itself may not altogether correspond. What we are in Christ, and what we are found to be in our own spiritual condition may be quite different things. But what we are in Christ becomes the basis of the appeal to us as to the condition in which we may be found actually.

The other thing is that clearly the whole church at Corinth was not bad. While there were sections there to which the apostle had to write such severe things by way of rebuke, and admonition, and exhortation, the whole church was not in that state.

I suppose the same could be said of all the churches in the days of the apostle, that there were two sides to them. There was that side which was good and noble, and there was that which was subject to warning and rebuke. The object of the letters, almost invariably, was to seek to bring all into the full position as represented in Christ. We could say that there were those who were failing, who were in defeat, who were doing anything but commending the Gospel and glorifying the Lord Jesus, while on the other hand there were those who were overcoming the very things which encircled them, and which in character were contrary to the Lord's mind. In all the churches there were the "overcomers" and the "undercomers!"

The appeal is always to the full thought of the Lord, and almost invariably, if not always, the letters are so introduced that the complete standard in Christ, God's full thought concerning the saints in Christ, is placed right on the threshold, and everything which follows moves from that and to that. It becomes the basis of the appeal, the basis of the exhortation, the basis of the warning, of the entreaty, the rebuke, the counsel, the instruction. It is all in order that that which is representative of God's full will for the saints might be expressed in all the saints.

### The Example of Levi

Turn to Deuteronomy 33:8-11. Verse 8 reads, "*And of Levi he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim are with thy godly one...*" (the margin has "*him whom thou lovest*"). Levi is an Old Testament illustration and type of the overcomer of the New Testament, and in these verses containing the blessing of Levi we have the foundations of the overcomer, the nature of the overcomer, and the function of the overcomer.

Levi is represented as expressing a very full thought of God. There is something about this statement concerning Levi, which puts Levi in a very honoured position, in a class by themselves. There is a contrast between the tribe of Levi and the other tribes. That contrast was brought out very clearly in the day of Israel's departure from the Lord, when Aaron made the golden calf while Moses was in the mount with God. You will remember how in coming down from the mount Moses heard the noise of the revelry in the camp and discovered the apostasy of Israel, the spiritual declension which had taken place. There had entered in something of the past life, the life of the world, the life of Egypt from which God had separated them, and they had taken a much lower spiritual level. As soon as Moses reached the camp and had taken in the situation, he immediately went and stood in the gate of the camp, and cried: "*Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me.*" Then the sons of Levi went out of the camp to Moses, and Moses said: "*Put ye every man his sword upon his thigh, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.*" (Exodus 32:27). It was to be a complete slaughter, without respect of persons, and the Levites went into the camp and dealt with those with whom they were personally associated and with whom they had responsibility. Their attitude was so uncompromising for the Lord that it was possible for these words to be said of them: "*Who said of his father, and of his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew he his own children...*" (Deut. 33:9). For the Levites the Word of the Lord took a place above all natural relationships, affections, and considerations, so that everything which was in the realm of the natural life was subjected to the known will of God, and was not allowed in any way to influence

where the question of the full thought of God was concerned. Were we to consider this thing purely on the human level we should say that these Levites slew their own hearts, in so far as their hearts were apart from the revealed will of God. They smote themselves in the realm of all their natural affections and interests, dominated by the full thought of God's will.

### **The Cause of Failure at Corinth**

Here is our link with what is before us. When you come to the first letter to the Corinthians and the second chapter you find that is the principle underlying what the apostle is saying about the natural man and the spiritual man. God's full thought at Corinth is represented in the introductory words "...sanctified in Christ Jesus, called... saints." That true, full thought of God is violated, destroyed in Corinth, because of these natural elements which are governing the lives of His children there. They have not slain the natural wisdom, the natural mind, the natural heart in its affections and its desires. The devotion to all that God has set before them is not such that every merely natural influence is set on one side. The apostle is obliged to say all that he does about the natural heart and mind governing because there are merely natural considerations influencing these people and keeping them and the assembly back from God's full thought. The result is that you have a situation revealed later in the letter which corresponds to what happened while Moses was in the mount: that is, a departure from God, spiritual declension, idolatry, sensuality, and all such things, for we do not know all that happened when Aaron set up that molten calf. It is necessary to look into the Bible a good deal more fully to have a true inkling of what happened at that time. Read Acts 7, and you will have a little more light upon it. The narrative in the Old Testament immediately connected with the incident is very brief and incomplete. You must remember that there was distinct gross sensuality associated with the worship of the molten calf. They stripped themselves of their clothes, and their behaviour was most unseemly in that worship. It was a real drop into heathen debauchery. It was a terrible situation.

In Corinth you have a very serious and bad situation of sin and spiritual declension revealed, and in both cases the cause is the same, namely, the coming into the realm of the things of God of the natural man, the old man. Levi put all that out. The natural affections and the natural mind were entirely cut off, with God's full thought in view. That is the overcomer. The Levites left that sin, that state, and went out of it, outside of the camp, and first of all spiritually separated themselves from it, and then from a position of spiritual separation dealt with it. That is always the way. You can never register an effective blow against corruption while you are involved in it. You have to be spiritually apart from it before there can be an influence registered upon it.

### **A Positive Attitude Against Evil Essential**

This is an assembly principle. No assembly can deal with evil in its midst until it has spiritually separated itself therefrom and repudiated it. Whenever unrighteousness is known to be in the midst a stand must be taken where that is recognized as evil and an uncompromising attitude adopted toward it.

We cannot on the ground of sentiment, or through any kind of natural consideration, be in any way involved in that. That is evil. God is not in it. God is not with it, and therefore we must spiritually be apart from it. Until that utter cleavage, that utter separation in spirit and in mind, has taken place, there can be no dealing in spiritual power and authority with evil. That is to say, evil will obtain, will hold, will maintain its grip, until there is a spiritual separation from it. The Levites separated themselves, and then from a position of spiritual separation dealt with the thing. That is God's order. That is the overcomer, the one who is spiritually apart, and who, being in that place of separation with God, is a mighty, effective testimony against evil, not in word but in power, even when that evil is amongst the Lord's people.

Levi is an excellent illustration of New Testament things, and we can see the Levitical principle at Corinth just as we see it elsewhere, a *SPIRITUAL* separation in a day of *SPIRITUAL* declension. It must be a spiritual thing. It is not enough that it should be merely a geographical thing. You can separate yourself from other Christians, and be yourself a carrier of the same kind of trouble, and have nothing but repetitions of the same thing. It must be first of all a spiritual separation, whatever else may become necessary, whatever else may follow. It is a matter of the heart.

What is this separation? In other words, what is it that characterizes the overcomer? It is heart separation unto the Lord for His full thought, whatever it may cost. That may mean an uncompromising attitude toward your own sentiments, your own natural reasoning about things. God's full thought demands that there shall be no argument whatever in favour of a thing which is against God.

### **The Reward of Faithfulness**

Then note what follows. We have seen the nature of the overcomer, the nature of the Levite; but what follows when that state obtains, when the Lord has a people whose hearts are circumcised in that way? The Word in Deuteronomy says: "*Thy Thummim and thy Urim are with him whom thou lovest.*" (RV margin) We will not stay to go into details with regard to the *Thummim* and the *Urim* (*Lights* and *Perfections*), but we know they were the means by which Israel got to know the mind of the Lord, and that is sufficient for our present purpose. So the Lord puts Himself in a special relationship to the Levites, and that special relationship is for the purpose of making Himself known to them, in order that through them He may become known to others. That is what follows. "*They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thine altar.*" (Deut. 33:10).

The overcomer, then, becomes the instrument and the vehicle of divine revelation, divine instruction. Come to 1 Corinthians again, and mark how over against the natural man you have the spiritual man. And both these terms, let us note, have to do with believers in the assembly. "*Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him* (in other words, he has no *Thummim* and *Urim*). *But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ*" (1 Cor. 2:14-16). The spiritual man, who has discriminated between the natural mind and the mind of the Spirit, is the man with whom the *Thummim* and the *Urim* are found, the knowledge of the Lord.

So then there is a great and privileged position to be occupied by those who, setting aside the whole of the natural life in its judgments and its affections, will at all costs stand for God's full thought. This great and privileged position is that of being God's vehicle of illumination to others. How are we going to be those who teach Jacob the Lord's ordinances and Israel His law? How is this ministry going to be constituted? It never comes by mere studying. A minister of revelation is not merely one who has studied the Bible very thoroughly, and all relative books and subjects, and has become very highly versed in Scriptural matters. Such are not the instruments of divine revelation, of making God known to others. Those who will fulfil such a ministry of revelation, where it is not they themselves who are revealing God, but God revealing Himself through them, are those who have come clear of the natural mind, and of all that which is represented by the term "*the natural mind.*" Such are in the place of the spiritual man, with God's full purpose dominating their hearts and mind. They are standing for that — and it costs and they are paying the price.

### **The Cost of Faithfulness**

Do you think that while Levi shut their eyes as it were to what they were doing it cost them nothing? You do not cut off your own children without feeling it, your own kin, without suffering yourself as much as they suffer. It was no mere cold, unfeeling brutality which governed Levi. It was, if we may use the word, the stringing of themselves up to a point where jealousy for the one thing prevailed, namely, God's honour. God's glory must get the better of natural feelings in this matter, and it costs to come thus right out from the realm of nature. It costs to stand in that position where Christ is your wisdom, and Christ is your strength, and you have none of your own. You might have strength in nature; you might have wisdom in nature; you might have position, reputation, influence amongst men; there might be all that in the realm of nature, but you deliberately look beyond that realm. You have to be a fool for Christ's sake, and a weakling for Christ's sake, and altogether outside of the camp of this world for Christ's sake. You might have had reputation and influence had you gone the way of nature, but God in His full desire and purpose and thought has become dominant, and you have cut this other thing off; you have repudiated it. And now from this world's standpoint, and from your own estimate of your natural state from your position in Christ, you know that you are a fool, that you are a weakling, that you are nothing, of no account at all, but you are for God. Christ is now your wisdom. Christ is the only strength you are ever going to count upon. Christ is everything. You

do not get there without feeling things keenly at times. It is very often brought home to you what a position like that means of suffering and reproach. To the natural man, to the flesh, weakness, dependence, is no pleasant thing. To the flesh competence, ability, capability are the things which gratify, and which we love. It is a terrible thing to feel ourselves so utterly dependent, but it is glorious to see the Lord coming in all the time, and being the full resource. Yet we know that the sense of dependence has to be maintained. It is along that line that God gets His full thought.

It was because there was not that basis, that foundation fully and finally established at Corinth that God's full thought was not expressed and represented by the whole assembly there. The overcomer is the one who is in that position where Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and everything in between. When you get there, or when God gets an individual or a company there, then there follows a ministry in and by which He is revealed.

That is the kind of training for ministry that the Bible speaks of. It is not a pleasant training, but it is the best, the most effective. We can give out a lot of information, a lot of knowledge, which may please and gratify the mass of people, and they may think it to be doing them great good, but in the day of the test, the day of the fire, when the question is, How much of Christ has entered into the very fabric of the being? We shall see that information does not do that, book-knowledge does not accomplish that. But a ministry of revelation will do that, if it is revelation from God; not our revealing of God, but God showing Himself through the instrument. That is true ministry, and that is preparation for ministry. It will explain some things to us. When we have handed ourselves over to the Lord our real preparation comes along the line of the destroying of the natural fabric, and the constituting of Christ as life, as wisdom, as strength, as everything. God's most powerful instruments in the history of this world have always been those who have gone out in fear and trembling and much weakness.

Are you prepared to accept a life like that? There is something for the Lord in an instrument like that. It is first of all vocation, ministry which is realized. Please do not make a technical thing of that word "ministry," and think of it as applying to platforms or public meetings. If you are wholly for God, standing for God's full thought on the ground we have just mentioned, you will be the means of God coming to other lives, no matter where you are. It is not a question of what you are going to say to them. You may be troubled often as to what you will say, or as to how you can say anything in the position in which you are, in that you feel that people would not listen to you, would take no notice of you. The question is not what you are going to say. God very often says His loudest things through most silent people. God can register an impact of Himself by your presence. It is not always a matter of words. It is a question of the Lord expressing Himself through those who are standing with Him in this way: that is ministry.

*"They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee..."* If you like to paraphrase that, you may make it read like this: *They shall prevail with Thee in prayer: they shall fulfil a holy and effectual ministry of intercession.* "They shall put incense before thee (the Revised Version margin says "in thy nostrils" — that is God smelling a sweet savour), and whole burnt offering upon thine altar (that is surely setting forth the ground of full acceptance). Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands (here is a blessing!): smite through the loins of them that rise up against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." The Lord is on the side of those who are utterly for Him. The Lord will watch over them because His own interests are bound up with them. Sooner or later it will be seen that they are the Lord's anointed, and no hand can be reached out against them without being answered by God in God's time. Levi had a very close relationship with all Israel, and all Israel owed their standing before God to the Levites. The overcomers are appointed of God to lead the way for the rest into His presence.

May the Lord show us that what He needs, what He desires, what He is seeking to have in His people, is that state of heart which is content with nothing less than His whole thought. The people who are going to count for God are those who pay the price, even if it means going outside the camp bearing His reproach, who accept that cost, and go with the Lord, even against themselves in all that is of nature.

