

# True Fellowship

By: Arthur Katz

## Foreword to *True Fellowship*

We have sought to recapture the principal elements of the spirit and life of those two great words, "True Fellowship." Surely the world is dying for the lack of that divine reality. This treatise is not an exhaustive attempt to define that reality, but allows the reader an induction into the constituent elements of what God is after in the life of His Church not least being the fulfillment of His eternal purposes through this very same Church.

Little or nothing is mentioned on Church structure or government. Others have written more than adequately on such subjects. But few have attempted to probe and explore Paul's words "To Him be the glory in the Church." We trust that a measure of that glory is communicated through this modest attempt at examining how that glory is revealed and expressed in the Church.

The material for each chapter was compiled and edited from Art's spoken messages on this theme given at different times and places over the last twenty-five years. Special thanks to Jeannie Clink for her needful help and careful editing skills in the final proofing.

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## Preface to *True Fellowship*

It says in Psalm 133,

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edges of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing life forever.

This is something much more than coming together for meetings. Dwelling together is a daily relationship; it is an integration of life. It is the awareness of our imperfections and struggles in the faith; yet we do not give up, we do not run, and we do not turn our backs. We

dwell together in unity, and it is right *there* that God has commanded the blessing and nowhere else. After twenty-eight years of community life, I know that this is not some easy or cheap thing to obtain. There is a *suffering* that is intrinsic to *dwelling* and makes dwelling possible; it is called the Cross.

I am fond of saying that every issue, in the last analysis, is the issue of the Cross as the experience of suffering. Humiliation is a suffering, and when God called us to establish a community, I knew that I knew that I knew, "You have had it, Katz. This is going to be for you humiliation and suffering. You are going to be found out. You are not going to be a charismatic speaker who flits from one meeting to another. You are going to be living intimately and intensively with other people on a daily basis in which your defects, your shortcomings, your sins and your failures *will* and *must* be revealed." And out of that, the possibility of a reality is able to come forth that can best be described as "true fellowship."

May these pages communicate to the reader something of that reality, and particularly the glory of that reality. And may we, with the apostle Paul, be able to say in our deepest hearts, "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Ephesians 3:21 KJV).

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## Introduction to *True Fellowship*

From the inception of my salvation, and into the first four or five years of it, I intuited that something was wrong in contemporary church life. Where was the power of God? Where was the glory and the apostolic reality? Where was the "Kingdom come"? Why could we not say in our generation as the saints of old said in theirs, "*Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!*"? Why are we trying to induce people to "accept Jesus" on the basis of the benefit that will come to them for accepting Him? Why were we not speaking to them in terms of repentance in the light of a soon-coming Kingdom? Could it be that there was no actual "Kingdom at hand" that would give us the authority to press that issue? By what means, therefore, do we obtain both the "Kingdom at hand" and the authority?

The Lord's reply was to bring us to Minnesota, to a property that had previously been a Boy's Camp. When I stepped over the link chain that hung across the entrance to the property, the Lord spoke four things into my spirit: "Dominion. End-time teaching center. Community. Refuge." It was the beginning of a revelation of His Kingdom that had its outworking in hardship, anguish of soul, and the terrible disappointments and frustrations that can only come to us in *true* church experience. I marvel at the naiveté of Christians who think that church is a place where they are somehow going to be mollified or 'blessed' in a coddling kind of a way. They do not know that it is the very place in which God, in His wisdom, has reserved His most exquisite forms of suffering in order to bring us more rightly into the knowledge of Him and His purposes. That has been my experience, and I would not trade it for anything!

Paul tells us in his first letter to Timothy 3:15 that the church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth*" (KJV). To think that we can come to this character with others, corporately, on the basis of a Sunday service and midweek Bible study is already a deception; to come to this reality is going to take *everything*. It is going to take a people who recognize that church is

not established for *our* enjoyment, but for *His* glory, and that it is an all-consuming, total requirement for which our jobs and careers are but secondary enablements. It behooves us, therefore, to come to this corporate life and character described by Paul.

We all suffer from an inadequate view of the Church. We have allowed the world to relegate us, as the Church, to some kind of Sunday afterthought, a kind of Christian cultural requirement that somehow serves the purposes of those who can obtain some benefit from it. The world does not see us as any more important than many other institutions that serve the purposes of men. We need, however, to have our understanding opened to an apostolic way of considering what the Church *is* according to God's intention.

It would not be unfair to say that the Church of today is essentially an aggregate of individualities; we sit alongside each other, but we are not yet "together" in the biblical sense of that word. We do not yet constitute that wholeness or completeness. We do not yet reflect the genius that is in the Godhead itself, where the Son does everything for the Father, likewise the Spirit for the Son, and the three are One. When we come to that kind of corporateness, the principalities and powers of the air will know it; but God first needs to reveal to us how deep-seated our individualism, self-will and rebellion are.

The powers of the world are increasing, captivating the souls of men, rooting them in time, and blocking from their consideration the things that are eternal. We cannot come to freedom from this evil influence by ourselves alone. Separation from the world is so painful, and those evil powers are so pervasive and strong. And it is only through the support, the encouragement, the prayer, the wisdom, the counsel of others and the atmosphere that we generate together as the community of God's people that we can live and maintain that freedom without again being sucked back into the power of the world. Community or *life together* is one of God's main provisions to resist and to overcome those powers. The sons and daughters of God are those who overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, and there is no place more conducive for being or becoming this kind of people *except* in such an intensive community setting.

There is not a living soul whose life is, or will be, totally free from deception. Our lives need to be submitted to the examination of God through the brethren in Christ. It is a painful revelation, but rather *that* pain *now* than the unspeakable pain of learning at the Judgment Seat of Christ that we were living a delusion. We may have *thought* ourselves to be spiritual, while all along we were far removed from authenticity and reality. The Lord is not going to indulge our romantic or wistful view of what *we* think true spirituality is. His gracious provision, therefore, is community life in which the true condition of our heart, and the things that would not otherwise have been understood, have the greatest possibility of being revealed to us!

The quality of our fellowship with the Lord vertically cannot be any better or more authentic than our fellowship with the saints horizontally. We cannot have the one independent of the other, and we cannot have the one out of proportion to the other. How many of us *think* that we can, and love to be solitary and isolated saints, having some kind of imagined and euphoric relationship with God privately, but hardly having any patience at all for the saints who are His Body? How can we cherish the Head more than the Body, and how can we honor the Head outside of the Body? The Lord has fixed it like that—the vertical and the horizontal beams of the Cross—and the one is in exact proportion to the other. It saves us from exactly that soulish thing we would love to indulge, namely, isolation, separateness and privatistic living. God has called us to fellowship, and we are *not* going to see resurrection power and authority if we are not related in the Body authentically. God will not let us 'get by' with a supposed and imaginary vertical relationship with the Resurrected and Ascended

One independent of an actual and existential one horizontally in His Body.

This requires something more than Sunday services. The Church needs to consider becoming a community in the sense of a closely-knit integration of life together in an intensive way. If it exceeds the numbers by which true relationship is feasible, then it cannot, in my opinion, attain to this reality. A generalized congregation of three hundred, five hundred or a thousand cannot effect what I am suggesting. Sadly, large church numbers are the great emphasis today, and constitute, therefore, a moving *away* from God's very provision for our sanity as well as the greater glory, namely, of being "witnesses unto Him."

As the conditions of the world become more extreme, people are going to be forced to choose more radically *for* or *against* God. We are in that painful interim between a conventional Christendom and the apostolic entity that God is wanting established again. And as we shall see, it is only the Church as an authentic, apostolic presence in the earth that can possibly fulfill its eternal purpose of making known the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers of the air (Ephesians 3:9-11).

## Chapter 1 - The Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is an eternal masterpiece, and I do not think we have sufficiently appreciated God's intention for it. We do not show the respect and esteem that the Body deserves. We seem rather to look at each other inadequately. This must have something to do, in part, with our inability to discern the Body, where there is a kind of matter-of-fact, lackadaisical attitude of disrespect. We do not esteem Christ *in* His people nor do we esteem the *variety* of God's people with all of their inherent differences. We are selective, and are more responsive and partial to those who are like ourselves. We miss seeing, therefore, the fullness of Christ *in* His Body.

It requires a revelation, and here again, we stand in danger of taking something very holy and making it a commonplace. We can glibly speak the phrase "The Body of Christ," but does that mean we have a true understanding of it? For me, the revelation of the Body came out of the struggle with my own wife in trying to reconcile the Jew and the Gentile, male and female. There are multitudes of contradictions represented right there, but the glory of God is most revealed in the taking of two antithetical persons and making of them 'one new man.' It is in the antagonism, the friction, and the issues of reconciliation that one begins to glimpse something of the genius of what the Body is as a living organism. God desires that we become 'one' as the Son and the Father are one even in, and especially in, all of the diversity and differences.

There is even a colossal friction between the different, legitimate callings *within* the Body of Christ, for example, the teacher and the prophet. A teacher sees things as "line upon line and precept upon precept." He is very fastidious about the word of the Scriptures and rightly so but a prophet operates in a different way. He will employ the Scriptures, but sometimes he will go beyond its literal meaning, or seize on something as obscure as a ketchup label! This offends the teacher's soul to the same degree that the prophetic soul is offended by what he perceives as the teacher's narrower vision. God Himself has established these differences, knowing that there is going to be an inherent tension or antagonism.

And so, if God will not do anything outside His Body, in any nation, in the concluding of His Last Days' purposes, then we need to have a greater respect and esteem for this phenomenon of the Body of Christ. It is not to be mistaken for the institutional use of that

word, or even in charismatic and evangelical churches where an institutional mentality and mindset often prevail. On account of the casual manner of our language and the lack of discerning the Body, we even talk now about unity in the Body of Christ as meaning some kind of ecumenical coming together of Catholics and Protestants, or different denominations coming to some common organizational agreement. I do not have a word sufficient to describe that distortion. It is certainly a caricature of the divine intention, and it stems from the error of mindlessly using the phrase "the Body of Christ." The Body is a living organism in the intention of God, sacred and holy, and only in that form does it have a life that flows out from the Head to which it is joined. Such an authentic Body, unobtrusive and unrecognized by the world, has always been, and will always be, an object of collision and opposition to that which is institutional.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).

It is little wonder that the institutional Church, by whatever name it is called, does not respond hospitably to God-sent apostles and prophets. Institutions demand that you go through a credentializing process through the attending of schools and seminaries. You are labeled "evangelist," "pastor" or "teacher," and get fitted into the institutional framework, but that does not mean God recognizes or authenticates your service for Him. The *true* Body of Christ will recognize and receive what is organically fitted for itself and will reject the thing that is organically alien. The opposite is equally true; the institutional thing *cannot* accommodate and receive the organic thing for they are diametrically opposed.

The purposes of God that pertain to His Coming, His Kingdom and His eternal glory will only be performed through His Body, and yet this organic entity, by its very nature, requires such a painful process in attaining the fulness that God is wanting.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:13-16).

Verse 15 begins with the phrase, "speaking the truth in love," which, in the Body, is an absolute necessity, but it can be avoided in any fellowship that is not the Body, but rather, an institutional formality. You can go to meetings in such a fellowship for a lifetime and never once be required, or be given opportunity, to speak the truth in love; but once you come into the *Body*, then it becomes virtually a *daily* necessity. The process of being edified and built up comes by what we ourselves provide in the working of *every* part, causing growth for the building up of itself. To build up means to bring about the actual formation and the coming into being. The supply comes from the Head to whom we are joined, but how does it find its working? There is no problem from the Head, but as liberal as the Head is in wanting to impart life to the Body, this life can be stopped up, coagulated and blocked.

We are more restricted and minimal with each other than we think. Our time, our attention, our interests, our gifts and our finances are measured out in 'spoonfuls.' What the Lord is looking for and that fills the house with the fragrance of Christ is a lavish overflow of the Body, because we esteem the Head to which it is joined, as being *one* Divine organism. I am always asking people, "To what expression of the Body are you joined?" This is different from asking, "What church do you attend?" The church you attend may be the place of your ministry and service as a mission field. We may sit in a church building, but if it is not an

expression of the Body, then we are losing the flow of life from the Head to which only a Body is joined. And we cannot, therefore, build ourselves up by that love and life and by what *"every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part."*

I am suggesting a prescription that is totally opposed to passivity. In the conventional situation, we sit inactive, and only punctuate the proceedings now and then by our "amens" or "hallelujahs." In the Body, however, this posture is altogether unacceptable. *"When you assemble,"* Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26, *"each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation."* That is how the *life* of the Body is expressed *to* the Body. But where are we ever encouraged to "each one having"? Rather, we have been compelled to a passivity, and to looking up to trained men to conduct the service. Furthermore, we are only too willing to pay the cost of it that we might be absolved from the spiritual responsibility of having to share a hymn, a psalm, a tongue, an interpretation, a prophecy, a revelation or a teaching! The Body is therefore emaciated, being inadequately fed. We cannot grow, and we are therefore limp, disjointed and anemic. We are left weakened if this life-giving provision does not come out of, and into, our midst. There can be no excuse to justify our inactivity and passivity. When we come together, we should have prepared ourselves already in the place of prayer, fully expecting that God is going to quicken and bring something through *us*.

When Paul came back a year or two later to those places where he had established churches, he had only to appoint elders. It was not some capricious choice but a recognition of the ones whom God had already promoted. He saw the maturity that was already evidenced in certain men. He saw those who had risen to assume responsibility so as to oversee and shepherd others, and he laid hands on them and prayed for them before the Body, and, *by that act*, he recognized and established them as elders. The expression of the Body in those localities grew and matured during Paul's absence because *each one* had a psalm, a teaching, etc.

### **The Unity of the Body**

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"  
(Psalm 133:1).

Unity is not cheap, nor is it something we can ordain, enforce or establish politically. Once it is obtained and maintained, we need to jealously guard it. The word *dwell* indicates something more than a transient moment; it is a consistent thing that requires remarkable investment to obtain.

It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edges of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing-life forever (verses 2-3).

This anointing is not the statement of our individual virtuosity or singular callings, but what we enjoy because of our relationship *together* that comes down on the head of Aaron and his beard. But if we are individualistically-minded, especially about our own calling, gift and ministry, we will hold the view that anointing is relative to *our* gift. I am utterly assured that the anointing of God, which is the life of God and the power of God, is the issue of our relatedness to the Body that dwells together in unity. It was true at the first and it will be true again at the last.

And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33).

The abundant grace was the presence of God's Spirit, because there was an "all-ness."

They were a people *tempered* together. This is more than merely being alongside of each other; there was a oneness that was more than congeniality. It results from the ability to suffer each other in our failures, infirmities, weaknesses and humiliations. It is nurtured in an environment that is loving and that allows for failure and error and does not condemn. It sees the weakness and the demerit of the brother and speaks to Christ about him in prayer. God reserves His anointing for the expression of a people who dwell together in unity. He has commanded His blessing in that place and in no other.

They would not have had enough power to inflate a balloon let alone penetrate the same Jewish community that had so recently crucified Christ if they were not dwelling together in unity. This unity will not come to us except we break through the stifling structures that have been historically ours, predicated upon customary Sunday service and mid-week Bible studies. There has got to be a breaking through into the dimension of the Life of God, both together, and on a daily or frequent basis. Nothing else will achieve that *dwelling* together in unity. To come to this unity is not some ecumenical design that is going to be established on a platform by the religious skill of men, but by those who are willing to pay the *price* for it in the necessary suffering that alone obtains it. This is not an option or an alternative, but the definitive desire of God from the first, for all generations and especially the last.

## Chapter 2 - The Mystery of the Church

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has a very distinctive content. There are concepts and views expressed in it of such a lofty and ultimate kind that our tendency is to allow its statements to pass over our heads. They seem to create a kind of misty aura of high-sounding things that seem to us impractical and unobtainable. There is, however, something that needs to come into our perception of the grand essence of what Paul is saying if we are to be an *apostolic* presence in the earth, which is to say, *true* church. If we do not sense the ultimacy of the things that pertain to God's eternal purposes here, then we are rendered inert in time; we *will* fall short of the glory of God.

In chapter 3, Paul talks about the mystery of the Church. And we can go no further unless we have a proper attitude toward the mysteries of God—a sense of reverence and appreciation for them and a desire that they be unveiled and revealed—because *that* revelation changes *everything*. God is jealous over His own mysteries, and He is not going to allow them to be mishandled, trifled with or rudely examined by those who do not have a right disposition of spirit for them. Paul is not interested in promulgating a mystery in order that we should have our curiosity gratified, but in order that the mystery might be administered and effectually fulfilled *through* the Church. With the revelation of the mysteries, there is a requirement to embrace and experience them, or we will be unfitted to be the Church in its full apostolic constituency. And it is only as an apostolic Church that we can fulfill these mysteries. Mysteries are reserved for holy apostles and prophets; they must come to us through them; then the teachers can follow in order to sift and refine and show the application.

...which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints...(verses 5-8a).

This is Paul as he really saw himself, and *because* he saw himself as the least, he was

therefore given the most. To Paul it was given the stewardship of the mysteries of God. God will not give mysteries to self-assertive and ambitious people who would use them for the advancement of their own careers and the recognition of men. This is the Paul who saw himself as the least of all saints-not just then, but throughout his entire apostolic career. The test of the maturity of a believer is that the more deeply he understands God's way and is brought through humility into the reality of His mysteries and call, the more he is aware of his nothingness.

## **One Body**

The "body" mentioned in verse 6 is the already existing body of Jewish believers who never left the faith, who recognized and received the Messiah and who received the Holy Spirit that was promised them. The mystery, however, is that Gentiles can *now* be fellow heirs *with* them and fellow partakers *with* them in Messiah Jesus through the gospel. The biblical faith of the God of Jacob, which is the inheritance of the Jews, has now been made available to Gentiles. In other words, Gentiles 'stumbled' into the Hebraic faith, and in fact, it is even a mystery that God welcomed them in! To be apprehended by, and brought into, an understanding of this mystery *is* calculated to change us-otherwise we will be brazen and arrogant: "*Our* Christianity." We have been allowed into something that has its roots in the God of Israel, and that goes back to the very inception of His redemptive history.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both into one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity (Eph. 2:12-16).

Gentiles, who were once without God and without hope in the world, have been brought, by the blood of the Messiah Jesus, into 'the commonwealth of Israel' where Jews in times past counted it unclean even to enter into a Gentile home. Paul reiterates this same mystery in Colossians 1:25-27,

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

There is no contradiction between these two texts. Gentiles are brought into the commonwealth of Israel, into their hopes and promises into Christ Himself. That is how we were brought in. It is the same mystery expressed in yet another way. In the past, believing Jews were in that Life, and now Gentiles are brought also into that same reality. This is not a cultural call to some "Judaistic" thing, but the *Life* of God in Messiah, in which Jewish believers and Gentiles are joined and made *one new man*. *This* is the faith to which we are called.

In other words, God has brought Gentiles into the Hebraic root, a root that is in God and in the life sap of God through the blood of the Messiah Jesus! Gentiles, up to the time of Christ, had been outside and excluded from the faith with few exceptions. Together with the believing remnant of Jews of every generation, God is making of us one new man, and *that*



is the genius of what we call the Church. Here we have the very essence of the wisdom of God. God is demonstrating to the powers of the air that not only can Jews and Gentiles sit alongside each other, but also that they have come to a place where they have equally transcended what is both Jewish and Gentile, and constitute now a *new* reality. It would be a reality never before seen, and that could only be established by the power of Messiah and His life. This is beyond what the world knows 'unity' to mean. The world is satisfied with "ecumenical" unity, some kind of religious-political thing where we agree to *respect* each other's differences. God is, however, after something more glorious and which requires His power to establish, for which He has poured out His blood and given His Spirit. *Two* diverse and contrary entities becoming *one* new man *is* that glory.

It is the same mystery as the mystery of marriage, in which God is not calling us to compatibility, but to become one new creature in Christ *together*. Needless to say, it is a painful process, but it is a process that reveals God's glory, because *His* interest is to bring about in us much more than the success of our natural compatibility. The issue is the revelation of His glory. The mystery is union, and union that is only made possible in the life of God in Christ. The letter to the Colossians stresses the life and Ephesians speaks of the covenants and promises, but it is not God in opposition to Himself. We need to apprehend the spectacular genius of the Church, and that it itself is a mystery for these very reasons. And it is only the Cross the supreme demonstration of God's wisdom that makes that glory a possibility. It is the only place by which we can bring to death the things that keep us from becoming one.

The oneness that Jesus spoke about in His high priestly prayer, "*That they may be one even as we are one,*" is of a different kind altogether than what is generally labeled as the "unity of the Body of Christ." True union is not a humanistic 'getting along,' but the same kind of oneness that characterizes and describes the Godhead Themselves: Father, Son and Holy Spirit deferring one to another in a precious quality of submitting relationship that make them One. When the Church will exhibit that oneness, though they are different, being Jew and Gentile and historically always at enmity with each other, then the principalities and powers of the air will be defeated by the very reality of it. That is one of the reasons we need to pray for that remnant of Jews to be grafted back into their own root and back into the Church, in order that this mystery might be completed.

### **The Eternal Purpose of the Church**

Paul is now going to reveal the heart of the mystery of the Church and its purpose for being, particularly in relation to the principalities and powers of the air. It is the same mystery as the mystery of Israel spoken of in Romans 11, insofar as the fulfillment of the one is also the fulfillment of the other.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:8-10).

There is nothing in the world that can fit us to understand this. In fact, everything in the world is calculated to keep us *from* understanding it. God's wisdom is at odds with every assumed rational, sane and conventional understanding of life, its purpose and its meaning. Unless we understand this reality, we do not understand the purpose of the Church, and we will therefore condemn the Church to some kind of Sunday addendum, some kind of institutional function that has for its purposes "us" rather than *Him*. That is a *fatal* mistake. We are not true church until this mystery comes into the central place of our consideration. We are too

rooted in the immediate, rooted in *our* needs and in the visible and temporal. God intends for us to have a view of the unseen that alone is calculated to free us from the bondage of narrow self-interest. This is God's genius and wisdom. He did not give us His eternal purposes because He wants to 'get fancy.' He knew that if we were not occupied with something that is beyond this age, we would become so rooted *in* this age that we would be null and void to address this present age.

God's eternal purposes can only be performed through the Church, a demonstration of a certain magnitude that is not primarily for the benefit of mankind as an evangelistic witness to the nations. This is *beyond* that and more ultimate than that, even though mankind will be instructed by this demonstration. It is cosmic, beyond the earth, and occupies *all* the ages to come. God is delighted by it; it is something that *He* wants, and He has created all things in order that this should take place. It has absolutely nothing to do with *our* success or *our* well being, with *our* enjoyment or any of those things with which *we* are so occupied. It is totally irrelevant to the practicalities of our daily life, and yet our daily life will suffer in exact proportion to our indifference to the eternal purposes of God. Is that not *why* we have insoluble problems in our daily life? Is that not *why* we are sickly? We are suffused and suffocated and taken up with myopic concentration upon *ourselves*. We like to feel our spiritual pulse and the programmatic activity of the congregation all centered in an egocentric Christendom.

We will never be saved from sins, lusts and the distractions of the world unless our souls are preeminently occupied with God's *purposes* for our salvation. The *only* thing calculated to liberate us is to be taken up with the eternal purposes of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing else has the power to counter the powers of the world and the things that are secular, mundane, and that clutch at us even things that have a seeming legitimacy. Good, respectable, conventional and legitimate things can occupy us as much as, or more than, the more blatant orgies of materialism.

To take this seriously will alert the principalities and powers that we have now become something formidable, and that they need to regard us with a certain tremor of apprehension and fear. Let them see a people who are earnest for the eternal purposes of God and there will be a war being waged in the heavenlies that we will feel and encounter. At the same time, that very opposition is part of God's strategy to prepare us for our participation in His millennial rule.

### **The Manifold Wisdom of God**

There is a hint here of a primeval, cosmic struggle or conflict between light and the powers of darkness, preceding even the creation of the world. It is a struggle between two value systems, namely, the gods of this world and the God of creation. We are entering the last of this struggle, and the sparks will fly fiercely right until the last resolution. It is so enormous in God's sight that He did not think it too extravagant to create all things in order that this drama could be played out. The world was created in order that it might support an entity called the Church that would bring this conflict to its final conclusion by something that it alone can demonstrate, namely, *the manifold wisdom of God*. The Church has languished for millennia long without an understanding of this, and has therefore been the victim of these very powers of the air instead of being God's answer to defeat them.

This manifold wisdom of God is not to be demonstrated to the world, but to the invisible spirit realm of the principalities and powers of the air. In other words, this mystery has nothing to do with anything that *we* can recognize as being valid or important for the Church, nor has it anything to do with benefit that the world will receive by our believing. Rather, it has

only to do with something that pleases God—a calculated demonstration of His wisdom to an invisible angelic order, and it must be made exclusively through the Church. It is totally other than anything that we might have taken for ourselves as the purpose for the Church's being. God does not tell us why He wants this demonstration, but it is important to Him, and therefore we need to heed it. If we think that God owes us an explanation, then we need to radically examine the roots of our conversion.

The phrase "all things" that He created includes the cosmos, the planets and their cycles, an earth that would be life sustaining, whole species of beings, economies, civilizations and a whole supportive structure. And out of it all, one thing should rise up that could not have risen without all that supportive structure and that one thing was so important in God's sight that it was worth it all—and that one thing is the Church!

### **To Him be Glory in the Church**

We have been brainwashed, and have consciously or unconsciously accepted the world's definition of Church. The government gives their tax-deductible status to us because they want us to agree that the Church is only a humanly defined institution serving human need. That mindset is an absolutely perverse definition of what the Church is. Serving human need is incidental. The Church's whole purpose is to serve divine need and to glorify God, and there is no other agency given in the earth whereby that glory is to be obtained other than through the Church:

To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:21).

Any church that has lost the sense of the meaning of that word "glory" has voided itself as church. If the purpose of the Church is that *He* might be glorified throughout all generations forever and ever, and we ourselves have lost the sense of what glory is, then what are we about? Glory is not some fanciful word. God intended His glory to be normative, and there was to be a radiance of this glory that was to permeate His creation. The world has no inkling what glory is. They are certainly the victims of its absence, and God has so calculated it that the Church is the only means by which His glory is to find entry into the earth and be made known. *A church that has already opted for programs and for things that will serve the needs of men has, by that very means, disqualified itself from being the agency through which His purposes can be fulfilled.* If we miss that God's purpose for the Church, we have missed everything; we condemn ourselves to being only institutional and accommodating to men and their human need. We miss their greatest need, namely, to make the glory of God known.

The whole of our modern Christianity is more or less predicated upon the needs of men, rather than the glory of God, but we shall never come to kingdom righteousness so long as *our* need is the predicate of our lives and the hub and pivot around which all things turn. We will never come to sanity and wholeness, nor will we ever come to the end of all our deliverance and inner-healing ministries. Our *real* sickness is our self-centeredness. To come into the eternal purposes of God will ruin us for church programs and the multitude of things we think we need in order to satisfy the saints. The present day proliferation of programs is a statement that the Church has lost this apostolic view, and like the world, it has got to provide services and benefits to hold the attention of its congregations. We must not allow the world to define the Church for us and allow them to fit us into their box as a kind of amenity, a little religious and spiritual service that is offered on Sunday. We are not jealous enough for the perfect and have not recognized that the good is as much an enemy of the perfect as evil. We are, therefore, ameliorating the needs that are about us and think that that is the purpose for which we are called. We have not understood that the central and

foundational calling as the Church is "*Unto Him.*"

### **Saved for His Purposes**

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (verse 11).

What expression of the Body can there be that does not make as its first priority the taking to itself of God's eternal purposes? A church that does not live for the eternal purposes of God is not living. Is it not little more than a succession of mere services? It has lost, or never had, this vital perspective as the reason for its being, and we are not truly saved until we have been fully apprehended by the purposes for our salvation. We are in an unbroken continuum with those who have embraced the purposes of God and for which reason they were hacked to death, sacrificed and cut up, murdered and butchered in a kind of satanic fury that seeks to nullify this ultimate intention of God through the Church. That is why there are so few who want to hear the call of God, because God calls us to *His* purposes and not to *our* own. We will no longer have an ear for the "faith-prosperity" message when once we are taken up with the purposes of God and the things that redound to *His* satisfaction. It will be a foul thing in our nostrils to "have faith" for a Cadillac or a healing. Is the whole purpose for the glory of the faith that we rub a genie lamp and exercise a principle that will redound in *a Cadillac*? What a travesty and heresy! It is itself a statement of judgment on a church that has fallen asleep and has lost sight of, or never had, an apostolic and ultimate purpose. And into *that* vacuum have come other equally infantile and deceptive things.

### **What is the wisdom of God?**

The wisdom of this world is predicated on self-interest, namely, "What is in it for *me*? What benefit do *I* gain by believing?" God is wanting another wisdom to defeat that wisdom, namely, a people who will give their lives for something that has no immediate or practical relevance or consequence for *themselves*. It is a demonstration of another wisdom that is *heavenly*. It powerfully frees that person from self-interest. It gives him a motive for being and for doing in things that are outside *himself*. The world's system does not believe you can do it. They want to bring you into their vortex and have you march to their beat, "You have got to take care of number one. Be practical! After all, what about your responsibility? What about your children? Why leave your profession and thrust your family into insecurity and risk because you think God is calling you? If you do not take care of yourself, then who will? Self-preservation is the law of life. Creation will tell you that. Don't get absurd about it, and radical, and consider your life as nothing. Do what is required to preserve it, to advance it and to promote it. And in the last analysis, if you have to use a shady thing or two, or even employ a threat, or an inducement, or an enticement, or an encouragement for promotion, or the use of intimidation, well, that is the way the world goes." *That* is the voice of conventional wisdom-*and the voice of the world*. It is a wisdom that makes mankind to fall in line and do their bidding and worship them as false gods.

Whatever the manifold wisdom of God is, we know this much, it will be contrary in every point and particular to the wisdom of the gods of this world. It is another wisdom, a heavenly wisdom, and when the Church can demonstrate it, the powers of the air, who have kept nations and races of men in bondage and subjection to false values, are finished. Where there is a church that can see through them and live independently of them and demonstrate *true* values, then those powers have no further influence whatsoever. Unless we break through to an understanding of this, our spiritual life will be stifled and church will be nothing more than a succession of services, and we will not be part of the fulfillment of the mystery. We have to decide whether we will be part of this or not. We do not have to be, and unhappily, if we are not, we will be in something that is called "Christian" but it will likely be

apostate.

### **The Principalities and Powers of the Air**

There is an invisible realm over the nations and over every locality, occupied by an order of fallen, rebellious angels, who have influenced, and continue to influence, the course of history in nations, races and men. The horrors that are taking place worldwide have their source and origin in the influence that is being exerted through men on the earth by these powers. Mankind is unaware that they are being played upon, and through intimidation, threat, ambition, lust and fear are being enslaved and moved about by these powers.

These angelic powers were created by God, and for God, in order that they might administer His creation in a way that would be conducive to God's purpose in man's coming to the knowledge of Him. They were created to preserve a certain structure to God's creation in order that man might seek and find Him. In their rebellion, however, they are usurping the role and office that was given them, and are turning the attention of men *away* from God. When this administrative order fell, it took on the spirit of Satan who said, "I will rise above the Most High." This is the ultimate egotism. Not content to serve the purposes of God administratively, they have used that place to win the allegiance, loyalty, devotion and worship of men unto themselves. They are, however, fallen and defeated powers, yet they can still influence, corrupt and adversely affect entire societies, communities and nations; they operate through the institutions of religion, commerce, politics and culture the most powerful being religion.

This is foundational to the true apostolic consciousness of the Church and its purpose, and we condemn ourselves to futility if we do not recognize that we "wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the principalities and rulers of this world's darkness" (Eph. 6:12). *We* wrestle. This is a collective and corporate requirement of a church that has come to that place of true "corporateness." That is why Satan would much rather see us doing all of our good deeds and individual activities, to keep us from obtaining the place by which we can come to such a composite character *together*.

### **The Two Wisdoms**

We have got to see what our life in Christ means as the Church, and understand that we are called by God to a cosmic and final struggle in a battle with the powers of darkness over the whole issue of which wisdom will prevail over God's creation. Wisdom does not mean what we would ordinarily think it to mean. It is not wise sayings, but more like value systems. The wisdom of the gods of this world is a system predicated on force, violence, threat, fear, ambition, lust, intimidation and the terror of men to preserve themselves, and to make their own survival the first law of life. Their system is the unchallenged premise by which the world lives its life, namely, the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure, and makes *that* the foremost purpose of its being. The ability to lay down one's life and not to consider that one's life is dear to oneself is the wisdom of God. This wisdom is predicated on weakness and foolishness. The one wisdom lives for itself, its own preservation and its own advantages, while God's wisdom lives for another. The wisdom of the Son of God is selfless; He never initiated anything for Himself, but lived entirely for the gratification of His Father.

This is contrary to human nature and how *we* think man has to live. Everything that is resolved through violence is the wisdom of this world. That is the way the world has lived its life throughout history. God's wisdom is to relinquish, to give up, to yield and to believe that there is something greater than death and, by that, overcome the fear of death. God's

wisdom is of another kind that is centered in the Cross of Christ Jesus, namely, to serve and glorify Him, and if that does not bring us suffering, nothing else will. We will know that we have aligned ourselves with God when we constitute a threat to the realm of spirit powers that brood over us. The overcomers at the end of the age are not those who attain to a painless, pleasant life; they are those who do not "love their lives, even unto death" (Rev. 12:11).

This is the wisdom that the world cannot *bear*. The only one who can live like that truly is one who does not think that *this* life is the whole story. There is an eternity, and it is the true appreciation of that fact that enables us to be fearless in this life. If we suffer the loss of our life, we are fully persuaded that it is not mere happenstance or accident, but ordained of God, and that there will be a reward for that sacrifice and suffering. We are living and moving by another wisdom.

### **Defeating the Powers**

The presence of a people in any locality, who are free from the influence of the powers, will break up the whole alignment of the powers of darkness that brood over that community, and thereby release its captives. When we are ourselves insecure, fearful, guarding our lives jealously, afraid to take the risks of faith and playing it safe, then the powers of the air are not required to acknowledge us *at all*. They are not impressed with our rallies, our music and our noise. They are only impressed with the same thing they saw both in Jesus and in Paul, namely, apostolic authenticity, the reality of God Himself. This is the only thing they are required to recognize—the thing that is of God and like God—as authentic as He Himself is, which is another synonym for apostolic. God is wanting authenticity in His people. He is wanting heavenliness, truth, unfeigned love and all the realities that are so painful to obtain. We have all been the products of a flaky and devious civilization that majors on appearances and outward things. Where they see the truth of God in the life of His people, they will retreat. They know whom to fear and whom to acknowledge.

The powers are not defeated by turning up the amplifiers in our worship or by shouting them down. It is not noise that impresses them, but character. It is the truth of life where we really live, not the brave show that we put on when we think we have it all together, but what is true of us through and through. They have got to see in our conduct and character the visible evidence of our freedom from the influence of their wisdom. They have got to see that we are unafraid and cannot be intimidated, and that we can say with Jesus when Pontius Pilate said to Him:

"Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?"

With a perfect peace, Jesus replied, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:10b-11a).

The wisdom of God was superbly demonstrated at the Cross of Calvary when the supreme Son of God relinquished the right to His own life and gave it up by the Eternal Spirit, the Spirit of sacrifice, without spot and without blemish unto God. He offered Himself up without complaint and without answering His critics back. He was a Lamb who went silently to the slaughter. He was even goaded by His own people to come down from the Cross before they would believe Him. He suffered that anguish for others while at the same time hearing their taunts and mocks. If there was anything in Him that had to do with self-justification and self-vindication, it would have risen up then, "You dumb idiots! I am doing this for you! Don't you understand?" But instead He says, "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*" Another wisdom was expressed contrary to the logic that the moment would have justified.

It was at the Cross that two systems of wisdom collided. Jesus fully absorbed the fury of the powers of darkness that wanted to destroy Him, thus obliterating the threat that He represented to their kingdom.

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Col. 2:15).

By demonstrating the superior wisdom of God, Jesus disarmed and brought a foundational and devastating setback to the principalities and powers at the Cross. The powers of the air exhibited their wisdom-threat, intimidation, the use of force and violence-in order to get Him to react in kind, and to rail against those who were railing against Him. Jesus consistently demonstrated something unto death by bearing the worst that they could inflict. Wisdom is not something that is necessarily vocally exhibited; it has got to be demonstrated in life. Ultimate malignity met ultimate magnanimity-the ultimate graciousness of God, the forbearance of God, the humility of God and the forgiveness of God. Meekness triumphed over viciousness, and it is the same demonstration that will make God eternally joyous, but this time through the Church, for which reason He has "created all things" (Eph. 3:9).

The powers thought that they had won because they had brought Him into death, but Jesus bore that death in a way that revealed the wisdom of God and it is *that* which defeats them. If force cannot compel a man to react in kind, what else can they use? If they cannot manipulate you to be like them to protect your carnal and bodily life and cry out and compromise and do anything to stay alive then they have no more power over you. If you are willing to die in your integrity in the faith and count it even as a privilege, what more can they do to defeat you? You have defeated them because the worst that they can do has come upon you and you have stood and remained faithful to God and exhibited the character of God in your suffering.

If the princes of this world had only known, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). They did not realize that by imposing their full wisdom, which is predicated upon force and destruction, they were releasing a resurrection and a life that would billow out over mankind throughout all generations, and would bring the final triumph of God and the raising of the dead. It set in motion the very things that would establish His throne, in the very city where He was put to death. Through His death and out of His rent side would be birthed a predominantly Gentile Church. The Spirit would be poured out from the Throne of God that would give an enablement and a power to fulfill its mandate and commission of ushering in His own millennial glory and Kingdom upon the throne of David. The powers suffered a severe setback with the crucifixion of Jesus when He made an open spoil of them and took the keys of death and of Hell. He disarmed them, but He did not inflict the final defeat. Their final defeat remains to be fulfilled by the Church in the mystery of God.

### **A Corporate Demonstration**

We are coming to the end of the age, and the magnitude of this eternal purpose and this demonstration is of such a kind that individual saints will not make it without one another. It is the Church in its entirety, because the Church is the Church *only* in its corporate make-up, that is to say, in all of the diversity of what constitutes it, otherwise it is not the Church. We are in something together, both the minister and the housewife, and we need to be consciously aware of that, and to prepare ourselves for the final conclusion of this mystery. It requires an entire people freed from the influence of the principalities and the powers of the air. It requires a people who are not insecure, not fearful and not living for themselves. It requires a people who are gloriously freed from mammon and who are indifferent to shopping malls. They can have their car crunched in an accident and walk away smiling. They can suffer affliction and inexplicable things without coming undone. They can receive

the stripping of their earthly goods with joy, knowing that they "have in heaven a better and more enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34).

In fact, the only people who can fulfill this mystery are those who would be "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). They have risen above and beyond their national culture. They are not fearful, but gloriously free from intimidation and threat. They know that their security is not from the Government or their employer, but from God. If that source should dry up, then the Lord has alternative sources. If it pleases Him not to provide for them, then they will prefer to die in faith rather than that they should subsist and prolong their bodily life by initiating some course of action out of themselves.

A church that can defeat the powers by the demonstration of the wisdom of God is likely to replace these powers in the governmental sphere in the heavenlies over the earth when the Lord establishes His millennial rule (one thousand year reign). It is the fulfillment of the Church's call to rule and reign with Him from heavenly places. In 1 Cor. 6, Paul encountered two believers in Corinth who were going to a worldly court of law to resolve a difference between them. Paul was flabbergasted, and asked them (paraphrased): "What are you doing going to a worldly court to resolve a dispute between yourselves as believers? Don't you know that you are called to rule over angels and nations? You are called to bring judgment and wisdom over nations. That is what you are being groomed for." He was astonished that they did not understand that.

Elsewhere in the Scriptures we read of the reward that the Lord gives to faithful stewards. Some will rule over two cities, some over five and some will rule over ten-not in this life, but in the millennial age to come. We have not sufficiently considered that millennial future, and our lives are suffering for the lack of that consideration. God's intention that we take eternal consideration into our present *now*. The Millennium is not some airy, abstract phrase, but the advent and establishment of God's eternal rule on the earth. It is a Theocratic Kingdom administered through glorified saints in the heavenlies, overcomers in this life, who will have different places in the rule of God, and the reward of God, according to their fruitfulness in this life. Once this life is finished, those issues are decided. It is not an immoral thing to be jealous for eternal distinction and reward; it is something that ought to be in our present consciousness, the absence of which condemns our lives to being merely predictable and ordinary. Do we have works that will survive the fire that are not hay, wood and stubble, but gold, silver and precious stones? Are we laying up treasure in heaven? Are we heavenly-minded? Are we eternally minded? Are we millennially minded?

To have this kind of mindset is to 'march by another beat' that no one else hears; we will have a motive that no one else can see. In fact, we have come to a new kind of contempt for the things that are visible, temporal and seen, and we are becoming more like Paul and enjoying and contemplating the things that are invisible and eternal. We are seeing by the eye of the Spirit the eternal weight of glory that makes the things in this life momentary, and our sufferings as "light affliction." Paul saw the things that were invisible and did not focus on the things that were visible, the things that we love to let our eyes dwell upon. If we are going to have any sense of the things that are eternal, it is only in proportion to our contemplation of, and our seeing, the things that are invisible. That means dumping the mail-order catalogs, pulling the plugs out of television sets, and averting our eyes from attractive men and women, or even *yourself*. If we are at ease in this life, then we are, as it were, outside the faith. If this world, its wisdom, its morality, its perversions and its corruption do not daily chafe us, then the world is too much with us. We need to be chafed, as righteous Lot was, and constantly praying, "*Come, Lord Jesus!*"



## Chapter 3 - The Church and the Jew

If the predominantly Gentile Church only knew that God has brought them into something exclusively reserved at first for Israel, they would have a very different attitude about what it means to be a believer. It would give the Church a certain kind of chastening and humility to see that the graciousness of God has now been made available to the Gentiles also. There is, however, a reason for that:

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous (Rom. 11:11).

There is a strategy to God's bringing the Gentiles in. We Jews were broken off from our own root because of our rebellion and disobedience, and you as Gentiles were grafted in-not just to enjoy services-but to come to such a place of faith that you would exhibit what should have been *our* blessedness. You are in covenant relationship with *our* God and are grafted into His root, and therefore the sap of God should be coursing through you and exhibiting its fruits and other blessings. There should be something observable in Gentiles that would alert unbelieving Jews to an awareness of their own God, so as to move them to jealousy.

### **Moving the Jew to Jealousy**

The church that has come to the place where it can demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers of the air is, at the same time, a church that has come to the maturity, stature and composition that will, at the same time, move Jews to jealousy. The two mysteries are really one mystery. A Gentile *is* demonstrating the wisdom of God, who will give of himself for the Jew in an indifference to the cost to himself, doing so unbegrudgingly, counting it all privilege and honor, even and especially if they are required to suffer for it, knowing that they have in heaven an enduring and greater reward. God supplies a greater wisdom, namely, His own character and His own life in order that it might become the character and life of His people.

Let the Church become an apostolic entity and a forerunner to a Kingdom that will displace the powers of this world, and you will see the world take off its mask and come at you with its teeth. Unless we get this into our spirits and understand the cosmic proportion of the Last Days' struggle between kingdoms and wisdoms, we will not understand how Israel has a place in this, and why the powers of darkness are intent upon their destruction. They hate this people Israel because they are, even in their present unbelief, the people of God. As long as Israel exists on the face of the earth, it is a statement of God's intention to establish His rule over His own creation a creation that has come under the influence of the principalities and powers since Adam's fall.

Israel is God's designated test for the Church, to reveal its authenticity and the degree of the truth of its sanctification. Historically, many great saints have failed that test. Luther, the giant of the Reformation, collapsed at this test. He spent some time with three prominent Rabbis thinking naively that he would persuade them about the truths of the Reformation, and that they would recognize in the Reformation Church the revelation of the messianic faith of the God of Israel-and those Rabbis refused to be persuaded. Jews were no more impressed with Reformed Protestantism than they were with Catholicism. Jewish refutation of Luther's biblical arguments for Jesus as the Messiah, according to the fulfillment of Scripture, were, to Luther, of such a horrendous kind that they bordered on blasphemy. And, by that, Luther saw that the very presence of a Jewish or a Judaistic-rejecting body in Reformed Europe

constituted a threat to the young Reformation itself. He then lapsed a vitriolic opposition in which he produced a book called, "*The Lies of the Jews*," which fueled, in part, the Nazi German persecution of Jews four centuries later! The Jew has ever and always been the severest test for the Church. They have always been a goad and thorn in its side because there is something about Jews in their mocking, skeptical attitude that is so provoking and intimidating especially to a self-congratulating, triumphalistic Church.

### **The Centrality of Israel**

We need to know, as the Church, that there is something that will be required of us because of Israel's fall. From God's perspective, the purpose of our salvation is to move them to jealousy. If we are not occupied with God's purpose in our salvation, then we are not apostolic, nor authentically "*His*." We can have our services, our outreaches, our programs and we can bless the people. The Lord will allow all this, but we are not to assume that we will, for that reason, have any part with Him necessarily in the things that pertain to His eternal purposes and Israel is set right in the center of these purposes!

The first and foremost thing that distinguishes true church from any other religious body is not its preoccupation with the needs and benefits of its congregations, but its preoccupation with *God's* benefits. Making a demonstration to the principalities and powers of the air of the manifold wisdom of God is not for our benefit, but for *His*. The single defect at the heart of the Church today that nullifies it from being the Church in the apostolic sense is that it has *not* taken to itself as foremost, *God's* purposes and *God's* satisfaction. The Church is still centered in itself: "*Our* blessing. *Our* benefit. What accrues to *us* by believing. *We* are saved from tribulation. *We* are going to heaven. Was the service good? How did you like the preaching? What did you get out of it?" Everything is predicated on *us*, *our* likes, and *our* satisfactions. We have brought into the Church the egocentrism that occupied us in the world, and which now have another face-religious or spiritual-but equally egocentric. Can you see that even unconsciously and inadvertently we are so self-centered, and that the very air that we breathe, the self-centered wisdom of the world, has permeated even the Church? Every question, in the last analysis, is predicated on what benefit *we* receive. We need something to break the power of that intrinsic orbit, and God, for that reason, has given us a mandate and a call for something beyond ourselves, namely, that a primary purpose for our being and salvation, from God's perspective, is that we might "move Israel to jealousy."

We live selfishly, and it is revealed in the effect that it is having, even on our bodies. We have this illness and that sickness, and we always will, because we have never had a purpose for our salvation *beyond ourselves and other than ourselves* that would have redounded to our health! We have been preoccupied with those things that pertain to *us*, rather than the only criteria that would satisfy *God*, namely, His glory forever.

Those who know anything about the glory of God know that there must always be the necessary suffering that precedes it. How many will hold steady and bear that suffering in the church until and before it becomes a glory? If we are together long enough and intensely enough, conditions will inevitably arise that will make us to 'throw in the towel,' in the betrayal and disappointments that come our way, not only from others, but just as painfully in what is revealed in our own hearts. The only reason many of us have not tasted that suffering is because we are not together long enough and intensely enough to experience it. Just when it begins to get a bit sticky, we go and find another alternative down the street, because we think that somehow the church is a place of personal enjoyment, and do not understand that it is necessarily a place of suffering before it is a place of glory. We will not be an authentic body unless, and until, our sole, primary purpose for being is the glory of God whatever that takes!

If the Church is going to move Jews to jealousy, it is not going to be because our amplifiers are louder than the fellowship down the street, or we have a talented musical group. It has got to be a demonstration of another kind, heavenly in origin, full of righteousness, truth and reality. The key to Israel's salvation is the Gentile Church, and the key to the predominantly Gentile Church coming into fulfilling the purposes of God is this *dynamic of obligation* that it would never have chosen for itself. This reciprocal relationship is calculated by God to save the Church from the religious self-centeredness and spiritual egocentricity that would have been its apostolic ruin. The alternative is to be inextricably and unavoidably self-centered, as is the case with most individuals, fellowships and movements.

I would say that even the consciousness of this requirement is presently absent from the Church's consideration. What kind of demonstration can the Church make that will provoke Jews, who have been the historical enemies of the gospel, to the jealousy of the thing that they have despised and resisted till now? Do we have to become more charismatic or pentecostal? What does "true church" mean? What must Jews see? What will do it? The remarkable thing is that Paul lets that statement stand. He gives no explanation as to what he means, or how it is to be performed. But this much we do know, the Church that can move Israel to jealousy is the Church that can defeat the powers of the air. Whatever is required for the one, serves also for the other. We know that there are two mysteries to be fulfilled. One is the mystery of Israel and the other is the eternal purpose of God, *through the Church*, of manifesting the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers of the air. These are two mysteries that are waiting to be fulfilled for which purpose God has "created all things." Ought that not to concern us?

### **Back to Beginnings**

Whatever these things are that we are groping for and touching, they cannot be obtained by only meeting on Sunday mornings with an occasional midweek Bible study. It is clear that requirements of this kind demand a total givingness. Sunday church is a form of convenience, but what I am suggesting is profoundly *inconvenient*. This is the going from house to house once again, breaking bread daily. This is working through issues, tensions, difficulties and misunderstandings, and it is amazing how easy they pop up and how quickly they can bring to nothing a relationship that has been years in the making. It requires a daily vigilance and dependency upon God.

We cannot from our own humanity produce the unmistakable sincerity and authenticity that is required of us. We cannot stamp it out on the production line. We do not get it by going to a three-month discipleship school. It is rather a labor of love, of sacrifice and of suffering at the hand of God, and you will only get it in a church that *itself* is a place of suffering. Church is a suffering before it is a glory. It is not from the attack that comes from without, but the suffering that comes from within in the inevitable and painful misunderstandings, confusions and accusations. You cannot believe the way people can sometimes be pressed, because of the intensity of issues that have come up, that they will be such to one another! There is often no explaining and no arbitrating the issue away. It is just something that needs to be 'aired' in having to bear each other. We are each in different places of maturity, self-control and understanding, making such conflict inevitable.

Wherever church endeavors to be true, wherever it seeks for the intensity of true relationships, face to face living, speaking the truth in love, correcting, reproving and exhorting one another, then there is, of necessity, likely going to be much misunderstanding amongst ourselves. We are going to have to face tensions. There will be times when the tensions are so thick that you almost stop breathing, where you think, "This is it. This

fellowship is finished. There is no way that there could be understanding and reconciliation here." We find ourselves utterly cast upon God and His mercy. Not only is there a warp that comes when the powers of darkness interfere, but there is also our own awkwardness and inability, especially with words and the way we hear each other subjectively. We meant one thing, but it was heard in another way. To untangle that, and to come finally to an understanding and an agreement requires a tolerance and a patience beyond one's capabilities. The time it takes, the anguish in all of that, is a suffering. But we will not be able to move Israel to jealousy until we have broken through and beyond our own natural ability to be patient and into the divine patience that is *of* God.

It is easier to send monthly contribution to Jewish evangelism organizations and let them do the work of evangelism, than for the Church in every locality to take up this mandate and obligation to the Jews of its own area. This is also God's criterion of success as church; it is not whether ~~we~~ are pleased with the services or what ~~we~~ enjoy, but that whatever has been established and created is able to touch resistant Jews. That is why Paul cried, "*Who is sufficient for these things?*" We need to know our inadequacy and insufficiency, and it ought to compel us to God. It forces us to the issue of the love of God, which is no abstraction, but which grows out of the gratitude for His faithfulness especially when we have cast ourselves upon Him again and again out of crisis situations that we could never have met on the basis of our own ability or wisdom. If it were not for the issue of the Jew, we would never have had the urgency to come into this mode of being. We, as the Church, would have satisfied ourselves with something much less than that which would have glorified God, because the Church that can move Jews to jealousy is the Church that will be unto Him a glory. We would not have known that glory if we had not had this mandate of requirement toward the Jew.

### **For Your Sake**

There is not one fellowship in a thousand that has so much as considered that the criterion of its success is not what it enjoys, but its ability to move the Jews of their locality to jealousy. That criterion is not even so much as considered because we instinctively know that it is ultimate. Jews *are* the enemies of the gospel. It is not just that they resist the gospel or are indifferent to it they have actively and historically opposed it. Paul says that they are the enemies of the gospel, and then he tacks on, "*for your sake*" (Rom. 11:28). Can you understand why this page has been 'deleted' from the Bible in modern times? It is as if the Church and its teachers have passed over and omitted it, probably because it is so radical in its requirement; and we, both the Jew and the Church, have suffered unspeakably for that omission.

What does Paul mean, "*for your sake*"? Do we need enemies, particularly enemies like that? We are not talking about a bunch of harmless amateurs. Jews are a characteristically powerful people; they are brilliant; they are intellectual; they are authoritative. Have you ever had a confrontation with a Rabbi, or a Jewish intellectual or radical? As a former missionary to the Jews, and having been one myself for a long time, there is no more formidable "enemy of the gospel" than the Jewish people. For the most part, we have never faced them nose-to-nose. We have never had doors slammed in our faces. We have never experienced bristling Jewish anger and indignation. We have never been cut to shreds by the cruelest words that insulted and offended human ingenuity can express! They can make you to feel like a fool, "How dare you present this message to us; we who have been on the receiving end of two thousand years of Christian persecution culminating in the Holocaust! Are you going to tell us that we need your Christ?" You do not know what confrontation is until you meet such a people head-on. All of a sudden you feel like a weak little nothing; your gospel seems now so utterly weak and foolish; you just want to shrivel up and blow away! Our God is not taken by surprise by these factors, for He knows them well. In fact, He has overseen the factors that would make the Jew, especially in the Last Days, the most conspicuous and

powerful opposition to Jesus Christ. That is why Paul says,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, [Foolish though it is, intellectually speaking] for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, [and here Paul comes again] **to the Jew first**, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16. Parentheses and emphasis mine).

If only we could try the gospel out on the Greeks *first*, and if it is successful there, then we will try it on the Jew. Why start where it is toughest? But God negates that by saying, "*To the Jew first.*" In the wisdom of God, we are not to begin where it is easiest, but where it is hardest. "Go into all the world, but begin at *Jerusalem* where I was crucified and where the prophets were stoned to death. *Then* you can go on to Samaria and all these other places, but begin with the Jew first."

We signal something to the principalities and powers of the air when we do not take this mandate seriously. They look down and say, "You guys do not take the Lord seriously. You have not obeyed His word though the Lord who commanded you to go into all the world and to preach this gospel to every creature, beginning in Jerusalem and to the Jew *first*. We regard you, therefore, as lightly as you regard Him. You have not acknowledged the Lordship of His Word. You have not acknowledged the divine priority that He has given the Church toward Israel. You have done your own thing, and have nicely circumvented the most difficult requirement of all. You are cowards, afraid, and have no confidence in your own spirituality. You have taken the easy way. You have allowed the Jews to have their own existence, because their synagogues are to be found in the same communities with your churches, which is the statement that you accord to the synagogue a certain validity of an equal kind with Christianity as therefore being tenable, authoritative and valid."

To authenticate Judaism by honoring and respecting the synagogue and having dialogues with them, as if they represent an equally redemptive faith, would have made Paul grieve. How could he have done that and still begin Romans chapter 9 by saying,

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (verse 3).

If a Christ-less Judaism were valid, why then would he have wished himself accursed?

If there is anything that makes the Church conscious of its inadequacy, it is confronting the Jew. The Jew is symbolic of the world, and the world at its most prestigious and powerful. Jews have won more Nobel prizes, more distinctions and awards in the fields of medicine, literature, culture and science, out of all proportion to their smaller number in population than any other people. They are a gifted people, but they misuse their gifts in the spirit of the world, *against* God rather than for God, and *that* makes them powerfully intimidating.

When God says, "*To the Jew first,*" He knows what He is talking about. When you touch Jewish life you are touching a whole world system, a whole humanism and a whole elaborate, moral, ethical, religious and secular system that is *opposed* to God in every point and particular. Although it is a false light, Judaism would be worth subscribing to from a humanistic viewpoint; it has the most compelling reasonings and enticements. But when God and His Christ are factored in as Living Reality, it makes that very same body of humanism inhumane in defrauding man of both reality and eternity.

### **The Fulness of the Gentiles**

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until... (Rom. 11:25a).

Put a circle around the word "*until*." There *is* a condition, and here is the point. It is a condition that only the Church can meet. The issue of Israel becomes the issue of the Church.

...until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in (v.25b).

When God says 'fulness,' He means the completion of all that He has intended. There is a fulness for which God waits, the "calling out of a people for His name, from among every nation" (Acts 15:14). This has always been the mission mandate of the Church. But according to Paul's letter to the Romans, the greatest incentive that God gives the Church to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel is that,

...the Deliverer will come from Zion (v26a).

When that mission is completed, something will happen independent of Israel's own spiritual condition. The Deliverer is released in the moment that the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. Israel is delivered, and the Deliverer takes His throne on the holy hill of Zion and rules over the nations. The world is in a hopeless condition until the Lord Himself comes. Only thereafter can there be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

It is clear that this view opposes the "pre-tribulation" rapture mentality, a mentality that sees the Church as being removed *before* the tribulation. It is a widely accepted doctrine, but to challenge it is to be looked upon as challenging some sacrosanct foundational doctrine of the faith. It is as if you are introducing heresy, when it is not a doctrine of the faith *at all*. Nothing, in our opinion, has more disarmed the Church of the necessity for preparation, discipleship, maturity and of being the Church that can stand in the Last Days and overcome tribulation, than the misguided confidence that they will not have to face it!

It is because of this "pre-tribulation" rapture expectation that the Church is presently operating now toward Israel from the place of guilt in that the Church is removed while the Jews remain to face the music. Anything that issues from the Church that has an ulterior motive, that relieves our conscience, where we operate out of guilt rather than from a priestly place, is not a valid place of ministry. Only priestly ministry is valid. The heart of priestly ministry is that the priest derives no advantage or benefit for himself in his priestly ministrations. However, if you are operating out of guilt and a bad conscience, then you are alleviating something for yourself by being condescending to Jews. A lot of the attitudes in the churches toward present Israel are of this condescending kind.

If we, as the Church, elevate and exalt ourselves as something separate, independent or superior to the Jew, then, by that one thing, we are no longer the Church. The Church loses its character when it loses its essential humility. The Church needs to be reminded that we were grafted into *their* root and that we are made, by the gospel, partakers *with* them. The Church is not some phenomenon independent of Israel; it is the graciousness of God to allow Gentiles to come into *their* promise, into *their* hope and into *their* expectation, which they themselves have lost by default and no longer know. Part of our task is to remind Israel, not verbally, but by being a demonstration of what it means to have been invited into the 'commonwealth of Israel' (Eph. 2:12).

Moving the Jew to jealousy is a truer measure by which we should be assessing our spiritual condition. The very nature of the present Church is to be satisfied in itself. It measures itself by itself or by others, and is happy with the measure of things that God gives, which defeats the very purpose for them *being* given. God calls us to ultimacy and to a purpose beyond ourselves that cannot be measured by ourselves, but only by our ability to move Jews to jealousy by the corporate word that we speak and fulfill as one life together. It can only happen with a people who have come to one mind, one heart, one understanding and one speaking. That is not an invitation to become mechanical robots processed off the

assembly line and who come in some monotonous submission to speak the same thing. It means a people, richly individualistic, formidable in themselves, alive to having the possibility of their own opinions and views but brought by the process of God, which necessitates suffering through trial, to being in complete agreement with God. And when He requires it, we can speak a word that alone is creative and life giving because it is a word that is in agreement with God. Unless we are in preparation *now* toward *that* end, we need not think that it can be summoned from us when the drama of the Last Days shall come upon us suddenly. Will we have an incentive for this quality of integration, unity of life and agreement, and the depths of it? It means the end of our little, secret reservations and privacies, our subtle rebellions, self-wills and egotisms. And one of the principal ways that the depth of *that* work has the potential for taking place is *in community*, in the daily life with the saints!

## Chapter 4 - The Suffering before the Glory

Community, or "life together," is the place where you abandon all hope for the continuation of the flesh. It is precisely for this reason that such a living arrangement is shunned, despised and spoken against. The institutional Church, as organized religion in whatever forms it takes, delights in hearing of the failures of communities. They are thereby confirmed in their own structured life, and they will say, "Well, community can never work. Yes, at the beginning of the Church age, and because of persecution, it was necessary that they shared their possessions and had all things together-but that can never work today." In essence, they do not *want* it to work, and they are only too delighted to hear the reports when such attempts fail and collapse.

The fellowship's inner life, the character of God that has been obtained corporately, is itself the wisdom of God that can be demonstrated to the powers of the air. The powers are required to recognize any band of believers who are more than mere religionists, good Baptists, Charismatics or Pentecostals. The same powers fear a people who are together, who are corporate, who are living in love and in righteousness, who are not in fear for their security, who trust God, and who can depend on one another. We cannot come to this mode of being outside of the suffering of the Cross. From our own experience, we have known the suffering in community, but we have known and tasted the glory of God. The glory always follows the suffering. We are going to be found out, we are going to be humiliated and our weaknesses are going to be seen. You may be a great guy publicly when you are speaking and under the anointing of God, but how are you on Monday with the wife and the kids? In community, all our inadequacies are revealed.

Jesus endured all of His suffering for the joy that was set before Him. He saw and anticipated what would be, for eternity, the consequence of His suffering, and that is what we need to see. It is the wisdom of God, because rejoicing in suffering *is* a contradiction. It is contrary to reason and to everything we think natural to man. What is natural to man is survival, "Take care of number one. Preserve yourself. Take care of your body. Avoid pain." That is the wisdom of this world, but the wisdom that can rejoice in suffering is another wisdom. It is this wisdom alone that defeats the powers of the air. It is the greater wisdom, but it is not enough just to speak it. It has got to be made manifest; to be demonstrated by a fellowship whose inner life is itself the proclamation of God's manifold wisdom. That wisdom, however, is worked in us through trial and testing, through the Lord allowing oppression and heaviness of spirit, and all the kinds of things against which we have to struggle as we work it out in our relationships. We become "one as He is one" in all of our

differences, our divergent personalities and in the things that invariably come up that threaten to tear the guts out of us. Every impulse is to run to the first charismatic and evangelical fellowship you can, just to be relieved from the tension of all of these demands. It is precisely in those tensions, however, that God can most readily form His character.

### **The Dealings of God**

In community, we have seen the unraveling of *exceptional* believers, who have given up their businesses and homes and come to our rugged northern Minnesotan environment with its Arctic-like winter. They are already a special people, and yet that does not save them from the dealings of God, which are extraordinary. We watch them acting in ways that they would have never thought themselves capable, and as they come into miserable, wretched death, we who are with them are required to bear the stink of it until that death has had its full work. We had a brother going through that, who came to us as an exceptional charismatic saint, but within a matter of weeks he was being so tested and tried that his whole life was coming apart. He was in that death, entirely miserable, and there was nothing we could do to ease the agony of it for him. As we were coming back from a meeting, we passed his house and my wife said, "Why don't you go in and comfort him. After all, you are in the place of responsibility." I said, "Yeah, that's a good idea," started to turn, and that was as far as I got. There was no way that the Lord was going to allow me to interfere with the process of death being worked in him, by bringing a premature and false comfort, when comfort was not what was being required. This man had to taste that death to the full-and he did, and there was a glorious deliverance later that came because we did not interfere. We need, therefore, discretion, discernment, and to be led of the Spirit. We cannot do these things mechanically. It is the issue of our own maturity as leaders, and whether the Lord has had His full work in us. There is not one of us who can come to this by himself. We come to that very maturity in our daily interaction with brothers, in relationship, and in our own receiving of correction and counsel even as shepherds of the flock.

### **Speaking the Truth**

The one who speaks the truth in love has, himself, got to be true. This is no small thing. Truth is costly in its demand and that is why only the lovers of truth are saved from deception. We have got to love truth in order to be true, because truth is so demanding, so costly and so penetrating. It is not just the truth of our doctrines and ideas, but we ourselves need to be true through and through in our attitude, our speech, our eyes, our thought-all that we are.

With all of the compromise in the world and even in the Church, we need a daily vigilance. There is a blind spot in every one of us that needs the word of truth that can only come from a brother or sister, because we cannot see it for ourselves. Will we be humble enough to receive it when it comes, or will we be resentful? True humility is submitting, not to the most mature believers in the fellowship, but at times, to the weakest, the immature, the youngest. Will we receive from their mouths the word of God, recognizing in their trembling the voice of God speaking a word for *us*? I have personally been saved from deception by just that means. Having had a long history with God, of being led by the Spirit in a radical way, and, fully assured that what I was doing was totally right, the word of correction came to me, not from the mature members of the community, but from the youngest and the weakest. The moment that I heard that word, my head fell upon my chest-*it was the word of God to me.*

What a jealousy for truth, and therefore, what courage must we have to speak the whole truth, no matter what the consequence. We must have a love of the truth beyond our desire for success as ministers, or the success of our denominations and fellowships. Our love of God is no greater than our love of truth. Do not measure your love of God by your ecstatic



euphoria in an imagined relationship with the Lord that has been stimulated by choruses and worship. Do not deceive yourself. What is our naked love of truth in the cold, gray dawn of the new day when it is inconvenient and costly? That is the measure of our love for God. The love of the truth and of righteousness demands an act, whatever the inconvenience and whatever the consequence. Truth is costly, and if we will not die for it, we do not really love it. Truth is not an abstract thing separate from God, or truth *about* God. God *is* the truth. This love has got to be cultivated and nurtured, and we need to live in an environment that cherishes truth and will not tolerate the lie or allow the cutting of corners. We are not sufficient for that in ourselves, and therefore we need the brethren on a daily basis.

I remember speaking at a congregation where three of the leading, spiritual women had left their husbands and were in adulterous relationships. How did this falling away take place? Women, who were once supremely spiritual, had now become promiscuous and had disgraced the entire congregation, the name of God and the reputation of that congregation in its community. At what point did the first leaven of the deceitfulness of sin come to these women? The first operation of sin is to disguise itself. That is its deceit. It conceals its own character as sin, operating rather as justifiable desire. Where did that begin in this case, and how was it that those who were related to these women did not discern it? Why were they not found out earlier when their first disposition for flirting was seen and recognized? Why didn't someone say, "Sister, that is not becoming to a saint. I detect something in your eyes, your voice, your teasing and ingratiating way with men. We know that you love the brethren, but that is not the way you should express yourself. It is unseemly." From that little leaven there comes, finally, a corruption of the entire lump. The reason probably lies in the fact that they were, so to speak, a 'charismatic' fellowship, not an apostolic one, which is to say, they were not yet authentically joined. Authenticity implies the Cross, the humiliation of suffering, being corrected and reprovved and having a question raised that you have an obligation to consider. Are we willing to hear that painful kind of word from one another, and, *are we willing to speak it?* The one is just as much the Cross as the other.

In Galatians 2:11, Paul did not hold back from confronting Peter concerning his inconsistencies. Apparently Peter was one kind of believer when he was with the Gentiles, and quite another when the Jews came. There was duplicity and deceitfulness in his practice that was already compromising the gospel. Paul confronted him to his face, before the brethren, for the sake of the purity of the gospel. Paul showed Peter a deception that was already beguiling Barnabbas, as well as others who were being brought into the same deception. How would we like to be in the early church again, where, if we begin to offer something that is not completely true, and yet, make it to appear as true? We would be struck dead, and be carried out feet first! How would we like *that* kind of judgment to come again to the Church? It was so in the beginning. The Church was a powerful witness then, and there was great fear upon them all. This fear is profoundly absent in the Church today.

It was Peter who had discerned in Ananias and Sapphira that they were only giving in part, yet the same Peter was confronted by Paul only a short time later in the book of Galatians. The one who was so used of God to discern the lie and compromise of another, only a short time later is practicing his own deception and needs himself to be corrected. The point is we do *need* each other. The person who thinks he is immune from deception is the greatest candidate *for* deception.

That is one of the main reasons why so many of our leading tele-evangelists fall. Where were those related to them who could have confronted them? Would they not have got fired? When you receive your salary and sustenance from such men, then you are almost forced to act and speak in a certain way that maintains your *own* well being. Were they living in fellowship in an apostolic context, or were they in an institutional arrangement surrounded by

men who affirmed and rubber-stamped them? Would they be willing to live in a community, though they be great evangelists, where the youngest and the weakest member might be the instrument of bringing their correction? God looks on this whole thing with grief, and we are all implicated and guilty in it. We are so taken up with their personalities that we send off our checks and thereby continue that very same system. The most powerful critique and examination of their falls did not come from the Church, as it should have, but from secular journalists. The Church has shown itself unable or unwilling even to critique and properly understand the failure of its leading personalities, so the insight had to come from the secular world. What a shame and embarrassment, and yet there is no one even raising the question as to whether there is something intrinsically wrong with the denominations that spawned these men.

I often exhort churches to watch for a change in their preacher's voice and inflection. If the reality of his speaking becomes professional, studied and affected, he needs, at that moment, to be told, because he himself is not likely to be aware of it. There is something that happens by which you can slip into it day by day, Sunday by Sunday, from being the authentic man speaking unaffectedly out of the truth of your life and knowledge, to becoming more and more a performer of a religious kind. But the man himself will not likely be aware unless he is told. How will he be told? You just have to say, "I just have to tell you that when I hear you now, the last couple of weeks, I have a strange discomfort in my spirit. I cannot quite identify it, but there is something coming into your speaking, an inflection, and a sound of something in your voice that for the want of a better word sounds professional. Your word and your voice are losing the sound of reality. You were so natural and unaffected before, but now, more and more, you sound 'preachy' and artful. Forgive me if I am missing this, but I feel like I need to express that." This is speaking the truth in love. Wherever something of that critical a kind is identified and addressed in its inception by someone who has the courage, love and sensitivity to the Spirit, then right there is *true fellowship*. We need such hearts that can speak those things and receive them when they are spoken to us-or we *will* become false. That is why the issue of love is as important as the issue of truth. If we only speak the truth critically, then it will not have any redemptive value.

One of the ways of distinguishing a true love of God from the false human thing is by ascertaining what end it serves. If there is a ploy, a device or a maneuver to win something for oneself, then it is not a true love. It is easy to operate on a sentimental plane, unbeknownst to us, and think that it is true love. It can take place in marriage where there is a symbiotic thing by which both partners are benefiting from the illusion and are happy about it, because it effects a certain kind of compatibility and mutual enjoyment-but when it is tested by reality, something has got to break asunder. The supposed "love" *will* turn to hatred because the romantic illusion is burst and the reality does not conform to the expectation. The "love" that was never a true love but a love of love rather than the love of the person cannot stand that failure. And in the sense of betrayal and disappointment, that false love must necessarily turn to hatred.

If we have been operating like that in our marriages, then what shall we expect in our fellowships? There is such a remarkable corollary between the allowance of illusion in the realm of our private or married life and what we bring into our fellowships. In both, we need to have an uttermost authenticity and reality. Do we have enough real love for one another that will pierce the bubble of the things that are phony and deceitful when the Lord reveals them to us? Even if others are enjoying the benefit of their deception, will we speak the truth in love? That is the kind of love that God wants to be expressed in His Body; it is in perfect conjunction with the truth. The love of truth and the love of God are one and the same. It takes a supreme jealousy for authenticity in the fellowship without which there will be no glory unto God. God's Church is His antidote to illusion, make-believe, wishful thinking, false love and all the rest by which very mankind is dying in leaps and bounds.

Conversely, can we be loving enough to withhold speaking and remain silent when we may seem justified in bringing a word of correction or comfort? We should not automatically assume that we must bring help and comfort to someone groaning under the dealings of God. Can we bear being misconstrued as heartless, loveless or indifferent? True love, ironically, may well bring the accusation of lovelessness, whereas sentimentality that has a self-seeking end is more likely to be applauded by the "shallow" as being true love. Whether it is to burst the bubble or to withhold, it will require a discernment, discipline and love that is God's by a people who have come of age.

### **Face to Face**

We need to make it a prayer of the highest priority that the Lord would direct us to some authentic expression of the Body of Christ, where we can submit our life, character and conduct to the authority in that Body and receive correction and reproof. It may not be in a Church building *per se*. You may find it in a Bible study group, or in an informal gathering of people who meet once a week, but who are earnestly seeking to go on with God. When the Lord reveals it, then submit yourself to it. You will receive what you need in those with whom you are in daily or frequent relationship face to face. If we will not meet with each other face to face, how then will Israel meet with God face to face (Ezekiel 20:35) in that soon coming day in the wilderness of the nations where the Church is? God is setting the stage to uproot world Jewry for no other reason than that they should meet with Him in the wilderness face to face. And in that moment of time, the degree to which that face will be God's face, is the degree to which we are meeting face to face *now*.

In true fellowship, there has got to be a degree of intimacy and intensity. A large fellowship, by its very nature, inhibits the flow of true life, even though there is a place for coming together by the hundreds in celebration and rejoicing for what God has worked in the Body. But you cannot substitute a Sunday celebration for that dynamic working by which the Body receives its life, which has got to be obtained more frequently in the intimate face to face relationships of the saints where *each one* expresses what the Head supplies, which sheer numbers alone would discourage.

Our desire to see the glory of God in the Church does not mean that it is going to take place automatically. Tragically, we are more inclined to be content to *talk* about the glory of God without any realistic expectation of seeing that glory. In our secret hearts, where we hardly know our own motives, we actually have a greater desire for *our* own success and the perpetuation of *our* own establishments than for the success of those who truly seek to communicate the glory of God, and who, strangely, are often not welcomed with open arms. They are seen as threatening figures because everything that they are talking about, and the intensity of this kind of relationship, facing issues of truth, is everything that fellowships do *not*, for the most part, want. What they want is turning up the amplifiers, song leaders, worship leaders, music, the sense of the euphoria and the impression of an "alive" church without the foundational and unmistakable reality of true fellowship. A good definition of much of present Christendom is that it wants the *sense* of the power and gifts of God, but without the Cross of God.

I have heard messages about the Cross that have left me completely untouched. The only time the speaking of the Cross becomes the issue of the Cross is when the man who is speaking it has, as it were, hung on that Cross, and not every speaker will. In fact, men are wise to avoid the subject, and do, especially if they have no practical knowledge of that suffering and that death. You can tell just by the hearing and the effect on your own spirit whether what you are hearing is a word of truth. Truth is powerful; it makes a requirement; it

is challenging and brings conviction. Truth calls us, in fact, *to the Cross*.

I was a high school teacher for seven years, and what underlies the whole educational system is mere contentment with the verbalization of material and the ability to repeat it or to give it back without the actualizing of that knowledge. We have not been sufficiently existential, nor have we demanded an authentic appropriation of the faith. We think that if we just verbally recite a doctrine, then we have the reality. But that would be a credal faith rather than an existential one, and we have been satisfied with what is credal as being that truth, when that, in fact, makes it a lie. There is, more often than not, an unspoken agreement with our ministers: "*You* present a biblical message; we will pay the bill and have a Sunday service that will leave our lives free from any kind of demand that would *really* touch our true vested interest and values." In other words, we do not want a message that is going to reveal where our heart really is. We want rather to be able to say, "Amen," and, "We've been to church."

When we came to community, one of the first things I heard from my own children was, "Dad, can we go to the shopping mall?" It turned out that they did not actually want to buy anything. They wanted to *see* the merchandise. I saw the same thing later with the community. People wanted to get away because of the monotony of the place. It was always the same faces and the lack of voluptuous variety and distraction. There was a need, and our eyes are greedy to see some diverse and different thing. There is a kind of a pleasure in walking through a shopping mall, looking through the windows, seeing merchandise, seeing variety: seeing, seeing, seeing. Community is a stripped-down place. There is nothing to see; there is no distraction; it is you and God-flat out.

One of the tests of community is to see whether we can enjoy the fellowship of the saints and the richness of our life together without having to make small talk, but to enjoy each other even in our silence. Can we go beyond the necessity for mere 'dribble,' even of a religious kind? Can we cherish silence as much as we cherish speaking, and can we have such a respect for God and His glory that we know that there is no such thing as 'small talk.'?

We need also to discern by the Spirit whom the *Lord* is sending to us; there is no other qualification than this. You do not have to be mature; you do not have to be a great disciple; you do not have to come with any money-you simply come. The only question is, "Has God sent you?" The person needs to know and the community needs to know, because there will be trials and demanding conditions, and if you know that you are called, then you can bear any trial that comes. We should be so complete in our trust in God's sovereignty that, no matter what happens, we will receive it with a complete peace and rejoicing. Are we at that place now? Would we ever have come to that place except by the only way it can be obtained, namely, through the sacrifice and suffering *in* the Body of Christ, *in* community, *in* the give-and-take, *in* the grit of dealings-except that we knew that it was a calling of such a kind?

## Chapter 5 - The Mystery of Suffering

It would not be unloving to suggest that *unless* the mystery of suffering has registered deeply in our consciousness, or rather, that we have been apprehended by it, we cannot rightly lay claim to being called the people of God. The Lord knows those who are His, and *that* knowing is altogether conditional upon our appropriation of the meaning of that one event in time, which, more than any other thing, reveals God as He in fact is, namely, His crucifixion,

suffering and death at Calvary.

The world, the flesh, and the Devil have conspired to empty the Cross of its meaning, to sentimentalize it and somehow to rid it of its horror. In fact, there *is* no way to *comprehend* its horror. It needs to be revealed, and we cannot come to this mystery by virtue of mind or intellect. If we come to this subject in too facile a way, if we are too glib in expressing it, if we seem neatly to have nailed it down and we can quote statements about it, then be assured, we have missed it. The glory of all that inheres in the Cross—the anguish, the blood, the gore, and the suffering—needs to be apprehended by our hearts rather than 'understood' by the faculty of our minds.

### **The Dungeon of the Night**

Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?' that is, 'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?' (Matt. 27:45-46).

In my opinion, the revelation of the mystery of suffering and of the Cross cannot be easily opened except one come into a dungeon of night. God is waiting for some anguished cry, rather than easy and glib words about a phenomenon that is at the heart of the faith, and which many of us have not experienced. It is for this reason that we have not exhibited what necessarily must follow the experience of it, namely, *resurrection life*. The quicker we will acknowledge *that* and be thrust into the despair that we rightly deserve, the quicker shall we enter the reality. There are so few of us who have approached it, and the irony is that there is nothing that more successfully militates *against* that reality than 'religion' itself. God is waiting for the acknowledgment that we are imprisoned, and that we have not attained to the actualities of which we speak.

We are not going to apprehend the reality of the Cross until we are willing to experience the total sense of the forsakenness of God. The Cross is not the Cross until we have experienced it as utter abandonment. How many of us are fighting desperately just to avoid *that*? How many of us have misinterpreted the circumstances that God is currently bringing into our lives, and attributed them to the enemy? How many of us are seeking valiantly to do everything to avoid that which God is wanting us to experience in ourselves—this sense of utter forlornness and abandonment where we are bereft even of what we thought we knew and understood? A great darkness came over the earth while Jesus was impaled upon the Cross. How many of us would be willing for a great darkness and a great nothingness to come upon *us*? Even to the point where those things we thought we understood the little notions that we have, the doctrines of which we are so assured should also be brought to the nothingness of that darkness? Where our glib phrases and faith confessions stand for nothing? The darkness that covered Jesus upon the Cross must come upon us also as a negation of *all* things—even that which we think we have understood about the Cross itself.

God is waiting for us to come to that utter destitution of soul. He is aghast at "phraseological" Christians, where even though what we *say* might be true, it has yet, for too many of us, not been *made* true, and *will* not and *cannot*, until we allow this darkness to come over us. As it was for Jesus, so too, will it also be for us, and until we allow this same darkness to come over us, until we experience that total sense of abandonment and forsakenness, we cannot enter into the reality of the thing that is at the heart of the faith. God is waiting for us to void ourselves of mere phrases and to be willing to suffer a kind of 'imprisonment of darkness' or whatever it takes to come to a true knowledge of Him.

### **The Nature of Suffering**

"What is bliss in heaven is first suffering in earth"-Author unknown.

Our hearts are naturally inclined toward trying to find a measure of bliss or satisfaction *here* and *now*. There is an inherent unwillingness in man to make peace with the Cross, and an unwillingness to recognize that the way of faith *is* the way of suffering. It is not on this side of the vale of tears that we expect the delight and the joys, but on the other side, though we *are* given a measure of *His* joy in the now. There is something in the nature of suffering that God wants us to seek out and find. There is something revealed in that last moment of extremity in the manner in which men die or suffer for Christ's sake that has more to say about living than scores of wearisome years that are lived safely and tamely in Christian respectability. Sadly, we see to it all too well that our lives are well shielded from any danger of suffering.

Paul wrote:

For I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

That was a wise determination, and probably cost him much. It is amazing how our intellects like to *know* many things for its own sake. To deny your mind the pleasure of contemplating what it chooses is itself an exercise in suffering. Any act of self-denial is an exercise in suffering. We need to encourage each other to understand, and to welcome the inherent centrality of suffering as being part and parcel of normative Christian living.

### **The True Revelation of God**

Far from God making us in His image, most of us are guilty of making Him in *our* image. There is a kind of projection that takes place in our minds, and though we use the name "Jesus," probably every one of us has a variation on the same theme. If our "Jesus" is any other than He who was crucified, then it is a self-serving "Jesus" whom we have projected out of the fancies of our own minds. We need desperately to know Him exactly as He is-radically and utterly-and He is nowhere presented more accurately as the reflection and image of God than in His suffering and death.

In fact, there has been nothing more grossly neglected in modern Christendom than the Cross of Christ Jesus, and we have suffered enormously for the avoidance of the subject. The Cross itself is ruthless and absolute, and is a plumbline from God. It is an unswerving standard by which everything must be conformed and measured. If it is absent and has been neglected, or some other substitute has been put in its place, though we allude to it as the "Cross," if it be not *the* Cross of the crucified Christ, then *everything* will be at variance.

Human nature prefers to take the sting out of that horror and make of it a theology of *principles* of the faith. We seem to find a way to speak glibly about atonement and even sing, "*He was wounded for my transgressions...*" then go home and commit the grossest of sins. If ever we needed light from heaven, it is here-a revelation from God of *this* suffering and of *this* revelation of God as *crucified*. I do not think anything else will keep us. Nothing else will give us a horror for sin. Nothing else will keep us from crucifying the Son of God afresh other than a *real* understanding of what He, as God, suffered in humiliation and unspeakable pain in the degradation that came to Him at the hands of men. It was God the Father forsaking His Son, outside the camp on the dung heap, in the place of shame.

Is not the root of all of our ills, strife, divisions, fears, jealousies, ambitions, and everything that leads to the rupture and fragmentation of marriages and fellowships the failure to radically apprehend God as He is? If we could only see our hearts and know ourselves!

Though our voices may become ecstatic and our emotions titillated in mentioning the name of Jesus, to what degree are we celebrating the crucified and risen Christ? And to what degree are we just singing a song to a blurred image of our own making that serves our own vested self-interest and well being? False images *will* lead to things false in our own lives, and they can only be corrected by knowing God as He is, and where He has presented Himself unsparingly and accurately-in the suffering and death of His Son.

When a coarse, Gentile centurion and professional executioner saw Jesus on the Cross, though he had seen numbers of men crucified squirming, groaning, cursing and blaspheming God, there was something about the manner of Jesus' dying that evoked this statement from his mouth: "*Truly, this is the Son of God.*" I do not think that we have rightly meditated upon that a Gentile, who had no biblical background whatsoever, is compelled to make a certain recognition of the true identity of that One who was on the Cross, by what was exhibited in His ultimate suffering unto death. He had seen "Caesars" deified as gods, and had celebrated all the wrong values, so why should he have so much as a modicum of respect for this pathetic Jew hanging on the Cross? But however brilliant Jesus was as the Son of Man and the Son of God in what He spoke, and the miracles that He performed, it required *this* as a final and ultimate demonstration of the testimony of who He was. It constituted salvation for a man who would have otherwise eternally perished as a murderer himself, unless he acknowledged that "this truly was the Son of God."

But we do see Him...namely Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor... (Heb. 2:9).

To see Jesus in the condition of His suffering is to see the most accurate depiction of God as He is, and will ever be presented. To see Jesus is to see the glory of God, and to see the glory of God is to see Jesus. If we suffer from a faulty image of God, we will have an equally faulty image of ourselves. The prophet Isaiah, on seeing the Lord, cried out,

Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5).

What then shall *we* say, we who are not prophets and oracles of God? We need to have our vision and sight corrected. We need to address our lives to the plumbline of God, the standard of God-the Cross of Christ Jesus-not academically, religiously, or superficially, but in the actual experience of our lives, as those who have come to Him, willing to abandon everything. We need to enter into a darkness and to rend every veil that keeps us from coming into that inner sanctuary. When we see Him as He in fact is, then there is nothing left to do but to repent from our self-centered existence, and from lives that bear little correspondence to His sacrificial one. Only *then* can true faith take place.

He suffered unspeakable shame in order that we should be shameless before Him, and not bring reproach to His name by our own infidelity and unfaithfulness. He came into the world naked, and died and left the world in the same condition. We have to understand that it was *God* who came down to earth and was born into the world as a helpless, dependent infant. It was a humiliation for God to come in the form of a man. He came down from Heaven, laid aside His glory, lived a life of obscurity, suffered the rejection of His people, and concluded His life in unspeakable torture that words cannot describe, of which the Scriptures say: "*And they crucified Him.*" Even God does not attempt to describe it. Is that *your* King?

### **True Suffering**

The word "suffering" is as much neglected as the word "Cross" and for exactly the same reasons. The issue of the Cross is the issue of death. Suffering is dying, and we have not been prepared by our churches, let alone by the world, to be disposed to consider it, or to

do it. The way of the Cross is the way of abandonment. Death is a synonym for suffering, and every suffering is a humiliation. We are living in a civilization that has no tolerance for pain. We think that suffering is a sick subject, and anyone who introduces it must, himself, be of a masochistic bent. It is true that, "to choose suffering is a disease; but to choose God's will even though it means suffering is to suffer as Jesus did-according to the will of God." (Oswald Chambers-*Living Water*).

Suffering is not something grim that is experienced by those who are alienated from God. That is another thing altogether, but suffering for Christ's sake-because we are living in an alien and hostile world that is inimical and opposed to God-is another kind of suffering. It is redemptive, and there is a peculiar and particular grace that accompanies it that is a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

We hardly ever hear any allusion to the Cross beyond that which pertains to salvation, and for this reason we have fallen short of the glory of God. There is another dimension of the Cross that enters the realm of glory, called resurrection, for those who have received the Cross as death. Why is there a painful disparity between our verbal professions and the actual condition of our lives? Why are we powerless to affect the world? Perhaps in missing the Cross, we have missed the *power of the resurrection!*

### **The Bankruptcy of Modern Christianity**

The pathetic condition of the lives of many Christians, the woeful condition of the Church at large, and the enormous fascination of God's people for the world and its powerful influence on them, all testify to the fact that we have tragically avoided the Cross of Jesus. Paul could say that he gloried *only* in the Cross of Christ Jesus, by which the world was crucified unto him and he unto the world. The single greatest factor that explains our fascination with the world the way that we reflect its fashions, its styles, its promotional spirit, its trends and the employment of its rock music and amplifiers is the absence of the Cross as experience in the lives of God's people. Only the Cross can effectually crucify the world from us and we from it. The world is too much with us because the Cross has been neglected in our understanding and experience. Nothing less than the Cross can separate us from a world that is powerfully seductive and at enmity with God and lying in the power of the wicked one.

Do our hearts wince when we touch any aspect of the world? Is the world as abominable to us as it is to God so much so, that it sends a shudder up our spine? I am not only speaking about its ugliest vices, but also about those things applauded as virtuous and good that are equally of the world. "That which is highly esteemed of men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15b). Do we treat the world as if it is under the judgment of God? Do we see *all* of its aspects including its culture and the things that are imposing, elegant and honorific as also having their origin in Hell, and being ruled over by the prince of darkness? Is our distaste for the world such that we cannot wait to get out of it?

On the contrary, it would seem that our ears and our eyes have enjoyed continual orgies of "sense experience." It is painful to deny ourselves anything. If anyone were to walk into our church services, our heads automatically turn to *see*-we have *got* to see; we have got to hear; the silence has got to be filled; our mind has got to be engaged; our fingers have got to be occupied. The denial of self in any form is suffering, and we have not been encouraged to that. We are unable and unwilling to face the issue of pain. We have over-indulged and spoiled our children, compromised truth in our marriages, suffered casualties and losses among our ministers, and given ground to the spirit of independence and rebellion in the churches, all because we cannot stand pain.

The avoidance of pain is a costly avoidance, and the symbol of the Cross, the very heart of



the faith, is an invitation to share in His sufferings. Our contemporary Christianity is really nothing more than a culture, a sanctifying cover up for the *status quo*, a vacuous praise club, attributing gain as godliness and a comfortable religiosity that leaves our real interests unchallenged and undisturbed in the avoidance of the Cross of Christ Jesus. How many of us live effectually as atheists, having no substantial difference in our lives from those in the world anywhere about us?

There ought to be a fragrance of Christ about us. The fact that the world can so easily tolerate us, and that we are devoid of any reproach, let alone of persecution, is, itself, a shameful testimony that we are so like the world that we cannot be distinguished *from* it. We ought, rather, to be citizens of another Kingdom, citizens of Heaven, but there simply is no way to get there except through the Cross.

In the religious unreality that pervades our church services, we are unconsciously yielding more and more to a spirit of manipulation in order to produce some semblance of life. We have become accustomed to a deadness and grayness, the result of unresolved conflict, unconfessed sin, nurtured resentment, the inability to forgive. These are all the evidence of the Cross neglected. What are you going to do with a carnal congregation that brings into the meetings their dead weight and grayness? You are compelled, if you are going to have anything that is called a "successful service," to condescend to manipulation. Manipulation is the antithesis of faith. It is a scandal and a shame that many of our services, particularly in the Charismatic and Pentecostal realm, look like High School football rallies and attempts to pump up flesh in the guise of Spirit, all directly due to the avoidance of the Cross. People simply insist on clinging to their resentment, bitterness and unconfessed sins, and because we have been cowards in the pulpit, and because we do not want to be shaken or disturbed, we put a thin gloss over that whole mess. We try, therefore, to pump up a measure of successful religion that will bring a flush to our cheek and give us a respectable 'Sunday hour.'

Waiting on God in silence would reveal the truth of our spiritual bankruptcy, but instead we drown it out with our amplifiers and ceaseless activity. There is a reason we are uncomfortable with silence. There is often a tacit and unspoken agreement between ministers and congregation by which the show goes on for the preservation of a safe *status quo*, while carnality and sin abound unchecked and unaddressed in the lives of both the congregants and the minister. In the name of being defenders of the faith, fearful men are found actually to be opposing it, not having the faith that was once delivered unto the saints. Ironically, those who consider themselves the most vigilant guardians *of* the faith do violence *to* the faith and smother it.

The spontaneity of the Spirit has hardened into a fixed liturgy of choruses, followed by pregnant pauses, then pontifical prophecies that are mere truisms, and which are ignored as quickly as they are spoken. Prophecies are given of the most general kind that you would hardly think God would bother to speak-and which, it is likely, He did not. They are accepted for the "nothing things" they are-because we go right on with business as usual, not at all affected. It has become performance, and our nonchalance is itself the proof of what our real attitude is concerning such kinds of "Holy Spirit" activity.

Only the Cross of Christ distinguishes belief from unbelief. Are we willing to bring to the Cross our wish-dreams, our subjective fantasies and, indeed, our total life for His total correction? If we have not the Cross as a plumbline and the thing by which our own life should be squared, how are we then assured of being built straight *in Him*? Have we a stomach for a King who is impaled on a Cross, and a desire to be joined in union with Him there? How many of us who talk about the Cross, desire in our hearts that He come down from it? One can well ask whether the veil of unreality that keeps us from the glories of God

and His kingdom shall ever be rent, until ~~we~~ "give up the ghost and cry with a loud voice."

### **The Consequences of the Cross**

Jesus brought His death upon Himself by His own character, His own life and His message. What then shall be brought upon us if we adopt His character, move in His life, and proclaim his message? The disposition that clamors for prosperity, for "blessings" and the "rapture" as escape is not the spirit that is going to appreciate a message on suffering and the Cross. We know that the spirit of Antichrist is in the world. "Anti" not only means "opposed to," but also seeking to be something like Him, yet not Him. How shocked and stunned might we be if we were to realize to what degree we ourselves have submitted and may actually be operating in that spirit-if our "Christ" is not *the* Christ who suffered, died and rose again! We nod our heads to the "doctrine of the Cross," but in the actuality of our own knowledge and experience where do we essentially live our lives?

The Cross is the most unreligious symbol that can ever be imagined. The crucifixion of Jesus, the ending of a life in nakedness that began in nakedness, is the complete negation of every kind of conventional wisdom and religious notion that men could conjure. There is no way to come to an understanding of it by our own reasoning. The fact that we think we have, is contradicted by our lives. We can only come to it in darkness and repentance, and in no other way. It is too perverse, too ugly and too unappealing, for which reasons, only perverse, ugly and unattractive people have never had difficulty in coming to the Cross. We need to not only see Jesus, but also the purpose for which our lives have been called:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings (Heb. 2:10).

We were *not* called to success, happiness, and our own satisfaction, or only to have our own needs met. In fact, we do not have to be clever to realize that this poses a question, namely, if this kind of redemptive suffering was required to make Jesus perfect, by what means then shall ~~we~~ be made perfect? The answer is of course, through exactly the same process by which Jesus entered into perfection by the things which He suffered.

By sentimentalizing and distorting the Cross, thereby taking the sting out of it, we negate its death and suffering. The Cross should be the central and pivotal event of all our faith and life. All must go dark for us and become as night in the daytime of our comfortable, religious understanding. We have become too used to the Cross, and have made of it only a theory and formula for salvation. We have come to altar call after altar call, and invitation after invitation, laying our lives down before Christ again and again, and yet somehow we are still very much alive. The veil of selfishness, self-interest, vanity and pride is still not rent. The rocks of our hearts are still not split. The Cross of Christ needs to become for us an "event."

There is only one way to enter it, namely, the total negation of all of our life, the doing away of ourselves in the yielding up of the ghost. If His glory is to be manifest in the earth, it shall be only through His resurrection life manifesting through those who have been joined with Him in death and burial, and have been raised with Him into that newness of life. God will only bury that which is dead. We will know that we have entered into the death when we see the evidence of the resurrection.

There is a real cutting that requires a real shedding of blood for any covenant of God, and we are in that covenant to the degree to which we have been joined to that cutting. Did we see our water baptism as some kind of biblical obligation, or did we see ourselves as being *buried* with Him? God knows those who are living in the newness of life and those who are

not. Those who are mouthing and pronouncing New Testament terms, and who may actually even be involved in New Testament "ministry," so to speak, may actually and unconsciously be putting their confidence in *their* flesh and their own natural ability and aptitude. You can, on that basis, make an impressive show of it but it is not *newness* of life. This is not some religious palaver. We are speaking of an utterly supernatural reality that brings the believer thereby into a new dimension of existence, reality and life. We are *in* that life or we are *not*. God has made it absolute. Merely to employ the word "resurrection" and allude to it, quote it, and preach it, does not mean that we *have* it. What is the evidence of our lives generally speaking and consistently? Are we in the flesh or in the Spirit? How many of us have tried to dismiss condemnation by quoting the Scripture over and over again: "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 8:1)-and have not been relieved. You can quote that scripture until you are blue in the face and still be under condemnation, if you are not *in* Christ Jesus. The pressure of the condemnation is to *bring* you to that very place. But who likes to be 'cut,' and who wants to see blood spilled? The flesh *shrinks* from it. Only those who love the Crucified One have any desire at all to be joined with Him in that place.

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed [because you do not have any other] with Him in glory (Col. 3:3-4 Parenthesis mine).

Are we willing to have our lives predicated on that basis, and are we willing to cease our efforts to 'get by' on the strength of our own natural ability? Your life is dead *except* His life be revealed, which means we will be left humiliated *often*. When we want to shine, be clever, impressive, entertaining or whatever, then He simply will not be there to accommodate us. There will be no glory for us ever, but only glory for *Him* when *His* life shall be revealed. We are not living anymore by our own calculations or deliberations. We do not move on the basis of what is logical and reasonable. That is the world's game. We move by *His* life. When *His* life moves, then we move. When *His* life will be expressed by speaking, then we speak. Trusting for His life, moment by moment, *is* the faith for which the saints once contended, and the just shall *live* by *this* faith.

### **Cut Off and Out**

It says in Isaiah 53:8b:

He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due.

There is something surgical and total about that expression. To be "cut off and out" is a radical separation from the world, the flesh and the devil for those who have had the same Cross, or the same "axe" laid to their root. It is more than just the issue of sin; it is a profound salvation for us if we have been joined with *that* One in *that* crucifixion.

Jesus spoke at one time about eunuchs. A eunuch is a man who has had the axe laid to the root. He said that there are some eunuchs who are born eunuchs, who are biological freaks, who never will have the physical enabling for the gratification that is the given to all men. There are some eunuchs that are made eunuchs by men, and there are some eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. Only a eunuch can be implicitly trusted, because there is no way that he is going to usurp anything from the kingdom over which he has charge. He is not going to appropriate anything for himself because the axe has been laid to the root. He has been "cut off and out," and God offers us also the same provision. It is the Cross of Christ Jesus, laid to the root of life, that we might be "cut off and out" of the land of the living. The only man, in my opinion, who will be safe at the end of the age-an age abounding with iniquity, filth, lust, powerful seductions, and

subtlety-is a dead man, whose life has had the axe laid to its root, who has recognized the horrible propensities of his flesh. He has recognized that self-conscious discipleship is not the answer; that determining, "I'll never do this again," is not the answer; that singing the choruses is not the answer. There is only one answer the Cross of Christ Jesus-not the plastic counterfeit, but the blood of the Cross, the place of suffering and shame where God bids us,

"Come."

Jesus said,

If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me (Matt. 16:24b).

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "When Christ bids a man come, He bids him come and die." For those who are "cut off and out," who will join with Him in that place, who have been made eunuchs for Christ, who have welcomed the axe laid to the root, it is *"the power of God unto salvation."* We need to see this, and come to it, and cleave to it until the end of the age. Having made that decision, you invite the daily death, the daily reiteration of this mystery in ways that are uniquely appropriate to your life, your call and your walk. It does not mean that you are forlorn, gloomy or despondent. There is a rejoicing even in the death.

The only way we can say that there is a resurrection is by the consistent demonstration of that power in our lives, and that resurrection life will never manifest itself other than out of the one necessary condition, namely, death. The whole reenactment, the whole drama, and the whole principle is future, but also, at the same time, present. The whole genius of it is before us daily. In fact, if that Cross is not operative daily, if we are not willing to suffer its deaths, for example, when our flesh rises up and we find a way to skirt around an issue, then we make ourselves, to that degree, candidates for deception.

### **The Love of the Truth**

The issue of being saved from deception is the issue of the Cross. It is the issue of our willingness to be ruthless with regard to ourselves, bearing the suffering of it when God makes the issue clear. If we are escapist, running from confrontation, rationalizing and justifying our conduct and finding a way to explain it that gratifies us and saves us from the awareness of sin as sin, then we are to that degree candidates for deception. The love of the truth is the only thing that saves us from deception. But that love of the truth is not a love for something technically correct; nor is it a love for correct principles. Love of the truth is something different and can only be understood as God sees and understands it.

The most acute expression of that truth is Christ and Him crucified. The fellowship or individual, who moves away from the Cross, and allows the Cross only to be a ceremonial and architectural decoration, makes itself or himself a candidate for deception. If we are not living a cruciform life, and if we are not willing for the suffering of the Cross, but instead want the blessing of it, then we are also candidates for deception. That deception will likely come from very God Himself, who will give lying delusions to those who have rejected the love of the truth. Mere tolerance for the truth or even respect for the truth is not enough. Only a love for the truth keeps us from deception. Truth is painful, especially the truth about ourselves. We have all kinds of ways to rationalize and justify our actions, because we simply do not want to see the truth about ourselves. We have got to be ruthless in this regard and apply the Cross, and bring to death that thing that God brings to us and allows us to see.

The most intense expression of that pain and suffering is not from the opposition that comes to us from the unbelieving and unregenerate world, but from the very people who are the

dearest and closest. If it came from the unregenerate we could bear it, but when it comes from someone in our own household, we begin to taste something of suffering in its most intensive forms. I believe that any suffering less intense than that cannot bring the deep work of chastening that God is after. God knows it, and those people who are opposing us are actually serving His purposes in the formation of our character as His sons and daughters. If we can understand this sanctifying depth of the work of God, by which even our brothers or our spouses seem to have become our enemies, or we toward them, it will save us from seeing them as enemies, and we will begin to see them in a new redemptive way and see that they themselves are suffering in the role they are required to play. We can, therefore, have a more redemptive and sympathetic view of a suffering that they must bear until the mystery itself is finally outworked. That puts us on a much more sanctified and saintly ground, otherwise they are looked upon as being 'enemies of the faith' or a 'thorn in the flesh,' when in reality, they are not.

It is not so much the actual death that scares God's people, as the *fear* of death. It is the *prospect* of suffering that intimidates us more than the suffering itself. How many of our rationales and justifications for keeping ourselves from intimate union with the children of God as a community of God's people really stem from our fear of the exposure? We are afraid to be found out, afraid to fail before the eyes of others, afraid to suffer the humiliation, and therefore we gird ourselves about with every kind of justification in our thought, and even employ scriptures to keep us from this kind of 'danger.'

God is the God of truth, and therefore, anything that is feigned, phony and postured, anything that is an affectation or a show, is a lie. God slew Ananias and Sapphira because they held back part of the sale proceeds and made the part that they gave to appear as the whole. It is a whole religious game of holding back from God and from each other, and we are making the part that we do give to appear as the whole. It is far better that we would suffer the knowing, and other's knowing, our true condition than that we should live some kind of deceptive life before others and God.

Every day disposes us to which path we are going to take in life. We can play it safe and live our lives secretly and privately, and be a little island in the midst of the crowd, or we can open ourselves. We can love the truth, seek the truth, and pursue the truth and suffer for the truth, or we can play it safely and conventionally and never be able to produce in others anything more than what we are. We can know the correct phrases and communicate them to others, or we can come increasingly into the abounding joy and glory of the Lord through suffering. Day by day we are making such choices.

## Chapter 6 - Church as Community

The magnitude of the end-time demands upon the Church are going to be of such a kind that a quality of character beyond mere conventional Christianity, as we know it, will be absolutely essential. This again raises the issue of intensive life together as a mode of present living. Community living is not an end in itself, but rather a means to a larger end, namely, *"To Him be glory in the church."* Paul lets that statement stand. He gives no explanation as to the meaning of the word "church," nor does he even try to explain by what means that glory is going to be induced. Instead, he has *us* search out the meaning.

In my opinion, the word 'community' is synonymous with church or true fellowship. Through

years of intensive community experience, I have gained a view of Church that has revised my understanding of the meaning of that word. Church has become a misnomer, not just in fundamental and evangelical Christianity, but even in the finest forms of Pentecostal and Charismatic life. If our church experience is confined essentially to a Sunday service and Wednesday evening bible study, then it is a caricature and distortion of God's original intention. Church has come to center itself in 'services,' and we measure the success of a fellowship by the quality of its service, namely, whether *we* liked it, whether it was pleasant, whether the music was good, or whether the preaching was good. However much *we* may applaud any of these aspects of the service, we need to understand that that very standard of measure is the indication of how far we have departed from the Lord's understanding of the *glory* of the Church. We can conduct superb styles of Christian services, but we cannot practice and demonstrate the Kingdom of God on the basis of accommodating the desires and tastes of our congregations.

Community suggests a band of souls sharing a common pattern and spirit, seeking as their first motive the manifestation of God's glory in the earth through the relationships established in intense opportunity together. Community is not some kind of sophomoric attempt to prove anything. When we started, we hardly knew what the word community meant. But in the anguish, the horror, the enormous humiliation of it, the terrible defeat and failure of all of our pet Charismatic and Pentecostal convictions, which burst like a bubble in the reality of the demands of an intensive life, something then began to dawn on us here. Though we did not understand at first, we became, over a process of time, something that could be tentatively called an expression of the Kingdom of God.

I am an enemy of any kind of social experimentation. The Kingdom is too glorious an eternal thing to be marred by men as some kind of a socializing project that *they* can perform. That is the reason many communities dissolve. Church, or true fellowship, is an organic expression of His life, unfolded in patient waiting by those who are joined together. When we come in complete ignorance of how to do it, that ignorance will be our saving virtue.

If God will not do anything outside His Body, then we need to understand that the Body is not an organization, but an organism, built on relationship by the Spirit, with Him and with each other. Christianity has become so systematized that it has come to be looked upon as an institution rather than as an apostolic organism. The Kingdom of God, however, is the expression of His Life organically administered, through the saints, by His Spirit, and to each other. Fellowship is the organism given of God by which the saints are made perfect, through daily relationship, through encouragement, and often through confrontation:

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13).

In other words, *tomorrow* is too late.

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

True fellowship, which is to say, authentic fellowship, both with God and man, is eminently a resurrection phenomenon. It takes power to forgive; it takes power to be patient, and it takes power to be compassionate. In fact, community would be impossible except as a resurrection phenomenon. Anything else is religious, pious, fraudulent and imaginary, and in saying that, I am going out on a limb and likely disenfranchising ninety-five percent of Christianity in the world.

Community is the most radical, demanding, excruciating, and yet glorious possibility for this kind of existential fellowship with the saints. We do not have to be on the same property, although that should be preferred, but we do need to be in an intensive, daily, or frequent, honest, open-hearted and committed relationship with God's people. It will be excruciating before it is blessed, and painful before it is glorious. It is, however, the test of our supposed love for God, and I praise Him for the genius of that, because it saves us from some kind of exclusive, euphoric and separatistic relationship, which is wholly a dream and something imagined. It is *because* of that joining, and *because* God is joined with us in that kind of covenant relationship that we see the daily unfolding of His life. This kind living will likely be messy, slow, painful, clumsy, time-consuming and often wasteful, but the end thereof is a glory.

### **The Revelation of our Hearts**

There is nothing more important than destroying romantic illusions and fantasies about community. The idea of entering community lends itself to either total rejection, for fear of becoming a heretical sect that finally leads a whole people to their Jonestown doom, or some kind of romantic illusions of tripping off into fairyland, or out into the rustic wilds. These are terrible distortions, and if there is any romantic idealization of what community is going to confer, or mean for us, we are already in deception. A much more realistic view of community is rather the enjoyment and appreciating of Christian fellowship with all of its failures, inconveniences, wastefulness and disorders, while we are in the process of growing up together.

You cannot believe what is in God's people, including ourselves, until we live with one another on a daily basis! Tensions are guaranteed to arise through misunderstandings, individual subjectivities, struggles and differences of opinion because of this issue or that. Disrespect, rebelliousness, selfishness and self-justification are all revealed, and it is a revelation that is painful, but nevertheless true and necessary. We have to pass through a veil of disillusionment and romantic notions of what we think fellowship is, what God's people are, and not the least, *who we ourselves are*. The most painful revelation we need to face is the truth of our own condition. True fellowship is the courage and the willingness to be with, and bear with, one another in all of the above conditions.

There is an ideal and there is a reality, and poison is injected when someone comes to community on the basis of ideal rather than on the basis of reality. If we seek anything more than Christian fellowship and that 'more' is a projection of our own imagining and romantic hopes, then we introduce a poison into the whole corporate lump, and the seeds of destruction have been sown. We are all dreamers and idealists to one degree or another. We elaborate out of our own imagining something as we think it ought to be, rather than see things in the reality of what God intends. We bring some wishful fantasy into what we think it ought to be, and if it does not become *that*, then we are disillusioned with others and ultimately with ourselves.

We will, however, have our illusions quickly shattered. But disillusionment is a grace, and the only way to be disillusioned is unhappily a painful way, but far more painful and far more disastrous is to continue in an illusion that is unreal and which one day must be revealed as false. The disillusionment is not just with others; it is recognizing things *about* yourself and *in* yourself that you could not have otherwise been forced to experience or to see. When it does reveal itself, can we then bear the pain of watching the unraveling of the illusions of another, knowing that we are not to falsely comfort them or intervene, thus interrupting the process of God? Can we let it have its full work and bear the stink of it while we are alongside the suffering member?

The Church is the "*ground and pillar of truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15), and if it is not that, then it is not the Church. Truth has got to be unsparing and total. We cannot allow the latitude of any illusion, any romanticism, or any idealism. Idealism is the last hiding place of humanism; to have an ideal is yet to be humanistic. God has so ordered it that the one place with the most potential for putting those things to death is community. If community served no other purpose than *that*, it would be purpose enough. More than one community has been dissolved because the people could not survive the disillusionment. They were unprepared for it, and when it came, it took them by surprise and became the end for them. They had wanted to hold on to their illusions.

Perhaps community should be looked upon more as a 'battleground' than a playground! If we come apart at the seams among ourselves, and cannot endure a look of indifference, or a seeming rejection, how then are we going to be overcomers in the trauma of the Last Days? If we have protective little egotisms underlying an outward appearance of spirituality, we will find ourselves constantly hurt. And if we think we are being ignored and find ourselves reacting in a touchy and hypersensitive manner, then how are we going to make it when the wrath of the powers of darkness, who know that their time is short, is ventilated against the saints? Community is God's end-time provision. It is not that we are malicious, but even in our well-meaning intentions, inadvertently and often in the heat of the moment, we are to each other *a pain!*

### **We Simply Come**

We cannot come into community with our own game plan or agenda. We simply come in obedience. It was the same call to Abraham, "*Follow me to the land that I will show you.*" We come as the broken people of God, who have no strength in themselves, and look to Him for the unfolding of the life, day by day, as it pleases Him to mete it out. The things that have their origin in God must have their outworking by the impartation of His life, given to the people who are called together, and who respond in obedience to the direction of God in the daily outworking of their life together

The issue of privacy and the violation of it will test us to the depths of our being. In community our privacy *will be* invaded; we never know when someone is going to come to the door for some requirement. One of the great tensions is in discerning how much time belongs to the family and how much to the community. How much do we enjoy ourselves *apart from* the community and how much do we give ourselves *to* the purposes of the community? It is not stated as some written credo, but something that needs to be worked out in the wash. We should profoundly desire the autonomy of families with the father at the head and the integrity of the family, but "family" can become an enclave of selfishness. The deepest forms of selfishness have been hidden under the supposed sanctity of family and children, for example, "Well, I cannot come to the meeting because of the children." How much has that been used as an excuse for people who really do not want to assemble together, and are employing the sanctity of family, as well as other values, as a cover behind which to hide?

Let God make community in His own image not what *we* think it should be. It may well be that His image for each of us is unique to ourselves, and the thing that most deters it from fulfillment is our insistence on *our* image. May God give us such a heart for truth and authenticity, and to be made corporately in His image for that is the thing that glorifies Him.

### **Community as Organism**

The worst thing that we could do is establish community as a system pre-packaged, i.e. this



is how you do it: "step one, step two, step three." In that, we will have contradicted the very spirit of community. The whole world, in the sense of a world system, is predicated upon business, pleasure, gratification and lust, and therefore, as a system, it is antithetical to God in every point and particular. The word "system" suggests something man makes in his own wisdom, mentality and organizational ability, based on his own values for the purposes of his own efficiency and success. In *antithesis* to this, God has a purpose for the Church that completely eclipses this mindset. He totally ignores the wisdom of the world, considering it foolish, and establishes a set of values, which in the eyes of mankind seem totally threatening, offensive, and will likely rub them raw.

The world values efficiency and utility, but in the Kingdom, as it is expressed through community, the values are not expediency, but the obtainment of godly character by whatever the cost. If you want someone efficient, then hire someone, but do not have God's people come and live with you! God's purpose is character growth, corporate life, the relationship by the Spirit, bearing the sufferings of one another and the instructions that comes through all of this. There is nothing 'messier' than community. It is naive to think, or expect, that everyone walks fully in the Spirit. If you want efficiency you will need rules and regulations to enforce it, thereby making it a legal system of telling people what to do and how. There is a tension of needing to have *some* measure of order and coherence, and yet not enforcing or requiring it, or else we would have robots. It is that terrible tension of suffering the inconvenience while patiently waiting for the saints to grow up to a place of maturity and responsibility, while yet resisting the temptation to try to have that measure of order by imposition.

The world's mindset wants efficiency because efficiency is what makes for profit. That mentality is visibly demonstrated even in the "best" expressions of Christianity, for example, as denominationalism, which is religion as "system." It operates through a hierarchy of men and officers who have charge over this and that. There are also secular and utopian models of community. But in the community of God's people, Christ is the Lord and center of all. It is He who mediates the life. He is King, and His Lordship is pervasive over all. His Lordship is not a body of rules that He sets down; but rather, we learn in the walking out of the life of faith. Needless to say, we will experience many times of missing His mind and failing Him.

Optimum efficiency is not something that concerns God. He is after optimum character, which cannot be compelled, defined or structured. Structure in that way negates character. What men will do freely before God, unobserved by man, is where the real foundations of character are laid. God is interested in what is wrought in the interaction with the saints when selfishness, vanity and pride surface in the working out of issues that come up. We have a God who is interested in our going beyond convenience and comfort, namely, the character that we shall wear throughout all eternity. This can only be established, formed and shaped in *this* lifetime, not just in our conflict with the world, but especially through the abrasive dealings that we have with each other as saints.

"Sunday Church" can easily become a mere convenience, but community is profoundly inconvenient. This is the going from *"house to house daily breaking bread"* and working through issues, tensions, difficulties and misunderstandings, and it is amazing how easily they pop up and how quickly they can bring to nothing a relationship that has been years in the making. It requires, therefore, daily vigilance, investment of time, prayer and dependency upon God.

We begin where we are, and when the commitment is made, and there are souls who are earnest about being joined, the life begins to unfold, and this is the thing that needs to be mediated from Heaven by the Holy Spirit. That is why the one commandment by which the

Church began was the word of Jesus,

And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49).

The Spirit was never given for us to do great, individual, Pentecostal acts that would distinguish *us*. He is rather the power and the enablement for the life together out of which those acts flow, for example, Peter "rising with the eleven" on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14). In coming into community, it takes only a few weeks before you realize that you are not the nice guy you thought you were. We need that revelation. We are going to make it *only* on the basis of His life, which is His power, and yet there are so few who are actually desire or who are living in that realm. There is presently no requirement to do so, because our present Christianity however well meaning and disciplined rarely requires us to cross over into the realm and dimension of actual resurrection life. Our lives are too conventional, and we are not required to come to the end of ourselves. But as soon as we come into a demanding relationship with each other, we will find that, unless we existentially know His life, we are as good as dead!

What we are describing is the difference between an organizational system and the organic, Spirit-work of God; it is the realm of Spirit in contrast to man-made systems two different forms of wisdom. One is foolishness in the eyes of the world and much more painful and difficult to obtain, while the other is predicated on efficiency. We will be tempted continually to systematize our church life and bring it under human arrangement. And though it began rightly, it can harden and stiffen in its forms and become an institution with a life unto itself, and thereafter, the whole issue becomes the perpetuation of the institution. It takes on its own identity, its own being as "such-and-such" a ministry, "such-and-such" a denomination, and the necessity now is to preserve what has been raised up as being the thing in itself.

## Chapter 7 - The Antiochal Pattern

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper (Acts 13:1-5).

It almost sounds like an antique description of some wistful thing in the past, having no relevance for today. This is not, however, a mere historical event, but rather God's definitive pattern of working from which we have grievously departed in this present hour. My spirit winces as I look at, hear of, and my mail box is stuffed with, all of the evidences of a melancholy abandonment of what has been offered us here as a true apostolic church and its working.

The early churches were the bodies of believers at a given geographical location. They were a besieged minority saved out of the world, living in the midst of vicious hostility, surviving and standing gloriously by the power of the Spirit, who had full sway through their lives as

they authentically lived together face to face. No man thought that the things he had were his own. They held "*all things common*," and if any lacked, they sold their houses and properties and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles, who then made distribution.

Paul, having established his converts in the faith, would take his leave and not come back until a year or so later. But the new believers remained there and flourished because one had a "tongue," another had an "interpretation," and yet another a "prophecy," or a "revelation," or a "teaching." They had the full panoply of God. They had God for a teacher with all the richness that the Spirit could provide in a true expression of the Body of Christ, and therefore, they had the assurance that God would not leave them comfortless. They did not have, nor need, a paid minister to help them through. Each man was required to participate and to give the full-orbed expression of the life of God every time they convened together. There was no gazing at the back of the head of the person sitting in front of them. It was none of our "sickly" stuff, punctuated by the occasional potluck supper. It was the vital coming together of God's people.

We hardly know what apostolic reality is in modern days, but the God *who changes not* is bent upon restoring us to the pattern that I have just described, and for many of us, it is going to be a very fearful adjustment. There will not be any glorious works performed unless they are performed in this pattern, by the Holy Spirit, who shall separate men, by name, for the work whereunto *He* has called them a lot different from some of the works in which *we* are involved. We have caught the organizational mania, and any man who has a talent for promotion, or knows how to hire those who have it, can quickly install himself in one kind of ministry or another. Christendom is congested with far more ministries than God ever intended, and the whole sum of them together for the greater part are, in my observation, "sound and fury signifying nothing."

When the conditions for truth depart, the Holy Spirit goes also, and that is why we feel compelled to turn up the amplifiers, institute programs and add our own little innovations, thinking that by the increase of activity, we somehow have the reality. The same Holy Spirit, who put to death a man and a woman for presuming upon God by bringing only a part of the proceeds of a sale, is the same Holy Spirit still. There are many beautiful and glossy church buildings, and many programs, but we do not have the glory or the power of God. We are producing people who are fixated in a kind of self-centered infantilism. And all of our teaching materials, messages, literature and conferences are fruitless when we depart from the apostolic pattern of God, especially in the light of what has been given to us in the Antioch account.

### **In the Church**

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there...

They were *in* the church. This is very different from the casual aggregate of individualities that compose our present church situations. We have a lot of flitting about to where the grass might be greener, or the preaching more interesting, or the visiting speakers more attractive. But these men were "*in*." They were deeply established. They were in a network of true spiritual relationship, one with another, which constitutes, in itself, the very nature of church.

...prophets and teachers.

There was something about the very structure and makeup of the church at Antioch that was conducive to prophets and teachers, and even to the raising up of apostolic men. This is not the standard of measure that we employ today to test the health of our own fellowships. We would rather measure by numbers, or programs, or find some other kind of measure rather than asking ourselves, "Are we a fellowship that is conducive to the germination and

bringing forth, the nurturing and raising to maturity of apostolic and prophetic men? Are our fellowships that kind of environment?" If we are more zealous for the symmetry and order of our meetings than we are for the inconvenience and the pain of prophetic interruption, then we will never come to the pattern of the church at Antioch which pattern God is wanting, and for which He is waiting.

There are no two callings in God so dissimilar and in a certain sense antagonistic to one another than teachers and prophets. Authentic prophets and teachers are familiar with the tension between men of those callings. Teachers are systematic; they see things as, "*line upon line and precept upon precept.*" A prophet insists on the Scriptures as being the inspired statement of God, but he more often sees things intuitively. He will preach from a Heinz ketchup label or the back of a box of matches. He is visionary and sees the grander and larger picture. But a teacher recoils at the largesse and the liberty that a prophet will take to himself. To the prophet, a teacher is as dry as dust, narrow and limited. The thirteenth chapter of Acts begins, however, by citing legitimate and valid callings, but callings that are intrinsically antagonistic *by their nature*. The point is that these men have come through to something existentially. Their antagonisms have not caused rupture or division, but rather, amity, reconciliation and unity.

### **The Diversity**

Who were these prophets and teachers? "*Barnabas,*" a Jew; "*and Simeon that was called Niger,*" probably of African descent; "*and Lucius of Cyrene,*" one of the Mediterranean ethnic groups; "*and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.*" He might actually have been of Roman derivation; "*and Saul,*" another Jew. What a conglomeration of backgrounds with every portent and possibility for conflict, eruption, strife and division! But they triumphed because "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself*"-and it was first established in their assembly.

Antioch was, and is, the pattern of apostolic reality, and therefore of a true apostolic sending church. The pattern could not be the church in Jerusalem that preceded it because that was uniquely Jewish, but rather, Antioch, with its ethnic, racial and cultural diversity. They were found, *despite* those differences, "*ministering to the Lord.*" That "togetherness" was not some magical thing; it could only be obtained through the deepest workings of the Cross in a people who are long enough, and intensely enough, together. They had come to a place of sanctification and separation from the things that make men resentful, irritated and jealous, and were, therefore, wholly given up to God *together*. We cannot minister unto the Lord in truth when there are unspoken tensions and difficulties that have not been resolved between brothers. We can sing songs and create a charismatic atmosphere through choruses, but is that worship unto the Lord? Ministering unto the Lord is an ultimate statement of a relationship to God in purity and priestly devotion that cannot be obtained independent of men, but rather is obtained, as it were, *through* men. There must be that relatedness to other men, especially men who are different from us and who may be irritating to us *because* of those differences.

### **Priestly Ministration**

It may well be that the first apostolic call came to men who were waiting on the Lord in priestly ministration in a silence more eloquent to God than the turned-up amplifiers of our contemporary worship, and to come to that corporately is supreme worship. It is one thing to be individually silent, but to be corporately silent in a room, face to face, is a form of suffering and death few are willing to bear. Everything in us is itching for something to be said. Sound and sight are sensual things, and our senses want to be gratified with something to hear, something to see, something to speak and something to do. Silence is

therefore death to the senses, and asserts the primacy of the rule of God over our senses, which want to have an independent existence from Him. If we are unwilling to think on pornography, then we will be encouraged to think on spiritual things, so long as the mind has its own independent way and existence. Thoughts that have their origin in man, even if they are ostensibly clean and even of a religious or spiritual kind, are in God's sight unrighteous, if they have not their origin in Him. Silence is the final death to anything that might yet linger about our self-sufficiency, our independence and our ability to serve God. Everything must be brought to death for true priestly ministrations.

When God saw *that*, the Holy Ghost said,

Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

In other words, they had reached something a high water mark as was expressed in the authenticity of their worship, despite the diversity of their differences. They had reached something of an existential and authentic kind, which released the Lord to call and to send. God had, in them, something He could send to the world that would be a demonstration and witness to the reality of the heavenly kingdom. Some transcendent thing had come, some breakthrough where the Holy Spirit could say "Now...I have found something that I want to replicate, a reality to which you have come, and now you can be sent. I have no fear now that you are going to steal My glory. I know now that you are not going to go back home and send out newsletters of the great things you have done in Iron Curtain countries, the carnal and soulish things that disfigure and compromise religious activity and make it less than an apostolic work."

We need to acknowledge the depths of our carnal hearts, and how much we are titillated by the opportunity for "ministry." We want to justify ourselves, particularly if we were born poor or disadvantaged, and we like to prove that we have "arrived." Who of us does not have an itch to perform, to produce, to be found acceptable and to be approved? It takes an enormous depth of dealing by God to bring us to a place of priestly rest and separation unto Him whereby it is safe for Him to call us. We are *all* shot through with defect. We *all* have blind spots. We are *all* riddled with our own ambition. God's provision to attend to that, to perfect us, and to bring us to a priestly and apostolic place is *each other*. But if our fellowships are formal, structured in any other way than apostolically, and institutional, or have a "one-pastor" mentality running the show, then we are already in an unclean and impure situation. If we are fostering a kind of pastoral mystique where the pastor is looked up to as somehow incapable of foibles, fallacies and weaknesses, then we are promoting a deceptive unreality. Church leaders need to take those platforms away, come down and be exposed and seen as they truly are; indeed, we all need to do this.

There is something inherent in man that wants to run off and *do* before he *is*. When Jesus said, "And you shall be witnesses unto Me," He did not mean that we were to do witnessing *for* Him. The *being* precedes the *doing*, and apostolic being precedes apostolic sending. Apostolic being is ultimate being, and requires ultimate sacrifice to obtain. Of necessity, fervent love cannot come until we have broken through all the hurt and pain, the disappointment and disillusionment of ourselves with each other, but unfortunately, that is the very point where we run and seek another fellowship; that is the very point where we want to run off to another ministry. If we had only held steady at that point and seen it through and broken through to the transcendent ground of fervent love, then we would have heard the voice of the Spirit saying, "Separate unto Me..." Instead, our "sendings" are self-appointed missions or responses to need, rather than the call of the Spirit, and therefore the consequences of our going are much less than the true works of God.

In Antioch, they were already a people separated from their own racial differences, their strivings, their enmity, their suspicions, their resentments, their jealousies, and even from

their religious ambition. As long as we embark on "ministry" with ambition alive in us, then what we perform is of necessity less than and other than a true work. The saints in Antioch would have been as content to remain in the place of worship as in the place of service. How many of us have come to that place, where we do not *have* to go, or where we do not have any itch to perform anything? We are just as content to remain in the place of anonymity, of being unseen, unknown and unheralded, as we are to be in the most conspicuous place of service. Only then can God send us, because He knows that in our going, our one exclusive motive is the jealousy for *His glory* and not our ministerial success.

### **True Apostolic Work**

We will not hear that call until we are a people who know how to fast and minister *unto the Lord*. Those men at Antioch did not go forth because they saw a great need. There is no more deadly snare for God's people than to elevate human need or causes, ministry or calling above very God Himself. It is the last and the most vicious and subtle of all deceptions and idolatries. In fact, if our work is directed toward a need, then we are not yet on apostolic ground. So much of what we do is birthed out of a sense of compulsion, a sense of religious obligation, a sense that we should be *doing* something for the needs that are everywhere around us. What we are about, if those are our motivations, is less than and other than apostolic work, and will not and cannot redound to God's glory. True apostolic work is never indicated by the nature of the need, or the targeting of a specific nation or people group. God did not even send them expressly to the Jews, though the Word says, "To the Jew first and also to the Greek." But in *being sent*, and in the very unfolding of their sending by the Spirit, they ended up in Salamis preaching the word of God to the Jews in the synagogue. But they did not do it by principles; it was performed in union with the Life of God. If we are incapable of waiting, then we are also incapable of serving. The apostolic work of God and the kind that shakes the earth and has eternal consequence is the kind that is initiated by the Holy Spirit, *who calls men by name*.

There is a necessity for priestliness that is at the heart of true ministry. Jesus is the High Priest and Apostle of our confession. That is no accidental conjunction. The apostolic genius cannot be obtained independent of priestliness, and the heart of priestliness is the ability to wait upon God. It is the ability to minister unto Him in such a devotion that it is all the same whether one goes out to minister, or remains. The going is a worship, just as much as the remaining, but we all know, especially in the younger people, that there is an itch, almost a compulsion, to go and to do. It almost seems to be a *requirement* in many Christian circles! We are *encouraged* in that, falsely, and therefore we have stopped short of, and not waited for, the full maturation of the church, which is the matrix out of which true sending, and being sent, comes. What we have at Antioch is an apostolic matrix, a womb out of which something of a particular kind and quality is generated or birthed, which I believe God is yet waiting for in our own localities and nations.

They were called for the work whereunto *He* had called them, without specifically telling them what the work was. They were not called to any specific ethnic group, nor to this calling or to that calling, but only *unto the Holy Spirit*, the only calling that is valid. Until we return to the pattern that He has given us, we need not think we can expect eternal results. We can do "good things," but we make void that which is eternal and glorious. Our ministry, if it is true ministry, should not be predicated upon where we know we are going, or what we are going to do, but simply *unto Him*. These were truly separated men. That is why, as in Acts 16, Paul could be turned away from the churches in Asia, that were being added to daily, and be brought to a place where the gospel had never been brought, namely Macedonia, by a vision that came to him at night.

And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (v. 10).

Paul had the vision, but all who were traveling with him received his vision as God's call for them. There was no question as to whether the vision was legitimate. They recognized Paul's authority because they were in a certain quality of relationship with him that had been established, not on the road, but *in* the church at Antioch. It would be one thing if they had been failing in Asia-any alternative to failure would have been welcomed-but when you can be turned away from your success, then you are separated *unto God*.

The fact that God is discreet and does not lift the screen in order for us to see what happened in the formation of those men does not mean that it did not take place. Anyone who has lived seriously for God knows that it *must* have taken place. There is no shortcut. Coming to this place of unity and true union had to have been preceded by confrontations, painful differences, struggles and tensions, and finally, reconciliation and resolution by the blood of the Cross and the Spirit of God. There is no life without death, and these men had to taste it. How long did Antioch exist before there was a sending? We are not told, but you can believe there was a history of suffering before this glory.

### **Authority and Relationship**

Recognizing authority does not come easily or automatically, and it is relative to our life and our walk. The Thessalonian believers understood it, and that is why Paul could say to them,

...that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thess. 1:13b).

They knew it was God's word to them because Paul communicated a spirit, a love and an authority that was reflected in his words, and which compelled pagans to turn from their idols. Paul's authority came out of a life submitted *to* authority and submitted to other men with whom he was in relationship. Paul's apostolic call did not lie in anything that was intrinsic to himself; rather it was the apostolic character and stature of the body that sent them their inter-connectedness and dependency upon one another.

Then, when they had fasted and prayed ["they" evidently being the congregation itself] and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit... (Acts 13:3-4a).

The laying on of the hands of that congregation *was* the sending forth of the Holy Spirit. This was the first apostolic journey, and Paul and Barnabas were not at all hesitant to allow those with whom they had been in fellowship in Antioch, in all of the diversity of that congregation, to lay hands on them and send them forth. The laying on of hands is a holy thing, and the hands were of men whose character was recognized, observed and known. They had the assurance of knowing the substance of who it was that was laying hands on them. God equates the act of those men in sending forth Paul and Barnabas as being "sent" by the Holy Spirit, because He knew the character of the men whose hands were laid upon them. Not one of them had spent the evening before twiddling the dial of the television set or using their hands in any way that would disqualify them. They were pure hands, and when you lay hands on someone, you transmit your condition *to* and *into* that person. Hands transmit what you, in fact, are. Those hands that were laid on Paul and Barnabas were of the same character and substance as their own. The laying on of hands is one of the most profound covenantal acts that men can perform with each other in God's sight. It was more than just a slap on the back and "we will see you on your return." It is a commitment of a kind that makes that very sending possible. It implicates the one, whose hands were used in the sending and remains behind, to be as deeply involved in the character of the work as the

one who goes.

They were a fellowship who understood these things and recognized how significant and fateful Paul and Barnabas' speaking and acting was to be. In the laying on of hands, they were saying, "We not only identify with you, we sustain you by our intercessions, because we are going to suffer the consequence of what you are doing. We are in this with you." They were now under obligation to sustain the sent ones by their prayers. Any intercession for the men who had been sent that was not out of this quality of relationship would be a mere performance. It would only have been religious obligation, a sense of requirement that does not impress God, nor the principalities and powers of the air.

True intercession and true prayer are forms of dying. We can all pray, but the kind of prayer that is an agony of groanings that cannot be uttered is a form of dying. When we lay our hands on someone with this kind of commitment and understanding, we are "signing our death warrants." Sadly, we are far removed from realities of this kind. We are so much the reflection of a superficial world that is satisfied with only nominal things and verbal understandings. We content ourselves, therefore, with a *ceremonial* "laying on of hands" that is much less, and other than, the true thing.

When you send someone on an apostolic journey, there is no assurance that they are going to return. It is painful, because you have opened yourself for love and made yourself vulnerable. You have gone beyond a "full-gospel bear hug," and you have actually come to a place where that brother has become so dear, that if he does not come back, it will be a loss that you cannot even calculate. It will tear your heart out. Are we willing to come onto that kind of ground, or do we want to safeguard ourselves from the pain of that kind of intensive love and affection for the brethren?

But if we are individualistically-minded and centered in our own personal ministries, then we will not realize to what degree true ministry is the expression of the reality that comes from the relationship to which we have been brought up together. The ministry comes out of the life, and the life out of the relationships. The ministry was never out of some man's virtuoso ability or singular calling. The insight, the content of the message, and the quality of the messenger have been wrought into him, but only out of that kind of intensive relationship.

Paul and Barnabas' separation took place, *before* they were sent, *in* the church. They were not casual Sunday attendees. Only the Lord knows what went on in Antioch before the sending-what issues, what confrontations, what dealings, what accusations, what strains, as they were filtered, sifted, purified and purged in the depth of God's sanctifying work. This can only take place in and through the Body of Christ, where men will "*speak the truth in love*" in all of the time and patience and sacrifice that such speaking requires. There is nothing more needful in this hour than men and women who are willing again for that sacrifice, and willing to leave places of comfort and familiarity to take their chances knocking about with saints in another location. We need to open ourselves to the kinds of strains that we would not have had to suffer had we continued in our present privatistic mode of living, and in which no-one would have faulted us, because it is normative throughout Christendom. Are we willing to forsake that, to take the risks, in order to obtain a future Antioch? *That* is the Cross.

The gates of Hell cannot prevail against *that* Cross. The reality of the Cross, the suffering and the reiteration of it, as it were, is the very heart of the gospel. Our apostolic authority, power and penetration are in exact proportion to the knowledge of *that* Cross, which is always the place of suffering and sacrifice. If we think that church is a place for good programs, or where we can get *our* needs met, then we have completely misunderstood the



nature of church and the gospel.

### **Filling up the Suffering**

The Scriptures speak about the sufferings that remain to be filled up in Christ. We always think of that as suffering some kind of external affliction, like persecution coming from the world, but the greatest fulfillment of that suffering is within the church *now*. To be in a "Sunday Church" situation, and to be struggling in it, or to be rejected in it, and to have to sit through it, Sunday after Sunday, without any seeming hope, in all of the sense of despair and alienation, is a suffering. It must, though, be borne. It is the suffering that needs to be filled up in the Body. We are not called to reject those places and to flee from them, but to remain faithful *in* them and to guard ourselves as to how we speak and relate to them. It must not be in any critical way, but usually bearing it in a kind of silence unless the Lord gives you the liberty to speak. We need to look to the Lord to bring the influences that will move it from where it presently is to what it needs to become. We are moving to the final crises of the age, and the centrifugal forces that are working to move us radically either toward God or away from God will make it necessary for those churches to decide whether they will go, likewise, toward or away from God.

This is an hour of preparation for soon-coming realities for which many of us are not prepared. It is an hour of restoration of a flabby and anemic Church that has played too long with its charismatic toys. It is a Church that needs to be restored to apostolic reality in the spirit of truth. We cannot say to a world that is dying and facing the judgment of God, "Repent!" until there is a Kingdom of God which is at hand *amongst us*. We need to come again to be an apostolic people of God, showing forth the Kingdom, that men might repent. The Antioch fellowship was not an exceptional thing that God wants, but the normative thing for all generations.

## Chapter 8 - The Preached Word

If we are called to anything in God, it is to be the bearers of His word, and in this regard there has been much lacking in Christendom. There is a profusion of speaking; there are welters of tapes, videos and communications of all kinds, yet in the midst of it all, there is a famine for words of a life-giving kind. We need a deep and new perception of this "holy sacrament." It has been my observation that believers, and particularly ministers, are forever seeking to establish their reputations and their acceptance on some basis other than the preached or spoken word.

The first statement of the anointed ministry of Jesus took place in a synagogue when He was handed the scroll of Isaiah, and He commenced to read from chapter sixty-one:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach...(Luke 4:18a).

There is a conjunction between anointing and true preaching, and any preaching that is not anointed is mere oratory. There is, therefore, a peculiar and particular quality that distinguishes apostolic or *true* preaching from all other speaking. This is a remarkable phenomenon, and a matter of life and death because:

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (Rom. 10:14-15a).

This is at the heart of the whole mission and calling of the church particularly its calling to the

Jew. The whole unbelieving world is waiting for a certain kind of speaking, namely, apostolic preaching, that is to say, a preaching of *one who is sent*. He whom *God* sends is given the Spirit without measure. This sending is therefore critical for which reason God establishes sending communities or bodies. Men have to be sent from some place, and the nexus of that is a fellowship of believers of the kind that I have been describing.

### **The Word of the Cross**

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21).

The word of the Cross *is* the power of God, containing an inherent, divinely penetrating ability to register divine truths *despite* the severest religious, cultural and ethnic resistance, as well as an ability to create faith in the hearer, causing him to believe unto salvation. It is the word of God as "event," and an event not necessarily under auspicious circumstances. It performs a work in them that believe, or a work that has brought them to the place of believing. It is a heavenly word proclaimed in the earth, not only to those who may be willing hearers, but also, and just as much, to those who are *resistant* hearers. Earth resists heaven, and every power of darkness wants to cloud the minds of men and keep them from understanding and responding. This resistance requires, therefore, a word of an ultimate kind to break it like a hammer on a rock.

The phrase, "word of God," is better understood more literally as a word *of* God; it has its origin *in* God. But we can easily turn this holy 'sacrament' into a cliché. We are prone to assuming that anything biblically-orientated and seemingly correct *is* the word of God. This is not so. Rather, the word of God is a divine communication of a uniquely powerful kind, expressed through a human vessel. Paul's own acute awareness of the phenomenon is expressed in his first epistle to the Thessalonians:

And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (Chapter 2:13).

Paul could rightly boast, and we need to read this as a literal and accurate description of a particular mode of speaking rare in our own time. If the distinctive nature of this communication is its power, what then is its character? Paul is careful to instruct his Greek correspondents, contrary to their own culture and love of rhetoric, that the preaching of the gospel can actually be voided of its power if it is expressed in the eloquent wisdom of men. The word of God is something altogether and qualitatively different from that, and if we lapse into a human eloquence, we void the statement of its power.

So, the 'word of the Cross' is not necessarily the statement or description of the actual crucifixion of Jesus. There is another meaning implicit in this phrase even when the Cross itself is not necessarily the subject matter, and yet it can still be the 'word of the Cross.' The substance of the crucifixion event, replicated in the humiliation of the preaching itself, is the reenactment of the Cross-experience itself. Every time the Cross is "reenacted" in any humiliation that comes from an obedience, the power that was first demonstrated at the Cross is again given opportunity to be expressed proportionate to the degree to what is actually borne or suffered in that humiliation. True preaching is humiliation. True witness is humiliation. True prayer is humiliation. Humiliation is another word for suffering and death, and wherever that issues in truth, the power of God will always attend it. The reason that we do not see the power of God in preaching is that men take the pains to avoid such

humiliation by being assured that they are going to get through the moment by the use of preparation notes, outlines and other dependencies that will ensure that they "get by." We are unwilling to take the risk of failure by standing with our faces sticking out and trusting the operation of God for the word *in that moment*. There is a genuine place for sermon preparation, but in the event itself, room must be made for God, and if we insulate ourselves from God by our own religious, human and professional preparation, we void the operation of the Cross and the foolishness of it, namely, the suffering and the humiliation, and therefore the power of the Cross.

The stakes are great; the issues of eternity are at hand, and it is beyond the sphere of unaided humanity to speak God's words in the way they need to be expressed, though many try with sincerity and good intentions. No matter what a man's natural qualifications and strengths, he must in that tremulous moment be in weakness and in much fear and trembling. He must have the deep awareness that every speaking is an issue of life or death.

A preacher, who thus intentionally empties himself in trust for a word *of God* to be given, experiences a suffering, in measure, akin to that of the crucified Christ, in the dying to his own ability to speak. He becomes foolish in a humiliation like the Savior's-unto death. This is the heart of all true speaking. The man speaking sees to it that his own ability will not be his dependency and source of supply. He is the humble recipient of a vitality that is to be given. There is a suffering, a humiliation and a death in the speaking that releases the same quality of power that took place at the Cross, and will again, in every re-enactment of that event. God does not want the faith of men to be established on human eloquence, but on the basis of the power of God. This power is released through the one that is willing to suffer the terrible humiliation.

This point cannot be labored enough. The death and humiliation are in *not* leaning on our own understanding, *not* trusting or having confidence in our own ability. In much preaching and ministry, we more often than not lean on our own human ability. There is a certain kind of unction in the scriptures alone, so that whether or not you yourself may be anointed or living out of that power, it will have a certain credibility. I think that is basically a description of what goes in most every Sunday morning service. There is something in the scriptures themselves that has a vivifying effect, or the people would be without profit altogether. But the preaching that is the power of God comes when a man abandons himself, and will not lean on his own expertise, his own power or his own ability. Pulling out *that* plug is the death. It is something one can never get used to, but is to be tasted again and again. Every occasion is as terrifying, contradictory and mortifying as if you had never done it before. It is a recurring experience in death. Who is willing to taste that death? Who is willing to abandon his own proven and trusted ability and confidence, and trust that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will now raise the speaker and his message?

### **The Creative Word**

In a word, by the very obedience of our Lord's suffering unto death, by which the veil of the Temple was rent, by the preacher's obedience, the veil is rent again, over the understanding and darkened mind of the hearer. This not only emits light on what is otherwise patently foolish and offensive to human sensibility, but it births or creates the grace of repentance and faith unto believing. The veil was rent in the crucifixion of Jesus, and is rent every time the same power is released by the same humiliation, but this time it is not the veil in the Temple, but the veil over the heart and understanding of the hearer.

A correctly recited word out of the Bible is not the *word of God*. It is only the word of God

when it is the word *given*, and that word does not necessarily have to be a written canonical word to be a word of God. It is not a word that will contradict Scripture. But it could be a word of mocking, or insult, or confrontation, a strange and foolish word. It is a word that must be given, and that word is attested to by the power of God. Those who speak the *words of* God have already come to a sufficient death to themselves that the power or life of God can be meted out to them without any danger that the glory of God will be touched or misappropriated. A man who will bear God's words, and speak them, can be trusted with them-however offensive they might be to the hearer, or even to himself.

Given the absence of the deep conversions effected by the preaching of the word in our own generation, one wonders if we have sufficiently considered the meaning of the word *sent*. Have we naively assumed that *any* promulgation of the gospel, or evangelizing, is blessed and honored of God? Likewise, it is perhaps wise to also consider whether any message, however correct, is indeed the word of God, especially if it was humanly contrived to avoid the very humiliation which I am suggesting is at the heart of the gospel as "event." If preaching Christ is more than the message *about* Him, but is rather, the showing forth *of* Him, then the God who sends may yet be waiting for suitable candidates for His sending. The issue is the issue of the Cross, and one might rightly suspect that it will not come to men with full conviction, except through the lips of those who know the Cross in their own experience, and are willing to suffer the humiliation of it again and again in the very foolishness of their speaking. If our speaking is not foolishness, then it is not a true speaking. It may amuse men, it may even inform and inspire, but it will *never* be an event.

Our own generation, like that of the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote, bears a greater affinity for sophistication and self-adulation than the God who made Himself of no reputation. A true preaching requirement, rightly considered, would be for us to think often of our wretchedness, that we may only have contempt for ourselves and our ability. To preach truly is not the issue of skill or learned technique, but a divine mystery. The very word "preaching" is derived from the Latin word *praedikare*, which means "to make known." As I have said, it was at the Cross that an uninitiated centurion, dulled by participation in much murder and violence, was compelled to proclaim, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*" Whenever Christ's humiliation is explicated in the foolishness of preaching, He is again revealed and set forth to be the Savior. For just as God gives grace to the humble, so also does He, who is full of grace and truth, have opportunity to intersect time and eternity, heaven and earth, in the moment of authentic meekness when a preacher ceases from himself.

A familiar illustration of this cruciform life is to be found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he exclaims:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (Chap. 1:1-2).

For all of Paul's erudition and religious knowledge, that kind of self-imposed limitation required a painful determination. The trouble is that we *know* so much, and so much that we know wants to find expression. It requires therefore a determination to put away what is so accessible and available to our preaching.

### **True Preaching Waits on True Sending**

Everything rests on the preacher being *sent*. This means that the community sending him is of one mind with him. They necessarily share the same mentality and Cross-centeredness or God would not say, "*Set apart for Me,*" except that the man was already separated and could be sent by the laying on of hands by people of like mind, heart and spirit. The man

sent is being sent *in place of Christ*, and those who are hearing him are hearing exactly what they would have heard had Christ Himself come in person to them. To be sent is much more than being commissioned; it is rather to be sent in place of another and the Other is Christ Himself, and it is through those who are sent that the people hear Christ's voice and speech.

But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"-that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; "WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!" However, they did not all heed the glad tidings for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:8-17).

The reducing of this to a formula, putting before the hearer and particularly the Jew some kind of 'easy-believism,' characterizes, in fact, most of modern day evangelism, and has left many outside the Kingdom. The hearers recite a "repeat after me" prayer and miss the whole profound point. There is a certain kind of hearing that is required for a certain kind of believing; and that requires, therefore, a certain kind of preaching a certain kind of word. Paul is actually citing from the Book of Isaiah where the prophet says,

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7).

This verse is, however, preceded by something remarkable in verse 6,

Therefore My people shall know My name; therefore in that day I am the one who is speaking, "Here I am."

The word *announce* is better understood as meaning *pronounce* or *proclaim*. It is not merely an announcement or verbalization, but a word that constitutes an event when it is sounded. *Announcement* does not quite get at the distinctive of true preaching. True proclamation is more than informative; it is a creative 'rhema' and breath of God, in the hearing of which an event occurs faith is established where there was none before.

God is not telling us to propound the faith to others in a systematic way by which their logic can be satisfied, so they can be won over by some kind of invincible logic of statements. He says rather that the key to their believing, and their calling on the name of the Lord, is the hearing of a particular word, namely, the *word of Christ Himself*. The feet of those who bear good news are called lovely or blessed because, "*I am the one who is speaking, 'Here I am.'*" The One who is speaking through those whose feet bear the good tidings is not the earthen vessel on that mount, but the One who possesses that life and is speaking through the earthen vessel. It is actually Christ's *own* word. They hear the voice of God, and His word is as creative as it was in the beginning when He spoke, and it was.

The voice, the speaking, the content, and the words that constitute the creative event that establishes faith to believe, enabling the hostile and resistant to call on His name, is actually His voice, His speaking and His words. We might believe it could come through some

giants of the faith like Paul, but can we believe the phenomenon will come through ourselves? Or that God would have the possession of us, who are the sons and daughters of resurrection, so much that we might say with absolute certitude, "It is He who is speaking, here He is."? We are not just talking about effecting individual salvation however great that is, but the whole consummation of the age waits upon a restoration of a remnant from the people Israel, who have been historically and adamantly opposed to this very gospel, and who are the enemies of the gospel to this day "*for our sake.*" How shall they believe in what they have so long rejected? God says through Paul that they shall hear a word of a particular kind.

Unless they hear *Him*, Christ's message and voice, they will not believe the truths of His death and resurrection. If you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, and God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved, but how shall *they* believe on Him unless they believe that He was raised from the dead? And how shall they believe that He was raised from the dead except that the evidence of the resurrection is in the words, the demeanor, the voice, the disposition and the constitution of the man who stands before them, whose feet are blessed on the holy mountain of God, and who shows forth, as a son of the resurrection, the truth of the resurrection, whose words are resurrection words of creative power that the hearers can believe? That is the issue of the salvation of the unsaved, and particularly of the Jew in the Last Days. It is *ourselves* and what we present to them that has the potential to bring about their salvation.

### **Resurrection Life**

The issue of the resurrection is inextricably linked to the authenticity of Jesus' Lordship in the believer's life.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself to becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11).

The resurrection of Jesus is the exaltation of the One who experienced an ultimate humiliation unto death. His Lordship consists of His being exalted above every name, and that is what is conferred upon Him, through His resurrection, for His obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross. That is why "whosoever shall believe that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised Him from the dead shall be saved." Those are the two principal doctrines, and they are inextricably joined together. If there was no resurrection, then there is no Lordship.

In seeing, therefore, the resurrection of Christ, and hearing the voice of the resurrected Christ in the messenger, the unbeliever, who has had no preparation for this encounter, is faced with the end of *his* lordship over *his* own life. It is the end of his bank account, his business mergers and of what he is going to do—all that is finished. All of that pseudo stuff is ended when Jesus becomes Lord and says, "Now you'll do *My* bidding." The reason why people are offended at God, who would otherwise enjoy God as God, is that they do not like the *Lord* part. It is the lordship that catches them in the throat, and especially my Jewish people, because they like to be lords of their own lives. To acknowledge that Jesus is Lord requires the *power* that raised Him from the dead.

To hear and see, therefore, a messenger who speaks Christ's words is to hear and see evidence that Christ is resurrected. The messenger must himself be a son of the

resurrection, or he would not be a "witness unto Him," which is to say, he is not yet authentically joined with Him. The fellowship out of which he comes must be a fellowship of a resurrected people who live in the power and the reality of resurrection, or there is no sending that results in a 'sent one.' The whole issue is the truth of resurrection as it is experientially known by a people in the earth, or both Jew and Gentile remain locked in their unbelief. Nothing else will free them.

To believe the resurrection is to believe that Jesus is Lord. To believe that Jesus is Lord is to believe the resurrection. To believe *at all* is a miracle that takes place by the operation of God through the speaking and hearing of one who is sent, who brings the glad tidings, that those who hear it might believe and call upon the name of the Lord. That is more than just giving God a little honorific acknowledgment. It means the surrender of the independent life to the totality of God's authority once and for all. That is full salvation, and anything less and other than that is poor facsimile.

Why does God bless the feet of those who not only bring good news and pronounce peace, but whose *word* actually constitutes peace and establishes salvation, and who says to Zion, "*Your God reigns*"? It is because the one who is bringing the good news is the one in whom God reigns *in fact*. Though the one who is hearing him cannot articulate what he is sensing, the truth of the lordship in the man who is speaking is evident. There is a God who reigns, and the truth of His reigning as Lord is demonstrated in the posture, the voice, the face, the demeanor and the character of the one who brings the glad tidings. The messenger is everything. He is a sent one. He needs to be more than a well-meaning evangelical Christian or a charismatic cream puff. He has got to be a piece of the resurrection himself.

God will not give His glory to another, except when it is exclusively *Himself* being expressed by the preacher, and that is why we do not see *that* glory, because not many of us are willing to live on that razor's edge. We are not so much concerned with the glory of God as avoiding the embarrassment of failure. That is why we have so little resurrection event in our weekly pulpit preaching. That is why true preaching is different and other than conventional preaching. Conventional preaching can never be an event in God. It does not raise the dead. As someone has said, and I believe it out of my own experience: "Every true preaching is a raising again of the dead." We need to have an enhanced appreciation for what resurrection means as a "God-event" in the word that is spoken in resurrection power. We will never be a mouth for that if we are trying to preserve our reputation, or if we are afraid ourselves to experience death. What if the word fails? What if, having trusted God absolutely, and not leaning on our own resources, He does not come through? What if we are left with our face sticking out, and instead of a powerful resurrection word, there is just a little *beep* and it falls to the ground with a thud? Then what? We have bowed to those fears, and that is why we do not see the glory of God.

Who is the only one qualified to preach a word like that? The man who does not want to preach, the man who wants to run the other way, the Jonah who wants to escape the call of God. The man, however, who loves to talk, loves to be public and enjoys being seen and heard, need not think that a word like this will ever be emitted from *his* mouth. The man who sighs and groans when he gets up to the pulpit, and would rather that the floor open up and swallow him, who does not want to be there, who feels terribly uncomfortable and who knows that he is not going to be understood, is the man out of whose mouth the word of true preaching is most likely to come.

### **The Mark of Authority**

Authority marks the preacher sent of God. One can be correct without being persuasive, let

alone penetrating, but from the outset of Jesus' ministry, it was the authority with which He spoke that caught the attention of His hearers:

And they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority (Luke 4:32).

Recognizing that all authority belongs to God, one must assume that the measure expressed by the speaker is the measure given to him. Authority *is* God, in the measure to which He Himself is participating in what is being said.

In an hour in which biblical faith is eroding, many of us are content with mere scriptural or doctrinal correctness. How urgent it is, then, to elevate the Church's whole level of regard for the authority of the word. We need to elevate expectation for the word to be creative producing change and establishing faith in the hearer a word beyond that which is merely informational. In my observation, we do not have this expectation. We do not come to hear the word *of God*, but rather a word *about* God, by a man himself who does not believe that he is speaking the word *of God*.

Perhaps what is needed for these times is not only a heightened regard for the speaking of the word of God, but also for silence. If God has not given us a word for a particular occasion for which we have been asked to speak, then we need to announce that fact and not try to fill the silence and alleviate the tension by what we can so easily produce of ourselves. God will test us, for He wants to see the depths of our jealousy for the word of God. The issue of speaking, in the last analysis, is the issue of silence, namely, the ability to suffer the tension of *not* speaking. Our regard for true speaking needs to be so great that we will not welcome any kind of equivalent or substitute, and we would rather suffer the tension of silence than fill it with some expedient thing that is good or even biblical. This requires a jealousy for the glory of God and an insistence that the word that we hear and speak will be His.

We crave things that would occupy our ears and eyes, and we need to have something happening that is auditory or visible. When those things do not happen, we come apart at the seams. Can we not sit in the peace of God? In fact, we should have no desire to touch or form the mode of the speaking or the mood of it that is equally as much the province of God as the content. It is the *word* that is the event, not the stylistic presentation, and when we attempt to bring a stylistic presentation, then we rob the word of its power and we lapse into human eloquence. The word itself is the bread of life that has come down from heaven, *but it must be given* as is.

Where that boldness or authority is not present, and therefore, not expressed, then the sermon stands in jeopardy of becoming mere ceremony, a piece of familiar and unchallenging predictability. It requires nothing from its hearers and it makes no demand; it only fills the space that has been made for it and there is no glory in the Church. We have only been sermonized. We have missed that which is creative. Instead, just the opposite has taken place; we have been dulled in our spirits, in our discernment and in our spirituality. To that measure, we are incapacitated as God's agents in the world and constitute only a sleepy Sunday religious culture that the world can well afford to ignore. The faith is holy. We cannot live, transact, and operate our lives as though this were not so, and think that there will be no consequence of any kind. As nature abhors a vacuum, that space, which should have been filled with godly and Spirit-content, now invites murky and dubious substitutes only too eager to provide an alternative in themselves.

How out of tune our contemporary preaching is to the whole tenor of Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:4



Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Evidently, to preach the word was to be particular, pointed and uncompromising in confronting the saints on the condition of their lives and the necessity for change-and they knew it.

In our age of ministerial professionalism, degree credentials from institutions of learning carry more weight than being authentically and apostolically charged for the call of ministry. This is only a symptom of the yet larger problem, namely, the substitution of the glory of God in the Church for a man-pleasing ethos. That is why we have such shallow teaching and preaching. God is not giving His authority and depth to men who would use it and usurp it for their own ends, their own names, and their own movements and religious successes.

If we are going to have a creative word that performs a work in them that hear it, then it needs to come from men who are not ruled by the fear of man, but by the fear of God. Only such a one will have the incentive to wait upon Him, and a communion with Him sufficient to seek Him for the word that *He* commands. It was in the place of communion, in the waiting before the Lord, by men who are just as content to remain as to go, that the Holy Spirit sent the word: "*Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul...*" The same way by which the word came, out of communion, is the same way by which the word must continue in the unfolding of their "apostolic" career. We need to be reminded that the veil is rent. There is a God who bids us enter boldly, and makes it known that there is a place of communion available in the holiest place of all, above the ark, between the cherubim at the mercy seat of God, and in His Shekinah presence where His intimate whisper can be heard.

In the last analysis, the world is dying for the lack of the communication of very God Himself. This is the apostolic message, the foundation of the Church, and all reality itself.

## Chapter 9 - Apostolic Lifestyle

The Church's call to an authentic poverty of lifestyle is not an option we can lightly dismiss. Religiously speaking, we can make a performance out of it, and cheapen it, as Catholicism has done through *religiously induced* poverty and abstinence. That is a humanly contrived substitute, and effects nothing in the Kingdom of God. There is, however, a place for simplicity of lifestyle and dependency upon God that has everything to do with the integrity and quality of the word that comes out of the believer. In fact, the very popularity that comes with speaking messages that are "approved" and that men *want* to hear, will assure you of response both in admiration, applause *and in giving*. This is not to demean the motives of men to say that they are choosing a wrong message in order that their middle-class lifestyles might be maintained. But somewhere in the realm of the labyrinthine corridors of the soul, we know that to be accepted, to be popular, and to be approved is also to prosper. To speak a word that is "unpleasant" and "contradictory" ensures that you are going to cut yourself off from the kinds of things that men-pleasers might think appropriate.

### **The Lord's Coming**

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For

ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation' (2 Peter 3:3-4).

The Lord's coming is a critical doctrine, and one that must not stand in isolation from other doctrines. To mock, or scoff, at His coming is to scoff at *everything*. It is to mock the faith and the word of God itself. Mocking is a contemptuous, contemptible attitude, and we can be mockers and not even know it. We can mock by something in our spirit that is not expressed in our words, but just by the way we carry or bear ourselves. For example, making careful and meticulous provision for our retirement, or looking forward to a long life, is in effect scoffing against the known doctrine of the coming of the Lord. Another example would be church groups in the perpetuating of their own institutions, which are scoffing against the coming of the Lord by making every kind of provision for His *not* coming.

By the same token, the erecting of multi-million dollar church buildings is not the statement of a people who are looking toward a soon-coming end a Lord who is 'at the door' and who is coming with Last Days' devastation and judgment. We will not be able to enjoy our concrete or glass palaces then. Our building programs are a statement that we are not "looking for His appearing," but if one were to suggest to the authorities of that fellowship that that is scoffing, they would be aghast, because they *subscribe* to the doctrine of the Lord's coming-*but only as a doctrine*. There is a difference between holding a doctrine and existential expectation. It is not the mere holding of doctrines that distinguishes us as the Church, but rather, do we have an actual apocalyptic expectation of an end? Is it such a pulsating reality for us that our plans for our retirement and for the future are radically affected? The use of our money and time is directly related to what we believe with regard to a soon-coming end, and if our conduct in our use of time and money contradict the doctrine of the Lord's coming, then we are, in effect, for the most part *scoffing*.

In the early Church, those who had houses and land sold them and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. They thought, "I do not need this. The Lord is at the door. The end is near. Why am I clutching my possessions? I will make my goods available now so that there might not be any who has need." They *believed* that the end was near. They had an apocalyptic expectancy and lived in that expectancy as being the logic of the faith.

...in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts...(v.3)

Our theological positions are more regulated by and related to the gratification of our bodily lusts than they are to our intellect though we are not likely conscious of it. If we were to examine the moral condition of our lives, we would find out why it is we have so little faith. Lust has an enormous power to dull the mind and spirit to the truths of God, even so much as to shut out the issue of eternity. A lust is by nature a desire, and there is a world of difference between a legitimate desire, an earthly need, and a desire that God looks upon as a lust that will affect our theological and doctrinal expectations. In these verses, Peter is speaking about believers in the Last Days who will mock and scoff, and the reason for their scoffing is that they do not expect His coming. Their view of the faith and their expectation of His coming have been corrupted by their lust and by desires that are not legitimate. This is critical for us because the world has become very expert in its power to tempt us to indulge in desires of every kind. In times past, there were things hardly considered to be valid as needs. But today, many desires are looked upon as needs, and people will sacrifice whatever it takes to get these "needs" met. But they are really lusts that have been legitimized by the world of commerce. It is a powerful force, and we need to be careful to identify the difference.

The difference between a legitimate desire and a lust is its origin. Does it come from below or above? The fact that it is permissible to drink Coca-Cola all you want, even before

breakfast, does *not* make it godly. Just because it is freely available does not legitimize that desire. Do we submit our desires before the Lord? Is He the Lord of those things that we think small and insignificant, particularly in this merchandising world? There is a whole realm of things pertaining to lifestyle that have been made legitimate in our minds because of their availability but for which there are spiritual consequences for our lifestyle. Our faith is profoundly affected by our lifestyle, and we need to be free from the lifestyle that the world would impose upon us, convincing us that it is legitimate and normal. Our lifestyle and the issue of self-denial are contrary in every point to the spirit of the age, which is characterized by self-gratification, not self-denial. The mere availability of something does not make that thing right. Though it may seem innocent in itself, the indulgence in it opens the way for other things, and the full and final effect is to dull our hearts toward the things of God.

Once, in Egypt, I watched brothers with me who were "out of commission" if they did not get their hamburgers and French-fries. They were wretched. They *had to* have their "fix." Any dependency, even on something legitimate, that is not in itself intrinsically evil, needs to be watched. This is not being legalistic; rather it is sounding an alert, because merchandise has an incredible power, and that is what the apostle Peter is describing. I love ice cream, but I have observed that indulging in it does something to my sensuality. That is why fasting is so powerful. The body needs to be reminded who is in charge. Try denying it a little bit after it has had three or four meals a day, and there will be a shriek coming up from the stomach, so much so, that you will wonder if you have started a revolution!

The apostle Paul kept his body under subjection, continually buffeting it in one form or another. For him, it constituted an actual warfare lest having preached to others, he would be found a castaway. That does not mean he thought he would lose his faith, but he did not want to be found a castaway from the eternal reward and the distinctions of sonship in living the overcoming life, cast away from the privilege of the millennial blessedness, and have a place less than what might have been his because of an indulgence in his body. That is why this same man, when he was stripped and brutally beaten and thrown into an inner dungeon, could "praise the Lord and worship at midnight." His physical body was not the focus of his life.

The number of ministers who are overweight are an embarrassment to the faith. Their credibility is immediately lessened because they are not keeping their bodies under subjection. What then of their spirits? They cannot be taken seriously; nor does the world take them seriously, especially when they see believers compromised by the same lusts as they are. If you do not recognize that you have given yourself over to some habit forming thing, try doing away with it for the rest of the week, and see if there is not some clamor coming up from inside that demands gratification.

Paul specifically mentions those who have turned away from the Cross and have made their belly their god-and that was in a much more simple time. We live in the world of merchandising, and no wonder that there is a rejoicing in Heaven when Babylon comes down in one hour. The merchants, who have made their riches by it, lament and mourn. Babylon is not formed at some future time, but is already with us, and if we cannot "get our fix," then we will find ourselves taking the number of the Beast in order to obtain it. Are we able to live with a simple diet? Or will we take the number so that we can buy and sell and get the things that we think we *must* have? Esau thought that the loss of food, a bowl of lentils, was his death. He was habituated to his stomach and the gratification of his bodily lusts.

We had a discussion once in the fellowship about "Sugar Pops" breakfast cereal. It went on for hours, and you could not believe the vehemence and heat of that discussion over what

kind of cereal was appropriate for our end-time community and especially for our children. It is amazing what is revealed when the Lord takes the lid off, and it can only happen in community, because if you live privately, who is going to concern himself with what kind of cereal to buy? It was revealed that if our kids were not placated in what they wanted, then they made their mothers uncomfortable and agitated. They became all rattled and it consequently affected the sex life of the husband. And *this* was the real issue a husband having to face the problem of sexual denial because the wife is in an agitated condition making him want to say, "Give the kids the cereal that they want."

We began to see the naked rebellion that lies underneath the surface of the Church, and it would not have been revealed unless the issue of our children's cereal had come up. We would never have known it if we continued to live privately, buying and eating what we wanted. When it was too expensive to buy those cereals, and we saw how much cheaper it was to buy bulk quantities of grain, then it became an issue, and out of that came the revelation of what I have just described.

When a woman, who loved the message of the Cross, came to us from California and could not get her orange juice, she actually lied to obtain a supply. She hid it, like Ananias and Sapphira. When the Cross touched her orange juice, something of an evil kind was revealed in her heart that she would have carried into eternity had she remained in California. We talked about it in our prayer time, "Well, if it was vitamin C tablets, would you have done the same thing?" No, because the issue was not vitamin C, the issue was the gratification of the taste and the enjoyment of orange juice. She *had* to have it. It was not the issue of nutrition, but the issue of lust and gratification through something that is made delightful in its taste. It was a revelation of what we will do to gratify ourselves over flavor, even to lie and to contradict the Cross for which reason she had come to be part of our fellowship! The Lord showed us that whether it was orange juice for one woman, a hamburger, or ice cream, or cereal for another, every one of us had to have a "fix" of one sort or another, and *it was compromising us all*.

Food and drink have a powerful, magnetic and seductive draw, and the sensation of taste, the holding of it in the mouth and the thing going down the throat, all indicate that our desire for it can go far beyond the issue of nutrition and become an issue of sensuality. There is a component to food, though created by God, that is played upon by those who benefit and profit themselves at our expense through delight and sense-experience. We can go on to a whole dissertation, not only about food, but also about clothing, cars, and indeed the entire lifestyle that we have allowed to settle upon us in the world, contrary to the character of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Even the kind of housing we should put up became an issue. Were we to be some kind of retirement community, living in the woods in nice, rustic, middle-class housing, or was our lifestyle to be proportionate to our message? If we should minister in Egypt, would our word be credible and have authority? That word is altogether related to our lifestyle. It affects the quality, the authority, the intensity and the power of our word. What we need to recognize is how much the world has had its hand in shaping our lifestyle, our propensities, and our sense of privacy. So, in establishing our households, the question arises of how much space we need. What is appropriate living space? Our western society has established a certain mode of life that is not necessarily God's standard. We have found that it is only in coming into a community situation that the things reinforcing our selfishness are found out. But, in being found out, we are broken up and released for the kind of magnanimity, generosity and fellowship that was the distinctive genius of the early Church.

### **The Intensification of Life**

In community, the vicissitudes of life are compounded more furiously and over a shorter period of time. There is no how-to manual for community living, and God intends that no such manual should exist. If we could prescribe a way of *doing* it, then it would no longer be the Kingdom of God but *our* kingdom. It is *His* Kingdom, and therefore the expression of it has to be given in the locality where we are, according to the design of God Himself, distinctive and appropriate to the situation we are in. We do not have to be governed or ruled by earthly factors like employment or location. There are unquestioned premises by which the world itself operates, for example, the forty-hour work week and the necessity for a certain standard of living or lifestyle. These things need to be radically examined and altered in the light of the Kingdom of God and in what the Lord is expressly requiring, though it contradicts the conventional pattern. For instance, would we be willing to work shorter hours if it meant that the purposes of God would be forwarded?

We are instructed in the Scriptures to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. How many of us in fact do it, though we sing it beautifully? In seeking first His Kingdom, and in putting the values of the Kingdom *before* the values of our employment, or the things that our employment makes possible, we may well find ourselves facing many changes. No one is compelling us to live by what we are able to earn in the world. What are the values that are closest to our hearts? Is it the suburban retreat, or the home that we have loved for years, or do we want the proximity with the saints for which we are willing to forsake *that* pleasure, however dear and however long we have enjoyed it? This is what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God, and surely this applies to where we are presently living. We should not be mindlessly saddled by the world's pattern, but rather invite the light of the Kingdom into our present situation. Are our lifestyles, employment, and the use of our money and time consonant with the Kingdom of God? For so many of us men, employment and distinction in making a living on the basis of our own ability are the props of own self-esteem, but it is a false security.

We need to have a revelation of the deep egocentric orientation of modern Christianity and how it affects and afflicts us all, and to recognize how Herculean a power is needed to break that centrifugal force, releasing our lives to be spent for God. Our motives need to be examined, and the interaction with the saints on an intensive daily basis performs exactly *that*, lays us bare, and brings the light of God into the things that are hidden. This is one of the virtues of community itself. We begin to see ourselves as God sees us. The apostles "*went from house-to-house daily breaking bread.*" They had the daily interaction, which is the genius of New Testament church, and needs once again to be restored.

We are not together frequently enough, or intensively enough, to come to this. Someone always comes up to me and says, "But Art, I live too far away. I have my job and career. I cannot be there that often or that frequently. What should I do?" I reply, "Sell your house and move closer. Change your job. Work fewer hours. Lower your standard of living. Give up your luxuries. Live more simply. Do not give all that time to the world. Make time for the people of God." Are we willing to give up our middle-class homes of comfort and privacy in order to come into a place of proximity with each other? The loss of comfort, privacy and convenience are the Cross, but where are our values anyway? The world encourages us to have a privatistic lifestyle, and our cooperation with the world is reflected in the way we love our privacy. We do not want it interrupted, but something has got to be sacrificed, and, as with everything else, it comes down to the issue of the Cross!

## Chapter 10 - Prayer and Worship

The assembling of the saints is so much more than merely coming together for a meeting, and needs to be seen, and better understood, as existential participation in the drama and dynamic of the life of the fellowship. It must, therefore, have its beginnings in the most deadly silence, where nobody knows how to begin. To have a paid minister "do it" for us is also a distortion of true fellowship. Overhead projectors, pre-determined and practiced choruses, and other techniques designed to prod the people into worship are incompatible with the freedom of the Holy Spirit. The life of God can only flow when the Spirit moves, and when we are obedient to be yielded to that Spirit. To what degree have we been schooled in the utilitarian world to look upon that as a waste? We want to come into church by 10:00 a.m. and be out by 12:30 p.m. It is a beautiful day, and we want to be out on the golf course; but the Body of Christ cannot be dealt with like that.

We had prayer meetings for ten years in the first Ben Israel community, and there were occasions when those meetings were agonizing and painful. We sat and looked at each other in a room face to face *in silence*. Everything in us was itching for something to be said. Nobody had a prayer, nobody had a word, nobody had a thought, and we waited and we waited. As mentioned earlier, our eyes and ears, being senses, desire so much to be gratified with something to see, something to hear; we want something to speak; we want to do. But silence is death to the senses, and asserts the primacy of the rule of God over our senses, which want to have an independent existence from Him. Waiting is a form of dying, and we could have alleviated that uneasiness; we were clever enough; we could have said something, or broken into a chorus. It was a suffering until someone finally prayed something, or said something, but the sessions that began in that kind of painful death frequently, if not invariably, ended in glory.

Authentic prayer, and even authentic praise and worship are themselves a "re-enactment" of the Cross. That re-enactment is our willingness to forsake and put aside human confidence and dependence, and come trembling and dependent upon God, willing to experience the foolishness of weakness. Are we prayers of the mere safe and timid kind? Are our prayers conventional and respectable? Are they "our" prayers, that we conceive in our own minds? Or are they God's prayers? Have we ever let go of the one in order to obtain the other? It is a fearful proposition to die to our own prayers. We will never know what form our prayer will take, or what its content will be, if we move from the one reality to the other. And even if we begin a prayer, will we be able to end it? And how will it sound? Will it embarrass us? Will it confuse those who hear it? There are many forms of suffering unto humiliation and death. Martyrdom is the easy when it comes as a final moment, but the truth of the Cross for the Church is the *daily* dying. This is what terrifies us failure, humiliation, and what men will think. We are afraid to take the risks of faith, lest we fail. Failure is death; humiliation is death, but in the Kingdom of God, it is *the way* of life.

If this dynamic of reality, centered in the Cross, has apprehended us, our prayers would be of another kind altogether. They would terrify the powers of darkness; they would be prayers that would even astonish us. No more would we insist upon our own agenda and the correctness of our own prayers. Are we willing to let go and let God be our source of prayer? It is a daily dying, and when we do die to ourselves, and are willing to risk embarrassment and failure, the life of God has its expression.

Every member should have a sense of his or her vital significance and importance. We need, therefore, to prepare ourselves for the coming together of the saints. We should not

go directly from the television set to the prayer meeting. It is a *holy* coming together for the Lord's use of us, and we should expect that. Then, what begins in awkwardness and silence becomes unspeakably rich. Each one is obedient to express a word, or quote a Scripture, or sing a hymn, or to give a prophecy. It becomes a statement of God's very heart; but it requires *every* part to be expressed, or we would not have the whole thing.

The quality and authenticity of our corporate prayer cannot exceed the quality and authenticity of our relationships in our life together. In other words, true prayer is relative to the quality and the truth of the corporate life *together*. Prayer is not the issue of virtuosity or skill; it is the statement of the truth of the corporate life. Are we in a place of union and identification with the Lord *together*, or are we disjointed and isolated individual entities, who have not a significant and authentic reality in relationship among ourselves? There is a Cross, which has a horizontal member and a vertical member, and they both must be authentic. We delude ourselves to think that we can have a vertical relationship to God and some kind of solo, "lost in God" feeling, and still be forgetful of our neighbor. The safest way to measure our spirituality and relationship to God is not by our euphoric "lostness" in the "heavenlies," but with that flesh-and-blood thing right next to us our neighbor.

There is a place for private, or personal, prayer, but not in a corporate setting. True corporate prayer is the issue of corporate life, and it is only this kind of prayer that does business with the principalities and the powers of the air over our communities and nations. *That* kind of prayer can only be, and must be, corporate. The one thing that the powers of darkness are required to acknowledge is authenticity the thing that is real. There is too much unreality in prayer and praise, especially when emphasis is put on musical ability, electronic technology, and worship leaders. True praise is the spontaneous expression of the redemptive work of God in the life of the believers, personally and corporately, that finds expression involuntarily. *That* is authentic, and when the powers of the air hear *that*, they are required to flee. Our worship will never exceed the quality of our relationships. We can turn up the amplifiers all we want and create an euphoric musical atmosphere and yet be deceived. Worship is more than singing. The heart of worship is sacrifice, and there is nothing more sacrificial than the loss of our privacy and our individualism and the kinds of things that we experience if we give ourselves in earnest relationship one to another.

Community, as I have said before, is the intensification of all of life, and brings to the surface things that would otherwise have gone undetected because of that intensity. Life together compels recognition and dealing, which is to say, suffering, but it is out of that grit that the possibility is opened for reality and the glory and grace of God. Worship is the spontaneous overflow of joy and praise to God for the depth and the truth of His sanctifying work that has come through struggle and suffering *together*. And any praise that is praise indeed has got to be an unconscious, unpremeditated and unorchestrated expression of a reality that has come corporately through suffering, by people who are together long enough and intensely enough to obtain it.

## Chapter 11 - Fellowship and the Mystery of the Trinity

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us what we have seen

and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).

The same phrase, "In the beginning, God..." is also used in Genesis chapter one, so it would seem that John is consciously trying to parallel the first words of Genesis, to show an arc of continuity with the whole flow of God's redemptive drama in history. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. In an almost jarring combination of terms, John speaks of the distant past, and then, in the very same verse, he talks about every day things such as "our hands have handled..." It is almost like the paradox of "heaven" and "earth" being brought together in one statement. Touching and handling divinity in that manner sounds disrespectful, but what is John's purpose in using earthly references to handling, touching, and seeing in the same breath with the eternality of the One who was being described? The bringing together of disparate things, which seemingly contradict one another, becomes all the more potent, and for that reason, we should rightly give it our full attention.

The environment in which this epistle was written will give us a key to why John, by the Spirit, is emphasizing the tangible, physical, and visible. He is addressing readers who were in a state of confusion over certain prevalent ideas and moods that were affecting Jewish and non-Jewish believers in that part of the world. He is speaking and writing in such a way as to touch a controversy that was already pervading the Church at that time, namely, the dismissal of the incarnate reality of Jesus. Back then, and in more subtle ways today, reference to the bodily, physical and touchable was by definition, common, coarse, and innately corrupt. "How do you fit Deity into a body?" one might have asked.

### **The Principle of Incarnation**

In fact, God coming in the flesh may well be at the heart of every opposition to God. It is certainly an offense to Jews, both presently and historically, but there is a degree in which it is just as much an offense to the Church in this day and age. Many will acknowledge God's coming in the flesh theologically and ideologically, and they will acknowledge that this was true of Jesus historically; but they will not acknowledge anything more than that. If you go beyond that, and say that God is in *your* flesh, or in flesh that we know or see, the whole offense of incarnation is raised again. And though we may agree that God was in the flesh of Jesus, have we really made our peace with this radical doctrine? We might be only condescending to what we know technically to be true, and therefore indisputable, but have we really been brought into the ultimate mystery of incarnation *God in man*? If we have not, it will surface, and show itself in one form or another. We need to understand that our "agreement" with acceptable doctrine does not necessarily make it true agreement. To merely nod our heads benignly and acknowledge that, yes, God came in the flesh, and then move on, is not really to deal with how staggering a thing Jesus represented in His coming, and how staggering a thing it is still.

It was not beneath the dignity of God to be confined to human form. Jesus would have needed to defecate, urinate, sweat, and go through the humiliating things that we all go through. How many of us have not been humiliated with a bowel movement? It is a daily humiliation, and has enraged men like the German philosopher, Nietzsche, that God created man in such a way that he has to be daily humiliated by his natural bodily functions. Let us turn the clock back, and let us say that Jesus walked into the room with the words, "If you see Me, you see the Father; I and the Father are one," and we are looking at this guy and thinking, "Is that sweat I behold on His brow? Do I sense a little bodily exhaustion there?" Do we understand how *any* man coming and purporting to be *one with God* would stagger us?



There are reasons why God came in bodily form, but we need to really understand the heart of the offense, because it does not end with Jesus.

The principle of incarnation is the genius, or essential quality, of the Church. If we ourselves are offended by the glory of that reality, we effectually block the phenomenon from being the present principle of our own life. No one wants to say that, "If you hear me, you are hearing the words of God." Paul makes that astounding statement, "For me, to live is Christ," and we say, "Well, that is okay for Paul, but let us not think that any of our contemporaries dares presume to be in the kind of relationship that Paul had with Jesus, and that Jesus had with the Father." But by thinking such things, we are *not* apprehending the depth of the reality that God intends as normative for the Church; we are satisfying ourselves with mere technical agreement, and the mystery of this glory will not be our experience. But *unless* we have that relationship, we ourselves are falling short of the glory of God. In His own incarnation, God's definitive intention was to set before us the very model that we are called to exemplify. Now *that* is the good news! It is much greater than the issue of forgiveness of sins; the *Life* that was made manifest is now available and accessible to saints who have the faith to appropriate it, and who have yielded to the condition of the giving of that Life.

But what would it take to prove someone's claim, even Jesus', had we been there in His time? Would we see by the way a person spoke, looked, or carried himself that this was the incontrovertible proof that what he was saying was true? What demonstration would it take? Jesus is making what appears to be extravagant claims by forgiving men their sins, taking on the prerogatives of God, and allowing men to worship Him. He is not waiting to die to assert these claims. On what basis is He requiring men to acknowledge Him as God? What evidence is He giving? John's answer is that "the Life was manifested." That Life is the Life of God, in other words, *God* was manifested. But what did Jesus manifest to Israel that would make His claims as "God in the flesh" valid? What was the manifestation of the Life? I do not think John was talking about the miracles Jesus performed. What would those who lived with Him say those who touched, felt and looked upon Him? As moderns, we have texts, commentaries and a whole corpus of understanding, but what was the basis for *John's* affirmation that the Life was made manifest? We know that Jesus manifested the *character* of God, but is John alluding to character alone? It is true that sufferings unto death reveal most profoundly the truth of the character of anyone, but *before* Jesus' crucifixion, men were bowing and calling Him, "My Lord, and My God." John would have said that the Life was manifested before the Crucifixion, and I am asking, where and how.

Why was Nicodemus not bowled over in his conversation with Jesus? Was the Life not manifest before him? But instead, he was confused and bewildered. What would *we* expect to see manifested if God were to take upon Himself the form of flesh and dwell among us? What necessary expression must there be if that Life is the Life of God and is now being expressed through the human body? God is the Creator, God is righteousness, God is Glory, God is Power, and God is Holiness. God is beyond definition, and yet, He comes in the flesh and He manifests Himself in a Man. What would that manifestation take, so that we could agree that this is God? If those to whom He came had erroneous views about God, projections of their own imagining, they would have been disappointed by what Jesus manifested. They would not expect God to be manifesting humility, lowliness of character and meekness. They would expect God to come with "real" credentials, and "real" authority, letting everyone know that this was very God. Yet God was not manifested according to the stereotypical expectations of a generation that was far removed from Him. They expected a Deliverer who would expel the Romans and restore the glory of Israel. But here is this unobtrusive character, having no place to lay His head, an itinerant preacher, poor and coming from a city of low reputation and yet, John says that He manifested the Life!

What, therefore, is the essence of that Life? What is the unmistakable and essential

constitution of the Life of God, even when it is expressed through a sweating man? What inescapable trademark, character and quality must that Life express? If Israel had been *in the Spirit*, they surely would have recognized Him. Obviously, "God manifested" does not necessarily mean that everyone who has opportunity to glimpse it will be persuaded.

In the beginning God said, "Let there be light, and there was light," and if that same God is manifested in human form at a later time, whatever will be said by that One ought to bear some resonance of the God who said, "Let there be light." When He says to a fisherman, or to a tax collector, "Follow Me," the man gets up from his table, from his vocation, and follows Him. A word came of the same resonance, quality and authority that spoke to the chaos and said, "Let there be...and there was." Since God is the Word, one of the most important manifestations of the Life would be the word that issues from the one who purports to be of God, with God, and indeed, God Himself, and it is evidenced in just two words, "Follow Me." Men got up and went. They were not hypnotized; they heard something, likely from a heart that was reverently disposed to God.

But many were offended and turned away when Jesus said to His disciples, "Will you turn away also?" Their reply was, "Lord, where shall we go, for You have the words of eternal life." They might just as well have said, "You *are* the words of eternal life. Where shall we go? You are it, and the words that proceed from You are the unequivocal demonstration of that truth. You have the words of eternal life." In the wisdom and economy of God, those who do not receive the manifestation of the Life will experience it as death. There is no room for neutrality here. The word of God is Life, and it will either be received as Life, or, being rejected as Life, it will bring death. It will bring a hardening, "If you hear My voice, harden not your hearts." A response to the hearing of the word of Life from God is required. God cannot be present, and nothing takes place. God is Life; there has got to be a movement, an activity, a vitality, an expression; there has got to be a manifestation, as was evidenced in the entire earthly ministry of Jesus.

### **The Fellowship as Incarnation**

The summation of all they had seen, heard, known and experienced testified that this was *the* Life. It was not just an isolated expression here or there, but the totality, including the character, that was displayed. And now, the mystery is that Christian fellowship is the incarnation of that reality:

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

There is a divine logic here: The Life was manifested, and it is on the basis of this Life that you will have fellowship, because that fellowship is the next expression of the same reality that was manifest in Jesus. Now *your* earthly body has God in its midst, or you could not have fellowship. Fellowship is not a social club that can be performed on the basis of politeness. This is ultimate relationship, known only to the Godhead Themselves: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The mystery is that this Life is going to be made manifest in the earth, and it will be the same quality of fellowship, because now we have the key to the enablement, namely, the Life that was made manifest. And if we do not have the Life, we are making a phony profession; we have only a principle, not the reality.

God added to the weight of things by bringing Gentiles into the picture. If it had only been Jews, they could have continued like the Pharisees, an exclusive "club" by those who "speak the same language." But now that Gentiles are coming in, with all of the differences represented in them, the fat is really in the fire. This same quality of relationship is expected

to be found in them, and has to be demonstrated and made possible through the *Life* of God, which we shall see later as being the *love* of God. In this, we can see the genius of God in opening the doors to Gentiles in order to save the early Jewish Church from the kind of presumption toward which they were already tending.

The fellowship is, therefore, the continuation of the mystery of the Godhead, now made up of diverse souls, both Jews and Gentiles. And if the nature of God is light in whom there is no darkness at all, then it would follow that there would be no darkness in the fellowship of the Jews and Gentiles that is made possible by the Life. This is the most extraordinary fellowship ever in the history of mankind. This is true fellowship. Fellowship is not fellowship until we are in the light as He is in the light, and we will know we are in this actuality because *joy* will testify to it, "And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete" (v:4). Joy will issue naturally and spontaneously when we are in the reality of the kind of fellowship that the Godhead enjoys together in the light.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us (1 John 2:19).

Why would anyone want to leave this kind of fellowship? Are we hoping to find a more perfect form of fellowship than the one we have left? That itself is error, because we are not going to find a more perfect form; we are going to find other believers going through the same kinds of struggles. To leave one group of believers in order to find a more ideal alternative is an indication that we do not understand what true fellowship is. It reveals that we are unwilling to face the constituent elements of true fellowship. And that is why John can categorically dismiss these people because they have missed the issue; they have missed the reality; their very going out is the statement in itself, or else they would have remained. There was no reason to go out if they were the people of God, but the fact that they have gone out indicates that they were not what they purported to be.

A good justification for living in community is that it necessitates the ongoing daily experience of living with what has been heard and said among us, rather than those things being broken off until the next Sunday. John is not talking about going out from a Church fellowship, but rather a going out from *his fellowship*. You can no more go out from fellowship than you can go out from the Lord, who has the words of eternal life, "Where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." This is the Lord; this is His body; this is the warp and woof to which we have been called and brought. Where shall we go? We cannot go out from that reality and still purport to have a relationship with God.

The joy of the Lord can only be full in *that* relationship and reality. There can be a constant sea of joy that is not always felt or experienced as delight, but joy is a solid undergirding that enables us to bear the friction, tensions and momentary differences that will, in time, be reconciled. And we can wait for that time without coming apart at the seams, or looking at the brother as an enemy or a threat. We can bear the things that God is working out, and there is a joy that enables us to bear, though it may not be pleasant at the time.

There is an extravagant promise in 1 John 2,

The one who loves His brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes (v. 10-11).

John connects abiding in the light with the issue of love. What is the quality of our love for the most difficult, threatening or irritating brother? The issue of light is also the issue of clarity of seeing, not only in relationship, but in all areas of life, so that there is no prospect of

stumbling in one who loves. John, guided by the Spirit to express the wisdom of God, equates love with the issue of light; and light is essential to right walking.

This group who had left John's fellowship not only continued to announce themselves as Christians, but they raised aspersions as to whether John was the real thing, and whether his fellowship was authentic!

And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3).

To John, the knowledge of God is expressed in how that knowledge is worked out practically in what we do, namely, keeping His commandments, and the primary commandment is to love. You can only obey it because you are *in* Him who is love, and that is how you can distinguish those who make phony professions of the knowledge of God from those who are actually *in* the true faith. The word "in" is everywhere used throughout the text. This is the controversy, and John's letter is to reassure those in the faith, those who are being questioned concerning what they represent. The evidence of a real knowing of God is expressed by obedience to the commandment, the most difficult and impossible of all commandments: *to love the brethren*.

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4).

If we have no intention of obeying this commandment, that is already the evidence we are only making a verbal profession of the faith, and we are likely a fraud. A sincere believer would desire to honor the God who has given the commandment, though he knows it is impossible to fulfill out of his own unaided humanity.

But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him (v.5).

The completion of love is a process that comes through obedience. This is how we know we are in Him. This is the *ipso facto* evidence of the truth of one's claim to be *in* Christ, namely, our obedience to the commandment. The phrase, "has truly been perfected" indicates that this kind of perfection is not automatic, and is not all there from the beginning of our Christian walk.

### **Love Incarnate**

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (1 John 2:6).

So here the bar is raised; the standard is a love higher than the love you have for someone who is like you even the Pharisees could do that but it is the love that was displayed by Jesus. If we could only understand how different the God of love, and the love of God, are from anything that we understand as love. This is the new and high standard raised by the demonstration of Jesus' love for sinners, and it is *this* standard that God now seeks to be exemplified in the Church by the same sacrificial extension of the love of the brethren, one for another. In fact, we cannot understand love unless we understand what God demonstrated through Jesus at the Cross. Jesus' demonstration was not mere condescension to men; it was Jesus bearing the wrath of the Father, that men need not suffer that, while they are yet sinners. Love, therefore, takes on a new meaning that waits upon this demonstration of God through Jesus at the Cross, and then that becomes the standard for the Church. But if we miss what is represented at the Cross, we lose the standard, and "love" degenerates into something much less a sentimental feeling or affectionate emotion.

We have again the powerful emphasis on incarnation: "The one who says he abides in Him

ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." In other words, if we are *in* Him, then the God who is love continually finds expression through us in the same manner that it was expressed through Jesus in His own body. This is not an effort to merely imitate Him, but it is, rather, the issue of incarnation, or believing *into* Him, who is love. This is the only basis upon which God's standard can be met, and it is the differentiation of the true from the false. Only God can obey His own commandment. It is an *ultimate* obedience, drawing from an ultimate source from the God who is, Himself, love.

The love of God *is* God, and unless it is wrought in us, or we are *in* Him who is love, what then can we demonstrate? Even to think that we can produce something that looks like love, because it is emotional or affectionate, is an effectual denial of God. And the truth of this can only be tested in the authenticity of fellowship itself, where the self-generated love will collapse. In the intensity of life that fellowship is, the abrasive things will always come to the surface. Believers are too disagreeable, too ornery, and there are too many points of disagreement among them for it to be otherwise. And the only way you can work through the tensions and trials is by the love of God, by seeking to obey the commandment. And it says that as you seek, God's love is made complete, but this is not a justification for indifference or nonchalance. One must earnestly desire to be *in* Christ in order that His love might be given to us, so that we would be pricked by the lack of demonstration of it, and that we would know that it must come from Him.

The world lives by "*eros*" love a love that characterizes most relationships between men and women. *Eros* love is a self-gratifying love that seeks to possess another person for one's own gratification. God's "*agape*" love is a self-sacrificial yielding, in which you expect no benefit from the extending of yourself. This is exactly what Jesus did at the Cross, and only that kind of love is capable of extending itself for the unlovely. *Eros* love looks for gratification in an object that it deems worthy of affection and attention. *Agape* does not depend upon the object of its love being worthy, but wholly upon the one who *demonstrates* this love being worthy one. *Agape* is not based upon the object of it being deserving, but upon what God is in Himself. God is love; it is the self-sacrificial love for the enemy, us, while we were yet sinners.

### **True Fellowship**

We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

It sounds like John is presuming to make *himself*, and those joined with him, the standard of proof itself; if you will not hear John, you are evidently out of the faith. Anyone who dares speak like this today would likely be considered a heretic. Is John exhibiting love? If this is really true, John's words must therefore be an expression of the love of God, despite the likelihood of being misconstrued.

No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit (1 John 4:12-13).

This is incarnational theology centering in the Life of God, the Life that we have seen, that we have handled even the eternal Life. If we are in the Life, we will express the love. Both the desire to obey the commandment, and the enablement to obey, are themselves the expression of that Life. In modern times, the tendency of the Church is to dismiss this union as a "mode of speaking," and therefore, to miss its literalness. There is a real "in Him," and in the Life, and in the love that have to have their outworking in the Body.

Chapter 4:18 gives a clue as to why the Life is not demonstrated more.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

Fear inhibits the expression of love. Love is vulnerable; love is opening yourself to painful things, and to disappointments. Guarding ourselves from that possibility is a sign of fear. Fear protects and restricts, and prevents the love from being made perfect and complete. Fear inhibits love, and that may be the single greatest factor for the lack of evidence of the love of God. Our own fear of being rejected, our unwillingness to take the risks of love, because we are defensive and afraid, have kept love from being made complete. The practical outworking of fear in a fellowship is the fear of opening one's self to love, and probably, it is a piece of the larger fear and insecurity concerning our eternal condition. If we had *that* confidence, we would be freer to open ourselves to the realities of love.

There is a real being "in Him," nourished in part, I believe, by communion, both in fellowship and relationship, as well as at the Lord's Table. As we shall see in the concluding chapter, eating at the Lord's Table is the renewing of the covenantal relationship with His life. In covenant, He has given His life for our rags, and *this* is the good news. It is not just the forgiveness of sins, but the giving of the Life and love of God in exchange for our threadbare and inadequate human substitute, and every time we take the covenantal cup, we are reaffirming this precious gift. The early Greek patristic Church, which historically is thought to have its origins from John the apostle, was very incarnationally-minded, with a great emphasis on communion and being in the Life, but we have lost this in modern times, being too mental in our categories and doctrines. We approve the doctrine, but are we in the Life of which the doctrine speaks? And are we maintaining the consistency of that Life?

Love will issue from being in the Life, and if it takes forms we do not recognize, we should not be offended. The God who is love must give the form of the love, and we must let love have its every expression. The only thing that keeps this incarnational theology from becoming esoteric mysticism is the down-to-earth necessity for the love of the brethren. "The one who loves God should love His brother also" (1 John 4:21b). God always brings us back to the stubborn reality of relational love with the brethren. He never allows love to be carried away into a hermit kind of isolated existence, but to the grit and reality of actual love to the brethren in all their diversity, both Jews and Greeks.

Are we willing for the cost of this reality? If we are not willing for *that* ground, though it leaves us open to being misconstrued, how then shall we be *in* Him? How then shall we be *in* love? This mode of being is God's normative intention for all His people. This is the glory of the faith. If we would rather perfect our own righteousness out of our humanity or religiosity, then we are disqualified; we are not drawing from the Life. And the Lord *will* test us and bring us to a "no-man's land." We will come to a place of being painfully embarrassed by the absence of anything that can be called Life. Incarnational ground is holy ground, and at the very heart of the genius of true fellowship.

We can say, "He who has the Son has Life," but to what degree does the Son have *us*? Are we totally yielded to the Son that He would *be* our life? Or are we walking in some kind of independence from Him? How many of us does the Son have in real possession, that is to say, in a total dependency on Him? And in whom His Life is real and sufficient for all of our needs love, wisdom, truth, righteousness everything? And if God be not raised from the dead, and this Life is not true, we, of all men, are most to be pitied, because we are casting ourselves totally and entirely on that Source. If we are not in totally casting ourselves upon Him, but rather, making our own provision for ourselves, we cannot say we "have the Son," or that the Son has us.

Beyond loving the brethren is the ultimate requirement: to love your enemies. Jesus said that if you could love those who spitefully use you, who curse you, who revile you, you will be the sons of your Father who is in heaven. He implies that the issue of sonship is the love of your enemies, and if we can do this, of what love, then, will we not be capable? These are they who have come into sonship, showing themselves to *be* the sons of the Father, who is in heaven. This demonstration shows forth the Father. It is the love that Jesus displayed at the Cross, while we were yet enemies of God, in our transgressions and in our sins.

In the Last Days, we, as the Church, are going to be tested by Jews, the "enemies of the gospel." They will be looked upon by the world with great opposition, even as the enemies of mankind. In their crisis of distress, there will not be anything lovable about Jews; they will not be worthy objects of affection, but the love of God does not wait for worthy objects. God is calling for sons through whom His love can be expressed, and if you can love your enemies in the face of the most intransigent behavior, what problem should you have within the Body?

## Chapter 12 - Confession: The Breakthrough to True Fellowship

There is hardly another writer who has understood the subject of confession of sin, or who expresses it so wonderfully as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In Nazi Germany prior to World War II, and in the intensity of community life, things came to the surface that he would not have otherwise seen, and in that, Bonhoeffer caught a glimpse of what true fellowship is. He saw the reality of what enables church to be the expression of the Lord's life.

He begins the final chapter of his book, *Life Together*, with the Scripture: "*Confess your faults one to another*" (Jas. 5:16a). Like so many of God's scriptural prescriptions, we simply do not do them, and suffer, therefore, the loss of what God has given us as a precious way to be freed from a weight we need not bear-*if we would but do it*. Every "doing" is a humiliation, and every obedience is another ascent to the Cross, but it always eventuates in another resurrection *unto life*. To confess our faults one to another is prickly, shameful and embarrassing. By nature, we prefer to confess privately and personally in our own closet, and hope that it will accomplish the same thing, and that by so doing, we believe we have actually *done* the word of God.

But Bonhoeffer begins,

He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone (page 110).

To be detached, separated, and leading an isolated life is not a statement of our temperament; it is a statement of our sin. We may not have recognized it as that, because the first propensity of sin is to conceal itself as sin. It is simply not recognized as sin, and we are very adept at forming generalizations and ways of excusing ourselves that would allow us to go on in a kind of separation from the saints-even when we are in the midst of community.

It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness (page 110).

That is to say, we are not in the Body; we are separate. Though we may be *positionally* there, we are not *actually* there. Sin will break fellowship. Unconfessed sin condemns us to being apart from the Body and not receiving the benefit *of* the Body.

The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners (page 110).

In other words, except that we have fellowship as sinners, we do not have fellowship. It is there that the mask is off and the pretense and sham is put away. It is *there* that we present ourselves to a brother as we in fact are, presently, before God the place to which He has so far redemptively brought us. That is the foundation for true fellowship. If we have fellowship as the "devout," then it is a *false* fellowship. Wearing our best religious faces or "putting our best foot forward" is not true fellowship. True fellowship comes from brothers who acknowledge that they are sinners being saved by grace. It must be a very real and trembling truth; it is for those who know that their iniquity is ever before them. The true Body needs, therefore, to be aware of its own defects, shortcomings and sin. In that way, it can admit the presence of another one as a sinner, who does not have to withdraw himself in the consciousness of his own sin, because he can confess his sins to another, that he might be prayed for and be healed. That is speaking the truth in love, even the truth about oneself.

The pious [or 'religious'] fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners! (page 110).

But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants you alone...God has come to you to save the sinner. Be glad! This message is liberation through truth (page 110-111).

God can only meet us on the condition of truth. He Himself is truth, and He will not meet us on the basis of phoniness or pretense. His grace is available, copiously and freely, but on the condition of truth alone. That is why so many Christian lives remain fixed at an unhappy level. They do not meet Him on the level of truth because they do not meet the saints on the level of truth. We can measure the truth of our relationship with God by our relationship with men. If it is deceitful, phony and secretive there, and withholding and unloving, then we are not to presume to think that our relationship with God is somehow better or separate. The two are inextricably joined together. It is our relationship *to* men that unmask us, and it is our relationship *with* men that is the true requirement and reveals our condition before God.

### **Sinners Saved by Grace**

The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are. He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner...Through him men could be sinners and only so could they be helped. All sham was ended in the presence of Christ. The misery of the sinner and the mercy of God-this was the truth of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. It was in this truth that his Church was to live (page 111).

True fellowship begins in the most foundational recognition of ourselves as sinners being saved by grace, which is ministered one to another in the environment of *truth in love*, where a man *can* confess his faults. To hold our faults and our sins secretly is to block fellowship and the flow of the life of God into and through the whole Body. Speaking the truth in love cannot easily take place in a large institutional setting, where you can wear a religious and devout face, while all the time fighting secret and private battles, and no one sitting near you has any knowledge of it. Then they come with the plastic communion cups, and you take



your cup, and you have communion-but the whole thing is a sham. We have voided and made of no effect the very provision of God that is to be our life, our vitality and our growth, because we have not understood that there cannot be communion without there first being confession. Confession frees us to take the cup and frees us from not condemning ourselves to judgment, to sickness or even physical death. The same thing that God intends for life can be death-if we take it while *not discerning the Body*. If we gloss over and are unwilling to see the things that need to be attended to, and be brought into the light, and be submitted to the blood of Christ that we might have fellowship one with another, then the whole thing is a sham. We will be taking upon ourselves sickness and death. If the sickness is not alleviated, the end thereof is a spiritual death, even while we live, and there are many such stalking about.

...Our brother has become Christ for us in the power and authority of the commission Christ has given to him. Our brother stands before us as the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God (page 111-112).

There is a dynamic which God has set right into the Church that is at the heart of true fellowship, and that keeps it free, clean, flowing and true, namely, confessing our faults one to another, and praying for one another, that we might be healed.

So in the Christian community when the call to brotherly confession and forgiveness goes forth, it is a call to the great grace of God in the Church (page 112).

It is a great grace to be free from sin and to have the weight and the guilt of it broken and dismissed. We need not shamefully withhold ourselves for fear of being detected. We can come open-faced and be in relationship with the brethren with nothing to fear and nothing to withhold. We have been "found out." The substitute for it is a kind of pious taking of our confession to God privately. It is giving to God a subterfuge and deception because we are unwilling for the shame, which is to say, the Cross-experience of going to a brother.

Conventional church, as it is presently constituted, does not provide an environment for confessing of faults one to another. You cannot confess to strangers or in situations where relationships are no more than casual, which is essentially the description of most fellowships. We do not know each other well enough to trust each other sufficiently for such an intimate thing as the confession of our faults. Ministers of the gospel suffer the most in this. They dare not ever breathe these things to their congregations, and therefore a certain kind of professional, ministerial mystique has been developed whereby he appears to be somehow exempted from the things that trouble the congregation. The truth is that he is *more* troubled than they, and is struggling in exactly the same areas, and even more intensely, because he is the focal point for the enemy's attack. To whom, however, shall he turn? Does he dare express anything like this to his congregation? Whom can he trust? He has to, therefore, keep it to himself and maintain the facade of having it all together when inwardly he is contradicted, and he knows that the enemy knows. And when he gets up to speak, we get a weak kind of bleat. We do not get the ringing voice of full conviction in the words he speaks. How can he when he is not in that place in his life?

That kind of thing has become so commonplace that we think it normative, or we think that that is just the way he preaches. It has nothing to do with his speaking ability at all. It is the issue of sin and compromise at the foundation of the inward life that has not been brought to the light because he is not in a church situation that is conducive to confession and deliverance. The whole fellowship then becomes a facade and the people play-act the faith. And if that is happening at the deepest levels of the church, namely, its leadership and its ministry, what then is happening among the people who are under this leadership?

Something happens in the whole atmosphere by which the same kind of duplicity, hiding and deceit take place, and the whole congregation is at that level, going on week after week in a kind of charade while the world is dying everywhere around it.

Through cowardice and fear, we do not have the benefit of what God has already structured into the church. We are too afraid to take the risk, preferring to play it safe. The person who keeps himself guarded goes from deceit to deceit, a hardening takes place, and when this is so with a pastor or leader, then those under him will reflect it.

In confession the breakthrough to community takes place (page 112).

We may enjoy singing choruses and hearing inspiring speakers, but true fellowship has at its heart the truth of the confessing of faults one to another. See to this and the choruses will take care of themselves. It is so easy through instrumentation, amplifiers and human ability to give an aura of a certain euphoric kind of enjoyment in worship that disguises, rather than reflects, what the true state of that fellowship is. We will even deceive ourselves into thinking that we have a kind and quality of relationship with God that in all actuality *does not exist*, because we do not have it with each other.

In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person (page 112).

Unconfessed sin will work its cancerous work when we keep it private and to ourselves. In our pride, we would rather die and suffer a spiritual death than a death to our ego. Without humility it is impossible to receive anything from God, and here is a perfect case in point. Here is health waiting, here is grace waiting, here is mercy and deliverance waiting, but pride keeps one from receiving it because only humility can obtain the grace that God offers.

In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted (page 112).

Here is a glimpse of fellowship as God intends it! It is the place of healing, not only for the sheep, but also for the shepherds. Our shepherds are in as much need of healing and deliverance as the sheep. There is no magic about their lives. They are flesh and blood like as we. They are not men of great faith and power who somehow have arrived at a place other than or apart from us. They may be anointed in the operation of their gift and calling, but in terms of their character and life, their needs and defects are equally as great as our own. Are we in an environment where that can be expressed? People would be shocked because it contradicts their idealistic view. But we are all participants in affecting the environment and atmosphere in which we can allow ourselves to be true to be sinners being made whole in each other's presence. We are all responsible for that environment and need to be careful, therefore, not to harden ourselves and to retreat again into our privacy.

Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God (page 112).

The last stronghold of man is self-justification. Whenever we are confronted, we always seem to marshal our excuses and have our reasons to justify and defend ourselves. When that is abandoned and the sinner surrenders, the breakthrough comes.

### **Daily Vigilance**

He finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and

judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ (page 112-113).

This requires a daily, if not hourly, vigilance; it requires keeping the heart open. When there has been a breakthrough, a hole has been made and light comes through, but how quickly will the hole close up again if we do not keep it open. If we are lazy, slothful, fearful, casual, and unwilling to pay the price of speaking the truth in love, taking a brother aside, or receiving a word of correction when it comes, the hole will close; we will stiffen and sickness will come into the fellowship. We need to keep our corporate heart *with all vigilance*, being jealous over it because its Head is the Lord, and He will do nothing except through His Body.

Now he can be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham. The sin confessed has helped him to find true fellowship with the brethren in Jesus Christ...A confession of sin in the presence of all the members of the congregation is not required to restore one to fellowship with the whole congregation. I meet the whole congregation in the one brother to whom I confess my sins and who forgives my sins. In the fellowship I find with this one brother, I have already found fellowship with the whole congregation...In confession occurs the breakthrough to the Cross...Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. In the confession of concrete sins the old man dies a painful, shameful death in the eyes of a brother (page 113).

We have a propensity both to rationalize our situation and to avoid being specific about it. The Cross *only* becomes the Cross in the specificity and the concreteness of the sin acknowledged. That is where it hurts and the shame is ignited. That is where the truth of it is registered. Even in confession we can side-step the reality of the Cross. We can make a play at it, talk around it, make an allusion to it and still come out with our pride intact. But God intends that pride be crucified in the very act of confession, in proportion to the specificity of it.

Bonhoeffer says the *real* death comes in the painful, humiliating confession of faults one to another. That very humiliation *is* the death; it is the experiential application of the death to that thing that would otherwise continue its life. Our pride remains intact when we make our own private confessions to God. That stubborn and carnal thing, which still has a powerful existence, will not go away. And the only thing that brings it to an actual death *in fact* is the humiliation of open public confession to another. It is tasting the death of humiliation, which the Lord Himself tasted in much greater measure when He was crucified publicly and openly before the eyes of His entire people and that, nakedly. How can we allow ourselves the luxury of privacy and the unwillingness to share the shame of exposure through open confession and the revealing of our sin? He, who was made sin, bore that openly, nakedly, shamefully and totally. Self will not be brought to death until we suffer it in the measure that the Lord did, that is to say, publicly and openly. If we do not burn in that humiliation, then we have probably not been truthful. We are still saving and protecting something, and therefore, we are cheating both ourselves and the fellowship of the flow of God's life.

God does not accommodate our desire to save face. He will not honor our private confession to Him because He knows our secret hearts, and He knows that we are trying to avoid the humiliation of having to confess to a brother. *We* would like to be alleviated of *our*

distress privately, but that is contrary to the whole magnificent working of the genius of the Body of Christ. The Church is the "*ground and pillar of truth.*" Private confession would be a deceit. We will never be willing to suffer this humiliation of confessing to a brother unless we have the deepest reverence and love for the Head of the Body. It is unbecoming to Him to have joined to that superb Head a Body that is deformed, sick or disjointed, and not of the same magnificence as the Head Himself. We cannot console ourselves by saying that the sin has been met because we have confessed it to God privately, if we have not confessed it *first* to man. That is where the real power of it is broken and the deliverance from it comes. That is where the blood has its opportunity to be applied. This is God's biblical prescription. He knows our corrupt hearts, and knows that we can make a false piety out of this and think that we are absolved of the thing because we have confessed it privately to Him.

### **Baptism and Confession**

And we refuse to bear the Cross when we are ashamed to take upon ourselves the shameful death of the sinner in confession. In confession we break through to the true fellowship of the Cross of Jesus Christ, in confession we affirm and accept our cross. In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother-which means, before God-we experience the Cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation. The old man dies, but it is God who has conquered him. Now we share in the [reality of the] resurrection of Christ and eternal life (page 114).

It is in an existential union with the crucified, resurrected One, and in fellowship with the saints that the resurrection life of God is made available. If we are undernourished and emaciated, it is because the life of God has not had free course through its members. Sin is death. It stops the flow and causes the blockage of the life of God.

In confession the breakthrough to new life occurs. Where sin is hated, admitted, and forgiven, there the break with the past is made...But where there is a break with sin, there is conversion. Confession is conversion (page 115).

This is critical. It is too easy to miss it at the very heart of the matter, namely, the operation of the power of the Cross actually experienced in the one place most profoundly made available to us as saints-in the fellowship of the saints. Anything less and other than this is not true fellowship. This is the heart of fellowship with God and with men that releases the life of God, and it is the life of God that will accomplish the purposes of God that conclude the age.

Confession is discipleship. Life with Jesus Christ and his community has begun...What happened to us in baptism is bestowed upon us anew in confession (page 115).

Confession is the one occasion given for the renewal and the release again of what baptism means, namely, death unto life.

Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God?...we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution. And is not the reason perhaps for our countless relapses and the feebleness of our Christian obedience to be found precisely in the fact that we are living on self-forgiveness and not a real forgiveness? Self-forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God itself (pages 115-116).

We are deceiving ourselves by this private speaking to God. The results are countless relapses and repetitions of the same sin, in the most embarrassing, least desired moment, precisely because we have been living on self-forgiveness and not real forgiveness.

Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person...But since the sin must come to light some time, it is better that it happens today between me and my brother, rather than on the last day in the piercing light of the final judgment. It is a mercy that we can confess our sins to a brother. Such grace spares us the terrors of the last judgment (page 116).

However painful and humiliating true confession is now, how much more humiliating if we have to experience it in the Day of the Lord's judgment. Judge yourself now that you need not be judged then. For whatever remains unjudged now will come up before Him in that Day.

But it is precisely for the sake of this certainty that confession should deal with *concrete* sins...Otherwise it might happen that one could still be a hypocrite even in confessing to a brother and thus miss the good of the confession (page 117).

The final deception would be to go through this as a form, thinking we have the reality of it, and yet lose the benefit that God intends. Once we have given ourselves to that deception, from which deceptions are we exempt? You embrace the whole truth and nothing but the truth in order to be found "*walking in the truth.*" The truth in *this* place is the greatest assurance of truth in any other place.

In confession we, too, receive the forgiveness of the particular sins which are here brought to light, and by this very token the forgiveness of all our sins, known and unknown (page 117).

In other words, if we are specifically identifying, clearly and truly, the sins of what we are aware, God will forgive us at that moment our unknown sins-because we have identified what is known. God waits for what we will do in truth.

### **To Whom do you Confess?**

To whom shall we make confession? [Whom do we know who can bear and understand it?] ...Anybody who lives beneath the Cross and who has discerned in the Cross of Jesus the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart, will find there is no sin that can ever be alien to him (page 118).

You can hear the confession of another brother because *your* particular sins have been equally as abhorrent in the sight of God. You have recognized that and confessed it before the Cross, and therefore you can hear him in his. He will not be shocked by your confession, though it be scandalous, filthy and perverse. He knows his own heart, and if he has not been guilty of your sin, he has had one like it, or he knows that except for the grace of God, he is quite capable of exactly the same.

Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother. Looking at the Cross of Jesus, he knows the human heart...Only the brother under the Cross can hear a confession. It is not experience of life but experience of the Cross that makes one a worthy hearer of confessions (page 118).

It is not that we have wonderful counseling ability and understand complex problems and are able to bring some human wisdom into the dilemma. Our qualification to receive the confession of another is that we ourselves are living beneath the Cross.

In daily, earnest living with the Cross of Christ, the Christian loses the spirit of human censoriousness on the one hand and weak indulgence on the other, and he receives

the spirit of divine severity and divine love (page 119).

This is so sublime a statement. Living in the shadow of the Cross in an earnest daily way saves us, on the one hand, from being judgmental and critical, and from the spirit of being censoriousness, where we look down our noses in contempt for the sinner who is wanting to confess. On the other hand, there is the weakness of being too vague, too general, too casual, too soft, and too indulgent and of not seeing the seriousness of sin at all. Living under the reality of the Cross earnestly and consistently saves us from either extreme.

Every person should refrain from listening to confession who does not himself practice it. Only the person who has so humbled himself can hear a brother's confession without harm (page 120).

Not only does the onus rest on the person who is confessing, but just as much on the person who is hearing that confession. God puts as much requirement upon the one *hearing* the confession as on the one *making* the confession, and it is that kind of requirement that calls us to be serious before the Lord and to be walking rightly with Him. Can you imagine a man to be in such a condition of resentment or irritation that he will not forgive? It is a pitiful state to be in. If you can avail yourself of another brother (or sister) who *will* hear you and who *will* grant forgiveness, then that is to be desired.

The Lord will direct us, but let there be an amplitude of candidates in every fellowship who live in the frequency of the Cross, who can be ones to whom we can confess. But, in most cases, it is hard to find even one. In other words, it is not safe to confess, except to a man who humbles himself and suffers the indignity and the humiliation of confessing to others himself. Look for, and pray for, one who is close on a frequent and daily basis. Do not seek for one who will confirm you, or one whom you sense would be sympathetic with your flesh. Rather, go to the one who is most likely to oppose you in the flesh.

The second danger concerns the confessant [the one who is confessing]. For the salvation of his soul, let him guard against ever making a pious work of his confession. If he does so, it will become the final, most abominable, vicious, and impure prostitution of the heart; the act becomes an idle, lustful babbling. Confession as a pious work is an invention of the devil (page 120).

We can trivialize the things that are holy. There is nothing more deceitful than a false confession. We would be better off not having even made it than to make it and make it insincerely. We are not to become "good" at it, by verbally performing it; that is to make confession an invention of the devil. We give the sin a greater power for a more absolute domination over us by a phony attempt that never intended to see its power broken. Confession of one's sins is a sacred, precious and holy thing, and the integrity of it needs to be maintained. Confession should never be set up in a religious way. Rather, the quality, or the character of our corporate life should make plenty room for it. We need to have an environment that is conducive to it, one in which we can find occasion to actually do it.

## Chapter 13 - Communion: The Joyful Sacrament

The apostle Paul writes,

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another (1 Cor. 11: 23-34).

Bonhoeffer continues in his book, *Life Together*:

The day of the Lord's Supper is an occasion of joy for the Christian community. Reconciled in their hearts with God and the brethren, the congregation receives the gift of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and, receiving that, it receives forgiveness, new life, and salvation (p. 122).

The holy sacrament of communion, also known as the Lord's Table, has lost its meaning, intention, value and power in modern times. It has become a kind of religious monotony, a practice that does not seem to confer any special blessing. One of the key reasons for this is that we have separated confession from communion. The confession of sin, the clearing of the air, and the reconciling of broken relationships must necessarily precede communion, otherwise we make communion a lie.

The fact that Catholics and Protestants misuse the word "sacrament" does not mean that we throw the baby out with the bath water. Sacrament is from the same root word as "sacred" holy and given of God, as a practice of a divinely inspired and initiated kind that is life-giving in its keeping. We must not reject something because men have abused it, nor must we become reactive; neither of those postures are the place of faith. If that is our mode of reasoning, then Satan has only to multiply the offenses and we lose the value of the sacrament altogether. We need to bring our own reactions and prejudices to the Cross, and see communion purely by the eye of the Spirit.

Communion is one of God's precious and gracious provisions, none of which would be life-giving if there were not a death and resurrection, a 'body' that was broken, and a 'blood' that was shed. We need to restore, therefore, the sacrament in its holy intention of God, and receive the benefit that God purposed in the giving of it. Moreover, it will only be a benefit when it is sacred, when it is holy, when it is true, when it is righteous, and when it is done in love. God forbid that we should limp along, and not have what God has given us as a precious grace "as often as we drink it." Communion, as we shall see, is not a little addendum; it is a means of life, a sacrament given by God until He returns.

It is one of the great ironies of Church history that the two sacraments, baptism and communion, have been the two issues that the Church has fought most ferociously over, and that have divided the Church the most, which suggests how much the powers of darkness rail against the sacraments. It will take, therefore, a monumental work of grace to restore these things to their dignity in God.

In His gracious wisdom, God has called us to be one loaf, one Body Jew and Gentile together. As Jews, we are grateful that we have some small contribution to make to the Body of Christ by drawing deep from our history, tradition and Jewish life, and out of the peculiar people we are in God's sight. We are able, therefore, to enrich Gentile believers,

who have not had the advantage of this tradition, with the symbolical meaning of the things that they so often partake. And not least of these is the Passover meal: the unleavened bread, broken and pierced for us, the cup of wine, of blessing and salvation, symbolic of the poured out blood.

The traditional unleavened bread, called *Matzoh*, used in the Passover meal, is itself a type of the Lord, and is made of pure ingredients: wheat and water. The wheat is ground to make flour, ground very small *for us*, especially grown for the Passover season. It is carefully kept apart and separate from other wheat, supervised in its grinding, broken *for us*, and baked in a very hot oven. It is then rolled flat, corrugated and striped by a certain instrument, likely shaped round to suggest something of the perfection or completion of God, and given to us as the Bread of Life. If you look closely, you can see the pierced holes in the bread. So the bread is really a wonderful, symbolic representation of the Messiah, pierced and broken for us. In like manner, the plucking of grapes, the piercing of the skin, and the crushing, are all processes associated with making wine, symbolic of the death from which the life can come forth. In priestly identification, are we willing to be ground very small, beat, baked in hot ovens of affliction? Are we willing to be crushed and poured out, that a people who are in darkness might have the bread of life to eat, and be able to drink from the cup of God's salvation?

And when He [Jesus] had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:19-20).

Jesus is referring here to the third cup of the Passover meal, sometimes called the cup of blessing or salvation. With the raising of the wine cup, and the eating of the bread, both of which have symbolically come up out of a "life from the death process," Jesus said, "This is My body, given, or as some translations put it, 'broken' for you...this is My blood in the new covenant." He used the traditional cup of blessing or salvation, and it is this cup He extended to His disciples that they should drink in remembrance of Him. In Scripture, divine blessing or benediction is always accompanied and validated by something of a palpable kind as expressed, for example, in the glory of the Lord filling the Temple. Blessing was, and still is, a priestly prerogative, given of God, on the fulfillment of exacting priestly requirements. With every true priestly ministry or blessing there is an accompanying, though indefinable, essence of the glory of that Life, not there before the ministry or blessing was pronounced.

### **The Plastic or the Authentic**

As a young, pentecostal believer, the taking of communion was the most agonizing thing for me. I almost dreaded that once-a-month occasion when the plastic cups were circulated. Something was not right. The anonymity of it was so abstract and antiseptic; it was not life-giving at all. I did not even *want* to take it. We were taking communion without confession, and taking the holy blood of the Lamb, not discerning the Body of Christ, not even discerning the blood, and washing it down as if it were Coca-Cola. We were living in unconfessed and murky sins, and calling that communion. We were taking it with those who were strangers rather than with brothers to whom we could have confessed our sins. I do not know how God patiently bears the grief of looking down on that mock thing, which He had intended as being holy. It was not only a mock, we were also losing the efficacy of both the bread and the wine. There is a power and grace of God in both His blood and His body if it is taken authentically. If we just take it as a religious ceremony, or requirement, then we lose the very thing for which it was given, namely, to maintain the life and virility of the fellowship.



In the early history of our Ben Israel community, we went from having communion once a month in the Pentecostal environment to *daily*. We switched from the one mentality to the other because of the demand of community living itself. Our appetites were whetted and our desire was for more of the life of God. Before we came to community, we considered ourselves exemplary, charismatic saints head and shoulders above most. We had all come to community out of sacrifice, but within two to three weeks of being frayed and strained in the interactions with the saints, the differences of opinion, and the various tensions that come up in the fellowship with each other, we ran out of the ability to be kind, loving, or even nice. Our natural kindly dispositions and temperaments had come to an end. We knew that if we were going to continue to be related to each other, we needed the love that was *of* God, the patience that was *of* God, and the mercy that was *of* God. We needed God, and we needed to eat and drink of Him daily, and to seek the Lord for the renewing of our whole composite nature by the Spirit of Life Himself. We could not continue in the daily strain of the tensions without *His* abounding life, which was made available through His resurrection.

Baptism, when understood rightly as being representative of the final entry point of the believer's utter and complete self-yieldedness, brings us into existential union with the crucified and resurrected Christ. By this, we can obtain the benefit of that resurrection, and now the Lord's Supper is a principal source for the ongoing life of God in our daily walk. Both sacraments have suffered in recent times. Both have degenerated, both have been made superficial, both have been made mechanical. We began therefore to take communion daily, with an authentic cry, "Lord, we cannot go on except *You* impart life!"

In the Catholic understanding, the taking of communion is called the Eucharist, in which the bread and wine are believed to somehow supernaturally become the literal and actual body and blood of the Lord Himself. It is the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, and is erroneous, in my opinion. But the Protestant side has moved to an error of an equal and comparable kind by describing the Eucharist language of bread and wine as "emblems" or "symbols." In other words, by being merely symbolic, they have a lesser significance, and are something we are required to do in remembrance only. My own feeling is in agreement with Bonhoeffer that the receiving of communion actually ministers new life and salvation to the whole being. By this, I mean that the grace of God can be found in breaking the power of sin, cleansing the soul, and reviving the spirit by the flowing again of the life of the Spirit of God. It is not the literal and physical substance of the Lord in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, but rather the continuing ministry of renewal by the Spirit of Life into His own image, who is holy. Do we have the faith to appropriate this blessed promise and provision? On what basis are we presently seeking the renewing of His life and salvation?

### **A Life-Giving Sacrament**

"Truly, truly, I [Jesus] say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in Him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever" (John 6:53-58).

The passage goes on to say that through lack of faith many of His disciples withdrew, and did not walk with Him anymore (v. 66). Unbelief, and the unwillingness to appropriate by faith the spiritual and eternal content of the word of God will always lead to a pulling away from God. The sacrament of communion becomes a sacrament that is life-giving when we are

actually eating and drinking *of Him*. This is God's very intention, and one of the most beautiful statements about that comes in the Old Testament with Elijah. Remember when he was fleeing from the threatening and murderous Jezebel? He found himself asleep in the wilderness, and an angel wakened him. There was bread and water by the prophet's head, and the angel said,

"Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:7b-8).

I am often reminded that the journey is too great for us. Who of us is going to make it to that ultimate mount, "Mount Zion"? It is too great an ascent for us. The divine provision is to "take and eat," not once or twice, but frequently, because to eat and drink of Him is to draw our life sustenance from Him; but there first needs to be a recognition of the need for it. This can only grow out of the awareness of how much more is required to be in authentic fellowship with the saints. It is one thing to have superficial fellowship-anybody can do that on Sunday or at a full-gospel occasion-but we were after a daily thing. We needed the life of God, the strength of God, the compassion of God; we needed to eat and drink of Him.

There are underground caves in Rome known as the catacombs, where saints met and lived under Roman persecution, and later carved niches in which to bury their dead. Their whole spiritual life was underground, and the one symbol that you see again and again as you walk through those caves is the cup and the bread, showing the centrality of communion to the saints in that time of persecution. For the very same reasons, we are likely to see the reviving and restoration of this precious provision. No more can it be allowed to degenerate into a kind of religious practice, taken mindlessly, in which the entire value is lost. That which is intended as life, if it is not taken and obtained on the basis of faith, truth and appropriate integrity, will become death.

It is similar to the principle:

For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

How can the same fragrance be life for one and death for another? That is just the nature of it. Those who do not receive it as life, receive it as death, and for that reason many are weak, sick, and others die.

The first apostolic sending in Acts chapter 13 may well have been out from the communion table, out from the place of worship in a fellowship of believers who were *in* the life of God, both vertically and horizontally. And the conclusive proof and reality of it may likely have been at the communion table. It was no wonder that the laying on of hands upon Paul and Barnabas was life for them. Something in that identification gave Paul power in the place of radical ministry because of the life that was in the Body at Antioch. There is a conjunction between authority and power in apostolic sending, and this reality will be reflected in those who are sent from it. It was not Paul's virtuosity, or his gift and calling in God in and of itself, but the reflection and the enablement of those with whom he was spiritually joined. The reality is what counts. Are we joined in this kind of fellowship? Only then can those who are sent from us move in the life and the power of that sending body. It is reality, life and power because the conditions for it have been obtained and maintained. We are eating and drinking of the body of the Lord; it is a foretaste of heaven; it is the perfection and completion of the whole purpose for which we have our being.

The fellowship of the Lord's Supper is the superlative fulfillment of Christian fellowship. As the members of the congregation are united in body and blood at the table of the Lord so will they be together in eternity. Here the community has reached

its goal. Here joy in Christ and His community is complete. The life of Christians together under the Word has reached its perfection in the sacrament (p. 122).

We cannot say enough about how important this is. Bonhoeffer saw this practice established in time as being already a preview and foretaste of that fellowship which is everlasting.

### **How to Minister the Sacrament**

Our true fellowship may not necessarily be in a "church" situation, but in a small handful of saints in a living room. It is with these that we share our life; it is with these we confess; it is with these we walk in truth, and it is with these that we receive the power that God imputes or gives to these elements if they are taken by faith in truth.

When you are the one ministering the sacrament, your responsibility is to guard the holiness of the communion table and not to make it a cheap practice by those who are undiscerning and mindless and just going through the mechanics of it. You may have to find yourself announcing, "I have this responsibility. You are welcome to the table as a believer in communion with Christ. I need to remind those who are believers, but who are living in unconfessed sin, that according to the Word of God, you will be drinking to your own judgment. You will experience this as sickness and perhaps as death, and I would encourage you not to take it without first making right what needs to be right. I am not at liberty to serve those of you who are not believers. This is for the church. I hope you will not be offended, but you have to understand I have an obligation under God to cherish and to keep the sanctity of this table."

With regard to children, the Lord is gracious and understands that there is no wicked intention or motive, and that the children in their innocence want to participate with the parents. They can take it even though they are not of an age in which the parent can explain the conditions for communion. What they receive the Lord knows, and He is not likely to be offended.

### **A Final Word**

We should never allow the Lord's Supper to become a methodology, but rather an environment in which the sense of the holiness of God prevails. It is a renewing of the covenant, and we are eating and drinking the Lord afresh. We are showing again that we are cast upon His life. Our coming to the communion table is a statement that we are not only in union with God in authenticity in the sacrificial giving up of ourselves, but also with the Church at large. We are giving our life up. We would enjoy our privacy, but the demands of the Body of Christ require our participation, and we give ourselves in communion with them.

May we be found esteeming the blood of Jesus, and take the cup in sincerity and truth, thus avoiding a sleep that may end in death. May we so desire our fellowship to abound in vitality and power; may we experience the flow of the resurrection life in the fulfillment of the purposes that can only come by it, through the Body. May we ask the Lord to show us what pride, privacy and hiding exist in us, and give us a desire to be found out, and not wait to be caught by sin. It is a scandal that God's people have to be "caught" before they have to reveal their shame. Let us not wait for that. Let us be clean and stay clean. We cannot do it by ourselves; it requires the operation of the Body, and we need to be in the expression of the Body where these realities are foundational and daily operating. This is the key to all the things we have been writing. There is no power or authority, no dealing with the powers of the air, except through this reality made available only in the Body.

It was only when Jesus broke the bread and made the blessing at the communion table that the disciples' eyes were open, and they recognized who He was. May our eyes be opened every time it is broken in truth. The purpose for what the Church is about is to have this mindset, this way of viewing and perceiving, and in a like manner, the issue of communion is not going to be methodology or details. Communion without the sense of the holiness of God is not communion. The very environment, the sense of the rightness, the holiness of it will affect the people to respond. And that environment is the environment of truth, light, love, and righteousness. In that kind of environment, we will receive the full benefit of God's intention. This is a glimpse of what Church means in truth if it is to be for God a glory, not only in this age, but also in the ages to come. What an attention it requires, and what a devotion and a jealousy! What a demand upon our time! What a risk of being misunderstood!

Those who are called to be servants to the Church need to be foremost in their example in these things, that God may have a Church for His name indeed the Body of Christ, appropriate to the Head. May the Lord grant an increasing desire for communion again. May it be taken authentically, in faith, with love unfeigned with those with whom we are sharing a common life. May we receive the full value of God's life. Bonhoeffer received his insights in a time of suffering. May these realities serve us as a precious Last Days' provision that will enable us to "make it to the Mount" in an inevitable, soon-coming time when we will face the same pressure of both Bonhoeffer and the saints in the catacombs of Rome. Amen.