

## Frankly Speaking (Vol. 1 & 2)

*by John W. Kennedy*  
(First Printing December 1972 & January 1973)

### Foreword

The short chapters which comprise this booklet have been selected from articles which have appeared in *BALANCE OF TRUTH*, a Christian monthly magazine published from Bombay, India. In over twenty years spent mainly in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry, I have become familiar with many of the recurring problems that beset the Lord's people, whether in their personal lives, or in their life together as a church. These problems may take on a new dress in the culture of different countries, but basically they are the same. Personal problems, relationship problems, ecclesiastical problems, problems of dogma, problems which stem from the contradictions in our own thinking and living, problems of spiritual loyalty, authority. Their number is legion, we all face them, and the answer to every one of them is in Christ alone.

One of our gravest problems is that so often we refuse to face up to our problems. We ignore them. We suppress them. We gloss them over. We hail them as victories when in fact they are defeats. In few places is man's ingenuity more evident than in his endeavour to sidestep the issues of an unpalatable problem. The result is that these areas of spiritual defeat continue unchecked to spread their insidious influence. The end may be devastating spiritual collapse in the life of an individual or in the life of a church. Or the end may be much less spectacular: a settling down into the contentment and carelessness of a characterless, ineffective Christian existence.

These articles appeared originally under the general title, 'Frankly Speaking.' There is a need to speak out frankly on many issues, and if we are eager to follow the Lord we will not fear plain speaking. If, in reading through the following chapters, you find some things hard to take, please do not be offended. Take what is said to the divine Word by which everything must be judged. If it is not in line with that Word, reject it. But if it is, face up to it. Paul says that we grow up into Christ through 'speaking the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15). As these pages are an attempt to speak the truth in love, it is the writer's prayer that they may be accepted in love.

I am happy that a request has come for some of these articles to be produced in booklet form and thus grant their message a wider circulation. May God grant that the sharing of the little insight He has given into His ways may be of help to others in moving on to maturity in Christ.

John W. Kennedy  
Ootacamund, India  
10th November 1972

## Contents

1. Discernment
2. Criticism
3. Fear
4. The Living Lord
5. Prejudice
6. Conscience
7. Gift
8. The Word
9. Authority in the Church
10. Leadership
11. Discipline
12. Responsibility
13. The Ministry
14. Authority
15. Sacrifice
16. Balance
17. Charisma
18. Faith
19. Service
20. God's Inseparables
21. Preaching
22. Failure
23. The Next Generation
24. Conformity
25. Stress and Strain
26. The Autocrat
27. Equality
28. Paul did It
29. Our Bible

## 1. Discernment

Discernment is the capacity to recognise the potential, for good or bad, that exists within a person or a set of circumstances, and the end to which circumstances are moving. Discernment takes us below the surface to the true nature of things where we can recognise their real worth. This insight is one of the most valuable gifts that God gives to His people. It is also one of the most essential in the healthy growth of the church.

Our Lord was pleading for a spirit of discernment when He said to the crowd who condemned Him for healing a man on the Sabbath day. "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement" (John 7:24). The word 'judge' here is from the same root as the word translated 'discerner' in Hebrews 4:12.

Two things emerge clearly from this incident. First, Christ recognised that, within the crowd, fickle though it was and lacking in personal conviction, there existed the potential for some measure of discernment. He did not treat them as people who were totally incapable of distinguishing right from wrong in the matter. Secondly, the incident shows us that the main hindrance to discernment is prejudice. The people wanted to see the Lord condemned, so it suited their purpose that what He had done be considered wrong. They judged His action not on its own merits, but according to the result they wanted to see.

Discernment is not something that operates mechanically. We cannot say that a person has the gift of discernment and, therefore, everything he says is discerning. This, of course, is true of all spiritual gifts. The capacity for discernment or teaching or anything else is sovereignly given by God, but it is only a spiritual gift when it is used in complete dependence upon Him. Otherwise it remains something 'natural.' This is not a denial of God's having given it, for all our faculties are given to us by God.

Sometimes we can see the spiritual and the natural in operation almost simultaneously. A brother, for example, may be a gifted teacher. As he expounds the Scriptures we can see the spiritual gift in exercise. Suddenly he goes off into a tirade on some pet aversion. At once we sense a break in the flow of the Spirit's working. He may continue his tirade with the same fluency and eloquence with which he expounded the Bible, but it is no longer a spiritual gift. He has descended into the realm of the natural. His vehement condemnation over, he may move back again into the higher realm. I have seen this happen many times, that which is spiritual gift and that which is just as obviously not, in operation together. The exercise of a spiritual gift is dependent upon man's constant cooperation with God.

It is very important that we should recognise this principle in connection with discernment. As we have already seen from our Lord's attitude, He expects us all to exercise discernment in some measure, and whether we do so or not lies largely in our own hands.

Discernment is the one gift that we all take for granted we possess. We even require discernment in others. Every time we make a judgement of a person or a situation we are professing to have discernment. It is essential, therefore, that this capacity should be developed on a proper foundation.

What is this foundation? It is Christ. In everything we must begin with Him, for 'by Him all things consist' (Col. 1:17). Christ is most fully expressed in the written Word, so we will be discerning people only to the extent that we understand and obey the Word. We cannot divorce discernment or any other gift, if it is to be spiritual, from a thorough grasp of the Scriptures. The Word discerns (Heb. 4:12).

Paul writes to the Corinthians that “the things of the Spirit of God ... are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The meaning of this is plain if we read it in the context of the chapter and of the epistle. The tragedy of the Corinthian church was that it was so completely taken up with self. It did not lack gift (1 Cor. 1:7), but the Corinthians lacked the selflessness which would have made them spiritual gifts. As it was, their gifts seemed to lead only to confusion. So Paul comes with the message of the cross (1 Cor. 2:2), the message of an absolute self-giving. This is the essence of the spiritual man, that the life of self is gone in a constant union with Christ.

There is no spirituality where self reigns. To the extent that my life is lived with a selfish motive, I will remain an undiscerning person.

One of the most common products of self is prejudice. Prejudice is the great enemy of discernment because it is based in self-interest. Perhaps I am thrown into contact with a fellow worker who is a more capable minister of the Word than I am. Or maybe I am working alongside a younger brother, who does not pay the deference to my position I think is my due. Because of this I begin to look at everything he does with a critical eye. I become prejudiced. I imagine that he is wittingly trying to discredit me. In all his actions I see an ulterior motive. What has actually happened is that the self in me has been hurt. If self in me were surrendered to Christ there would be no such offence. Because prejudice has taken over, it is now impossible for me to recognise my brother's true spiritual worth. All I can see are faults which self exaggerates far beyond their reality. Prejudice has destroyed my capacity to discern. Most of the failure in our local churches to develop the potential that God has given His people is due to a lack of discernment. And most of the lack is due to prejudice. We are prejudiced because basically we know so little of the self-giving experience of the cross.

Discernment is based on an understanding of the Scriptures and the surrender of ourselves to Christ. In fact, this self-giving is the sum of all Biblical teaching and is the essence of spiritual maturity. Discernment, therefore, at its highest, belongs to mature spiritual character.

In the realm of Christian service we are today faced with a great challenge to discernment. On every hand there is a crying need for leadership and for those with a capacity to build up the people of God. Often we bemoan the lack of gift, yet there is something so incongruous in suggesting that God should start a work and not provide what is necessary for its healthy growth.

I believe that very often the fault lies in the lack of discernment of those of us who are supposed to be spiritually mature. We fail to recognise the capacities that God has given to others because we do not possess the selflessness to encourage the development of someone else's gift.

If the Lord could demand a measure of discernment from a motley crowd of people, what has He a right to expect from those who profess to know Him? The call to discernment is a challenge to a deeper understanding of the Word and a fresh submission of ourselves to Christ.

## 2. Criticism

We all find ourselves at times the object of criticism. It is usually a distasteful experience. In fact the word 'criticism' generally associates itself in our minds with jealousy, harshness, and what is petty and proud. That this should be so is some indication of the extent to which people are unable to cope with the faculty of criticism and have debased it into something wholly destructive, void of any redemptive value.

This is a major tragedy. The healthy development of every aspect of life depends upon the ability to discriminate between what is good and what is bad, what is helpful and what is unhelpful, what is essential and what is non-essential, what should be given priority and what should not. To be unable to make these choices, or to be dominated in making them by self instead of Christ is one of the surest roads to spiritual confusion. But in making them, rightly or wrongly, we employ the faculty of criticism. Criticism is the expression of discernment, either true discernment or false. Paul prays for the Philippians that they might abound in 'all discernment' (Phil. 1:9). We may take it that he meant a spirit of TRUE discernment.

There is little more poignantly indicative of a person's character or his measure of spiritual maturity than his attitude to criticism, both the way he employs it and his reaction to it. We need to know not only how to use our critical faculty, but also how to accept criticism from others. Either we know both, or we are unable to cope with either. It is notoriously true that the person who is most ready to mete out harsh criticism to others is usually the person who most strongly resents criticism himself.

Everything that has the potential of blessing also has its attendant dangers. A person whose principle of action is to steer clear of every possible danger will soon find himself doing nothing at all and will end up a spiritual nonentity. Faith can develop into bigotry. Knowledge can produce materialism. Generosity can lead to extravagance. We do well to be thoroughly alive to the perils, but not to discard what is good through fear of them. Likewise with criticism. Few things can be more devastatingly destructive of spiritual life. Yet criticism can also be of immense benefit, a vital factor in the encouragement of spiritual growth.

Having made these few general observations, I propose that we now look at our subject first from the standpoint of the critic, and secondly from the standpoint of the one criticized. None of us are permanently in one category or the other, so what is said will equally apply to all.

### The Critic

We want to concentrate more on how to be a helpful critic than how to be an unhelpful one, but a word must be said on that most unfortunate person, the inveterate critic. Eternally conscious of imperfections, both real and imagined, which make it impossible to enjoy anything the Lord is doing, he is of all people the most discontented. He desperately wants to make progress on the spiritual journey, or so he says, but he just cannot put up with the noise and the dust and the heat of the train. He is always looking for an air-conditioned coach that does not run. The danger is that he gets nowhere. If he does decide to travel, he can make a most unpleasant travelling companion.

Then there is the systematic criticism of an individual or of a group in which some people indulge. Such criticism is either the result of jealousy or of some other personal complex. I do not think I have ever seen it accomplish the end it professes. Invariably it defeats its own purpose and usually ends up unwittingly encouraging what it denounces. Even our Lord in His strictures against the Pharisees left ample room for the exceptions, of which

there were not a few. He had time for Nicodemus, and obviously Nicodemus felt that Jesus was eminently approachable—even by a Pharisee. If you are a critic in this sense, take the matter to the Lord and ask Him to show you the root cause of it, for be quite sure that it is of help neither to you nor to anyone else.

Much criticism has its root in reaction. What someone has said or done shows me up in an unfavourable light, so I retaliate to protect myself, particularly if there is some measure of truth in what the other person has said. Let us avoid such criticism as the plague. Its source is pride. It merely panders to our own conceit and is destructive of spiritual life in others. It may also be appropriate to remember that what we see in the character of others is often a reflection of our own. The criticism of reaction is more often than not an apt though unknowing criticism of ourselves.

In writing to the Ephesians Paul says, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Here are the essentials of spiritual criticism. What is our aim? Is it the growth of the other person and the church, or is it self-justification? Spiritual criticism requires first of all a spiritual motive. Second, it requires an attitude of love. We can at times be very ready to speak the truth, but the readiness and ability to speak the truth in love are the mark of a maturity which very few possess. We have to understand that it is not only what we say that matters, but the way we say it. How often I have heard the right thing said in the wrong spirit. It would have been much better had nothing been said at all. It’s the difference between giving a gift to a person and throwing something at him. A gift, of course, can be rejected with disdain, but there is no valid reason why it should not bring benefit. The other is not so much as calculated to be beneficial, rather the opposite. Love has been defined as a personal sharing in the destiny of another person. That is certainly true of God’s love for the world. We who are made partakers of Christ’s nature should have the same capacity to share in the destiny of others. When that is so, our criticism will have all the properties of life and helpfulness.

One word more. Let us remember that nothing is more readily copied by others than our capacity to criticize. If criticism is harsh and condemnatory, the disciple will outdo his master many times over. We are, therefore, using something that can make or mar the spiritual lives of those who follow us. How do we fare in the role of critics?

### The Criticized

To be at the receiving end of criticism is no less a test of spiritual stature, fraught with dangers and difficulties, but also with singular potential for blessing. First of all, we must recognise that there are times when every single one of us deserves the criticism that comes our way. If our attitude to criticism is automatically to brush it aside as unjustified, then we have yet to learn basic lessons in humility and the subtleness of human nature. However carping and harsh the critic, we can benefit by asking ourselves, “Is it true? Or is it partly true?”

The fact that as long as we remain upon this earth we will ‘know in part’ means that there will be differences in thought and outlook. These differences are the stuff of which much criticism is formed. Criticism, therefore, should never be seized upon as a reason to break fellowship. Let us disagree as strongly as we may in matters which are not basic to our faith, but let us disagree with grace, and not think that disagreement precludes our working together. It is thus we learn. The person who cannot work with someone who faithfully criticizes him will find both his outlook and his spiritual usefulness sadly restricted.

Scripture leaves us a remarkable example of how the child of God should react to criticism. Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote to the Philippians. At first he was accorded a certain amount of freedom which allowed him considerable opportunity of ministering the Gospel and strengthening the assembly, but his future was nevertheless uncertain. Whether it would be release or death he knew not (Phil. 1:19-25). That, in such circumstances, there should be a group of people preaching the Gospel whose one aim was to discredit him, is a revelation of the depths of pettiness and uncharitableness to which even those who profess to know Christ can sink. What Paul had done, if anything, to rouse their jealousy, we do not know, but surely when a man is about to pay the supreme price for his faith after a lifetime of devoted service and suffering, all who love the Lord should be upholding him in love and faith. Paul made his mistakes like all men, but was this the time and place for brethren in the faith to be castigating him for his weaknesses or trying to take advantage of his helplessness to advance themselves? Of all the disappointments that Paul had suffered this must have been one of the keenest; to be kicked when he was down, and that by those who ought to have been supporting him. Who would have blamed Paul had he reacted in a spirit of bitterness, lashing out in biting criticism of those who so richly deserved it? But that would have been defeat. However unjustified the criticism was, however deeply it cut into the quick of his soul, he would accept it in grace and make it redemptive. "Whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed," he said. "Therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation" (Phil. 1:18). I believe that bitterest of all experiences in the final stage of Paul's sojourn here upon earth wrought an added refinement in an already much-refined soul. It could have been so different. It could have left his soul defiled.

Let our criticism be redemptive to others because it is made in love. Let our acceptance of criticism be redemptive to ourselves because it is accepted in grace.

### 3. Fear

Many people seem to think that to admit to fear is a sign of weakness. Actually, to admit to fear is an essential step on the road to spiritual victory. Those who refuse to accept their fears remain spiritually impoverished.

All men are afraid, and their lives are controlled mostly by the fears that they refuse to admit. We tend to divide people into two camps, the strong who have no fears, and the weak who have them all. But our division is too facile. The weak use their admission of weakness as an excuse to be left alone, to be allowed to be a continual prey to their fears. The strong use the outward show of their authority to hide the weakness that lies behind. Both are basically alike, a prey to the fear of their real weakness being discovered. It is only in an admission of these fears before God, a confession of our unutterable weakness, leading us to a complete and constant submission to Christ, that we can know true victory.

There are fears that are right and helpful, but there are others that dog the lives of God's people, fears that are destructive of spiritual life and fellowship. The Bible sums up these two fears in two verses. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25). "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).

#### Fear of Others

Sometimes I hear the boast, "I am not afraid of any man. I fear no one but God." This is patently untrue. That a person should make such a boast is itself an indication of the strength of his fears. All of us fear others, and are in turn feared by others. Often those who are revered as spiritual giants are subject to the most excruciating fears of those who are considered their inferiors. Absence of fear is not a mark of spiritual greatness, because fear is present in all.

Fear of others is the source of much instability of character. This fear can react in a number of ways. Fear of the authority of someone else may make me want to ingratiate myself with him. When we meet I automatically try to humour him. But my attitude is unreal, a fact which he unconsciously recognises, so he reacts by being more overbearing in his authority than he would otherwise have been. My fear of his authority has made him more authoritative, and my fear of losing his fellowship has induced an attitude of insincerity in myself which makes fellowship more difficult than ever. Fear always creates what it fears.

To fear two people of rival authority at the same time leads to further complications. I not infrequently meet people plagued with such a fear. They are feverishly concerned about winning the favour of two persons of opposing points of view. From each they may receive contrary advice, yet they have no desire to sacrifice the friendship of either of their counsellors. The dilemma of these poor folk is that they invariably imagine that the only way of maintaining the friendship of both is to be a 'yes-man' to each of them. They will visit one to champion his ideas and indirectly leave him with the impression that they reject the advice of the other. Then they proceed to do exactly the same with their other advisor. Their fear makes them men who are increasingly incapable of responsible decision, men whose actions are determined merely by the convenience of the moment, men of unstable character.

Fear of rivalry is another fear which saps the energy of believing Christians. It often leads to the most vehement intolerance which shatters fellowship between those who are truly one in Christ. Frequently we see that those who criticize one another most bitterly are those who, spiritually, have a great deal in common. The one fears the rivalry of the



other, and in an attempt to strengthen his own position, he notes and exaggerates the other's every weakness to his own advantage. Here again fear creates what it fears. In the fear of rivalry a believer may, by criticism, so alienate his brother, that the latter develops a spirit of rivalry of which he had previously been innocent.

Fear plays a decisive part, for good or ill, in the fellowship life of the church. The awe in which an outstanding spiritual leader may be held can bring coherence to a group as each member seeks protection under the leader's superior spiritual perception. They may go so far as to fear lest any deviation from his stated opinions will bring down the judgement of God. While this apparently unites the church it inevitably leads to centralization and concentration of authority. The fellowship ceases to be united by its living devotion to the Lord. It is united by their common fear of a man which is contrary to the whole conception of the church.

At the same time as fear apparently unites, it also divides. The leader is isolated by the fear he inspires. The led are isolated by the fear they feel. Spiritual leaders can be among the most lonely people in the world. Fearing lest close fellowship with those they lead will prejudice their authority, their spiritual maturity isolates them from the fellowship they so require. What fellowship does exist is superficial, and the leader's isolation encourages a feeling of inferiority in those who could and would make a contribution of fellowship but increasingly feel that they dare not do it.

#### Fear of Oneself

The most pitiful of fears is the fear we have for ourselves, fear of losing our dignity, fear of being criticized, fear lest we be denied the honour and position we think is our due.

Basically, we are afraid lest people should know us as we really are. We are weak, so we put on a show of strength. We make mistakes, so we justify ourselves when anyone suggests that we have erred. We have little worth or competence to occupy a position of prominence, so we order people around in order to give an impression of authority. We are afraid for ourselves. We are afraid of being discovered. We have not learned that, at heart, all men are the same, and we are no different from anyone else. We think that others are strong and we are weak, so we try to cover up with a show of arrogance. Arrogance, officiousness, the inability to bear criticism are always the sign of spiritual immaturity.

The decisions we make are dictated by our fears. The greater our fears, the less are our decisions determined by right and wrong. If I am afraid of criticism, unconsciously I try to make the decisions that will leave less room for criticism. The result is decisions that are immature, the symptom of an immature spiritual character.

#### Fear of God

There is no life without fears. The victorious Christian life is not a life without fears, but a life in which our human fears are recognised, and a life of rightly directed fears, divine fears.

Along with the desires which form part of living comes the fear of not attaining them. The object of the spiritual life is a spiritual desire, Christ and the longing to attain unto His fullness. With this desire comes the fear of falling short of it, the fear of sin. It is this sense of spiritual purpose accompanied by the progress born of a fear of falling short of it, that the Bible calls the fear of God.

It is in the fear of God that we come to see all our human fears in their true perspective as fears not to be nurtured or covered over, but to be recognised and admitted in the presence of God. This is the road to victory.

Let us accept our fears as a blessing, but a blessing only as we recognise them in an admission of our own weakness, and in that weakness submit all to Christ. For in submission to Him, all the human fears which dominate will be conquered through His domination, the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom.

#### 4. The Living Lord

I have recently been having a fresh look at the book of Acts. One cannot read Acts intelligently without becoming deeply aware of the intense personal loyalty to Christ of the early churches. This was the work of the Holy Spirit. He did not draw attention to Himself but testified of Christ as the Lord Himself foretold (John 15:26).

In Acts we are in touch with people whose thinking had been moulded by the dramatic events that followed the crucifixion. Some had personally witnessed the execution on Calvary. Some had seen and talked with the resurrected Christ. Some had been with Him as He was caught up into heaven. All had been profoundly influenced. That the Lord was alive was no mere pious thought. It was a historical fact. His presence in the midst of His people was no myth. It was reality.

The reality is no less today, but too often it goes unnoticed, separated as we are by two thousand years from the events of the cross. We still speak of the risen Christ and the living Lord, but they have become catchphrases instead of an awesome expression of the reality of the presence of the One with whom each one of us must personally deal. In the face of the many problems that beset the churches of today, we need to pray that God will renew to us the vision of the reality of Christ's presence in our midst.

When Peter acknowledged the supremacy of Christ, the Lord answered that upon Himself, the Rock, He would build His invincible church (Matt. 16:16-18). Later He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). In the life of the church, the ever-present Christ must be our point of reference. Whatever our difficulty or our need might be, we must return to this great fact. To do otherwise is to end in confusion.

In Corinth we see the results of a departure from this principle. Loyalty to Christ had been replaced by loyalty to Paul, Apollos or Peter. All three were men of God whose ministry had been a source of blessing. Ironically, the very truth they taught led to dissension because it was accepted as final, not as a means of moving on towards the fullness of Christ.

Error is not the only danger that besets the church. Partial truth is equally perilous if its limitation is not recognised. And partial truth is all the ministry any man can offer. "Now I know in part," said Paul to the same Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:12). Fullness of truth is in Christ alone. Loyalty to partial truth will divide us. Loyalty to absolute truth, Christ, alone will unite us. This is what the Corinthians failed to see.

What I have said does not imply that the Corinthians should have rejected Paul, Apollos or Peter. On the contrary, the ministry of all three was vital as contributing to a full understanding of the Lord. The error was that loyalty to one excluded acceptance of the ministry of the others. This was equally true of those who said, "I belong to Christ." In claiming to belong to Christ they rejected the ministry of His three servants as unnecessary. If we are truly loyal to Christ we will not reject the means He uses for our edification. At the same time we will be careful not to allow the means to usurp His place of pre-eminence. Paul's emphasis on the lordship of Christ at the beginning of the letter is an indication of how far the Corinthians failed to give the Lord His rightful place in their midst.

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). In these words, Paul presents to the Corinthians their Lord. His supremacy lay in His humility, God willing to become man and to die. Before such a Christ all men are reduced to nothing. Which one of us could claim to match such complete self-giving? All

that we are or have learned fades into complete insignificance before the cross of Christ. The cross is the great equalizer. In its light all of us are equally nothing.

The Christ who dwells in our midst is the Christ of Calvary. We give testimony to this fact as often as we meet together around the table of the Lord. There we show forth His death till He comes. In doing so we recognise in His supreme humiliation His immeasurable greatness. His pre-eminence overshadows all else and we all bow in equal worship.

Equality is the basis of fellowship. Probably all of us have experienced at some time the break in fellowship that occurs whenever someone adopts an attitude of spiritual superiority. It is obviously true that some believers are much more mature than others, and we refuse to recognise this to our spiritual loss. At the same time, when supposed spiritual maturity is taken to confer some special authority over others, at once fellowship is jeopardized. Our fellowship is safe only as long as it finds its common focus in a crucified Christ.

If we take seriously the fact that Christ dwells in the midst of His people, it follows that there exists within the local church a sufficiency to meet its every requirement. If our sufficiency is Christ and Christ is present there should be no lack. If there is, the fault lies in our inability to apprehend what has been placed at our disposal. The spiritual struggle in which the church is constantly engaged is centred round the supremacy of Christ. When He is dethroned, confusion reigns. The object of the Christian ministry is to point people to Christ who dwells in their midst that they may find in Him their all.

In the relationship between the churches, the New Testament shows clearly that, while there was a spirit of mutual respect from which all benefited, each church was directly responsible to Christ. This, of course, follows inevitably from the fact of the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. Since the greatest One of all dwells with us, we can owe no greater allegiance to anyone outside. On the other hand, the Lord dwells not exclusively within one local company. Wherever His people are gathered in His name, He is there. This means, therefore, that just as we recognise the Lord's position within our own gathering, so we must respect His position within every other gathering of His saints. If we do this there can never be overlordship of one church by another. There will be equality and fellowship. What one has learned from the Lord will, through the ministry of the Word, be shared with the other, not in a spirit of domination, but of love and mutual respect.

Most of all, the living Lord's dwelling with His people brings to each one of us the challenge of accepting our responsibilities to Him. God's people, individually and corporately, within the fellowship of the local church, have to learn to deal directly with Him. "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The presence of the living Lord brings this Mediator into our midst. If we are going to deal with God we must go through Him alone. All else—the ministry of the Word, the fellowship of His people—must direct us to Him. When the church has learned this, it has begun on the road to spiritual maturity.

## 5. Prejudice

To some extent everyone is motivated in his likes and dislikes by prejudice. The believing Christian needs to remember this, for it is as true of himself as it is of anyone else. If he refuses to recognise it, his spiritual life will become impoverished. He will find it very difficult to admit that he is mistaken. He may even think that he cannot make a mistake. He will think the work of God is dependent upon him when, in actual fact, he is a hindrance to it.

The warning which the apostle Paul gives early in Romans 12 is basically a warning against the tragic results of prejudice. "For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Romans 12:3). Paul prefaces this warning with an exhortation to "the renewing of your mind." This renewal has been made possible for us through the work of the cross. It is nothing less than a new, spiritual association with Christ. This alone should be the source of our living. It is the basis on which alone we can discover the will of God. All past associations must be viewed from the standpoint of this new relationship.

Then follows a statement on the value and necessity of fellowship. To think more highly of Christ than of ourselves is at once to make us see how essential fellowship is. To be centred in Christ is to recognise our need of one another. To be centred in ourselves is to recognise no need of anyone.

What is prejudice? Prejudice is judging according to our old set of natural values. As with everything belonging to the natural man, these values are based on self, so prejudice is always something which satisfies my whims, however unreasoning they may be. Prejudice is a refusal to live the renewed life that is ours in Christ. It leads to an exaggerated self-importance. It denies the need of fellowship in practice, though maybe not in profession.

Traditional prejudices are very strongly rooted within every one of us. They form one of the most powerful enemies in our spiritual warfare. The way to victory over them is the same as the way to victory over any sin. We must recognise that prejudices exist, that they are wrong, and live by faith in Christ whose life alone is triumphant. The greatest difficulty is in recognizing that prejudices exist, for so often they act within us unconsciously. They form the automatic way of thinking that we have inherited from the past, and it is as natural to us as breathing.

### Prejudice of Race

There are prejudices which spring from our upbringing in any particular part of the world. I am a Scot. From childhood I have learned to accept certain attitudes and prejudices. For example, I'm thrifty; that is, I am careful with money and whatever things I possess, so that I can get the longest and best possible use out of them. I say, "Thank you," when anyone gives anything to me or shows a courtesy. I eat my food with the assortment of knives, forks and spoons that is used in Western countries. I do not throw pieces of paper or litter on the ground. None of these practices are bad. In fact they have much to commend them, though I cannot claim any particular virtue for observing them. I observe them quite automatically. They have become part of me simply because of the circumstances of the country in which I happened to be born.

The difficulty commences if these things begin to assume a particular aura of "right" in my eyes, and the less I know of other peoples the more allowed this "right" becomes. I begin to think that the way I do things is the only really valid way. When I see the generosity of an American brother, I am likely to condemn it as prodigality. The Japanese

brother who bows his thanks a dozen times and then starts all over again I may condemn as hypocritical. The Arabs who eat their food from a common platter I will probably condemn as unhygienic. The fellow-traveller who munches peanuts while littering the carriage floor with the shells I will condemn as dirty. But this is not the end. My whole attitude undergoes a change. I have associated an American, say, with something wrong, so the next time I meet an American the first thing I say to myself is, "He's an American." Then my reasoning continues, "Be careful. He is wrong," and I find myself beginning to judge everything he says and does on the foolish assumption that he is an American and must, therefore, be wrong. That is prejudice.

### The Prejudice of Authority

Here is another realm in which prejudice often operates. Since no man is perfect, no man is perfectly fitted to wield authority over others. Some who are in positions of authority are very ill-qualified to hold them, so they find that their authority is in frequent need of being defended. The more ill-qualified a person is for authority, the less secure his authority is, so the need to defend it is all the greater.

But even the man most gifted to wield authority will find it contested at times, for he will make his mistakes and will be criticized for them. This opens the door to prejudice, and prejudice is encouraged by that sense of inferiority that we all feel in these points in which we fail. Happy the man who can always recognise his mistake and admits it. I have not met him yet. Most unhappy the man who can recognise his mistake but refuses to admit it. He feels inferior because of his error, but tries to cover up both his error and his inferiority by proudly defending what he knows deep down to be wrong.

Now where does prejudice enter the scene? It enters where I consciously or unconsciously judge whatever another says or does, not on its own merits, but according to whether it weakens my authority or strengthens it. For example, a person in authority in an assembly commits some error of judgement. Another brother faithfully and plainly tells him, "You have done wrong." The elder immediately rises up in self-defence, for in the correction he sees only a threat to his own authority. That is prejudice.

### Prejudice of Judgement

"Judge righteous judgement" (John 7:24), said our Lord Jesus Christ. He would not have said this had He not been very well aware of the tendency to UNRIGHTEOUS judgement. One of the most disturbing effects of prejudice is the spiritual havoc it causes when it enters into matters of discernment between right and wrong.

The life of an assembly will inevitably at times involve questions of discipline. Discipline presupposes the establishment of guilt. Establishment of guilt is a result of deliberation on the part of people who act as judges. What a tremendously solemn responsibility this is, and how few people are fitted for it.

John speaks of the Lord as being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). It is important to understand that unless we have the spirit of grace, we shall never be able accurately to discern what truth is. Grace is the outworking of love, and love, as Paul reminds us, "seeketh not its own, is not provoked ... rejoiceth with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:5,6). In other words, the person who loves is not out to justify himself. He is impartial. His one concern is truth.

How tragic it is to see those who are spiritually incompetent sit in judgement over another. Full of self-importance, holding maybe some personal grudge against the one

they are judging, their minds already made up as to the verdict, they pronounce everything as proof of their own misguided opinion. That is prejudice.

### Prejudiced Principle

When the Lord said, "Judge righteous judgement," He was speaking to the Pharisees who were ever seeking an opportunity to condemn Him for breaking the law. Departing from the spirit of the law, they interpreted it according to traditions of their own. The result was that while they judged others ostensibly on the basis of the law, their judgement was in fact based upon their own traditions. In other words, they interpreted Scripture according to their preconceived ideas, instead of allowing Scripture to shape their ideas.

Here is another realm in which prejudice operates. It is liable to warp our whole understanding of Scripture with resultant spiritual bigotry and impoverishment. Yet how many preachers use Scripture in this way. Some prejudiced point of view is made the basis of interpreting a passage of the Bible which is given a meaning it was never intended to have. As believing Christians we need to be particularly on our guard in this matter. We must approach God's Word, not in order to see in it a reflection of our own ill-considered or borrowed ideas, but in an unconditional desire to know the truth which alone makes us free. To do otherwise is prejudice.

In what realm do your prejudices mainly lie? Recognise them. Confess them. It is through Christ alone that we can live an unprejudiced life. As we saw at the beginning of our discussion, the basis of prejudice is pride, and the answer to pride is 'not I, but Christ.'

## 6. Conscience

“So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16). It is obvious from these words that Paul considered the function of conscience to be of great importance. What is conscience? A person may refuse to adopt a course of action because, he says, his conscience does not allow it. On the other hand, he may excuse an action on the ground that his conscience does not condemn it. In other words, he uses conscience as a judge of conduct. This raises many questions.

Is conscience basically the same in all men? If not, what is the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian conscience? If we accept that there is a difference, is a Christian conscience a final arbiter in matters of conduct? What then is the relationship of conscience to the Scriptures? Can there be an appeal beyond conscience to the Bible? If so, and the Bible and conscience conflict, how are we to know that conscience can ever be a reliable guide?

In the opening chapters of Romans Paul clearly shows that every person has some capacity to discern between right and wrong. God holds man responsible for his actions because sufficient light has been given to him through creation and the experiences of the past to choose aright. In this sense, conscience is an innate faculty of man, gifted by God.

History shows, however, that the conscience of individuals has varied down through the centuries. Most of the Old Testament patriarchs, for example, were polygamists, though we would unhesitatingly condemn polygamy today. The practice of slavery was accepted throughout the Roman Empire. Though it is mentioned many times in the New Testament, it is never actually condemned. Yet again the conscience of the twentieth century condemns slavery without hesitation. Conscience varies from generation to generation, or from culture to culture. All of this goes to show that conscience is not a fixed part of man's nature. What one man's conscience may accept, another man's conscience may condemn. It follows, therefore, that a person's conscience depends on the nature of the influences that affect its development. It may be a reliable judge between right and wrong, or it may not; or it may be right in some instances and wrong in others. A conscience conditioned by Christian influences will be different from a conscience conditioned by non-Christian influences. If these influences are mixed, the judgements of conscience may be inconsistent with one another.

If conscience can be developed, the opposite is also true, that conscience can be debased. This is what Paul meant when, in writing to Timothy, he spoke of people whose conscience has been ‘seared’ (1Tim. 4:2). Through wrong influences their conscience ceased to pass judgement on what was evil. This, it may be said, is the problem with all mankind. It is the problem of sin, and all of us do well to remember that sin has affected the conscience of every one of us.

Many of our difficulties in understanding the nature of man arise from our failure to see the relationship between various Biblical terms. Scripture uses terms such as ‘I,’ sin, the flesh, conscience, the will. The tendency is often to view these things as faculties quite separate from one another when, in fact, they are all closely related. In many cases they overlap or describe the total human personality from a particular point of view. All of us have probably listened to preachers who deal with the question of sin as if it were a ‘thing’ residing in the human body, something like an appendix which can be dealt with by being cut out and thrown away. Sin, of course, is something much different, and God's dealing with it affects the entire personality.



The same is true of conscience. A moment's superficial thought will show that conscience is closely related both to the emotions and the will. What we call a 'good conscience' brings an emotion of peace; a bad conscience produces an emotion of tension. Conscience is related to the will in that its judgement can either encourage or discourage the will to act. Conscience then belongs to the whole personality and is affected by it. It does not operate in a vacuum, nor can it be studied in isolation.

So far we have established four facts. First, the basic faculty of conscience as an arbiter between right and wrong has been given by God to all men. Secondly, conscience develops according to the influences to which it is subjected. Thirdly, conscience can be abased through the effect of wrong influences. Fourthly, conscience is dependent upon a person's total personality since it is, in fact, the reaction of the personality to what he or others have done or propose to do.

As believing Christians we should be concerned to have a conscience which responds to the standard of Christ. If this is to be so, the Bible must obviously play a pre-eminence part in the development of our conscience. At the same time we must realise the extent to which other influences are also at work, and be able to discern between them.

The most influential of all factors on the development of conscience is our aim in life. The Christian knows that his aim should be Christ and may eagerly pay lip service to this ideal. But amid the demands of other influences that are constantly clamouring for attention, the spiritual aim is easily submerged under a host of secondary aims. These soon become paramount and the spiritual aim is permanently relegated to a secondary place. Conscience, now being conditioned by lesser considerations, can play some startling tricks. Supposedly spiritual people can degenerate to the most unspiritual actions, with seemingly no qualm of conscience whatever, in the interest of position, convenience, family respect, or a host of other things which become temporary aims. Conscience, in such circumstances, is determined by external factors rather than by the fact of a personality which stands united with the will of God in Christ.

Let us look at some of these external factors which influence conscience.

Every culture and community has its own set of traditional patterns, a way of doing things which is considered right. Conscience, conditioned by these patterns, bids us conform to them and tells us that any other way of acting is wrong. The same is true in the church. Whether it is right to stand or sit while we sing, stand or kneel while we pray, and many other minor details of church order can all become matters of conscience. This is not because any Scriptural principle is involved (though a Scripture precedent may be produced to prove that it is), but because conscience has been conditioned by habit or custom. The result is a conscience which reacts to anything which does not conform to these habits—a weak conscience. Until it realises the supremacy of Christ over matters of form, it will remain weak and a potential source of weakness in the whole church.

More than we often realise, our lives are directed by the example of others, either our heroes of the past, or people who have a direct personal influence upon our character. From them we derive our education for life in a broad sense. Through the precepts we learn from them and their example we develop our ideals, and also a conscience which reacts against anything that questions these ideals. In the development of conscience, however, not only ideals play a part, but also the personality of those from whom we derive them. This can work either for good or for bad.

Conscience is a developing faculty, and its development is affected not only by stable factors such as established tradition, but by unstable factors such as human emotion. It is clear that we require a fixed standard other than conscience through which conscience

can be developed and by which conscience itself can be judged. This standard is provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. The truth of the Scriptures is an absolute guide. Loyalty to Christ is loyalty to an infallible example.

The realm of conscience, like everything else in the life of the Christian, has to be dominated by the supremacy of Christ. Where anything or anyone intrudes between a believer and his Lord, conscience is liable to be debased and ceases to be a reliable guide. Where conscience and the assured meaning of Scripture conflict, the reason is that conscience has been moulded by other external or personal factors. This leads to conflicting loyalties in which conscience makes contradictory demands in our relationships with God and one another.

It is the Christian's privilege to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men. It is a privilege we will fully know only as we cultivate our personal relationship with Christ and allow Him to align our conscience according to His revealed truth.

## 7. Gift

"But there is so little gift." Again and again I have heard it said of some church that does not seem to be developing as it ought. On the surface it may seem to be perfectly true, but there is something so incongruous in believing that God will start a work yet not provide the spiritual wherewithal for its healthy growth. There is a failure somewhere. Obviously it must be either God's fault or ours. I take it that readers of this page will agree with me in absolving God from blame, so the one alternative left is that we should accept the responsibility ourselves and examine our own thinking on the subject.

One of the greatest barriers to clear thought on spiritual matters is jargon. We suffer from this much more than we often like to admit. Every sphere of life, whether religious or secular, produces its own language. This is particularly so with spiritual movements. Down through history they have produced their own range of terminology which, at the time of its initiation, was descriptive of vital spiritual experience. The word 'Christian' is itself an example. The name was first used in Antioch for those who belonged to Christ and followed Him. Today it may mean something vastly different. Similarly the vocabulary of the Gospel, repentance, faith, new birth, the cross, which in the first flush of divine life is so meaningful, can become meaningless repetition and, what is more, the words can be responded to as emptily as they can be spoken. We can insist on the indispensability of faith, yet be hard put to it to explain what it means. It is a most profitable exercise to check up on our terminology now and again to see whether it has degenerated to the realm of mere jargon. I suspect that there are some dearly-held phrases often used in the preaching of the Gospel which are little else.

The point at which I am arriving is simply this, "What is gift?" Are we really so helpless in seeing it develop? Does it so completely defy definition that all we can do is wait vacantly for the bestowing mercy of God, and designate every lack as God's will? If the church is suffering from spiritual malnutrition, do we honestly believe it is because of God's stinginess in withholding what He Himself has said is essential? I believe we suffer from a totally wrong conception of the nature of spiritual gift. 'Gift' has degenerated into a piece of jargon; the expression of an inner lack which we dare not define too closely lest we suddenly find ourselves responsible for it; an indefinite something for which we wait, we know not quite what; if it does not come it is because God does not give.

One of our errors is the tendency, too readily, to separate the spiritual from the natural, and to keep them separate, to think that they operate only on their own distinctive planes. To put it another way, we look for the sovereign intervention of God in our situation and practically reject the thought that human responsibility has any part to play. Any effort that is characterized by painstaking endeavour is likely to be brushed aside as 'human,' with the result that our judgement of what constitutes spiritual or divine gift may be based on little more than whim or prejudice.

The truth is that spiritual gift is a combination of the human and the divine. All that is human is touched with the divine once we have experienced the miracle of regeneration. God intervened in this world in Christ. He has intervened in our personal lives in Christ. The very fact of the church is the outcome of God's intervention in Christ. To say that God must intervene again, that He must give more, is a denial of what He has already done. He has given all; He has given Christ. "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell" (Col. 1:19).

If Christ is within, then the potential for the accomplishment of God's fullest design is there also. Gift is not an extra. When God gave His Son there were no extras left to give. The parable of the talents (Matt. 25) would suggest that the Lord has left none giftless. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to

profit withal" (1 Cor. 12:7). In the body of Christ each member has a vital function to fulfil. Where the failure lies is on the uncooperative human level.

God has so ordained that the glory of His purposes should be revealed through cooperation with His creation. Having sovereignly intervened in the affairs of man in Christ, He now intervenes no more in a manner which demands only passivity from His people. God calls us to develop the potential that His intervention has placed within. Thus Paul writes, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12-13) Note well that the call here is not only to use what God has given, but to develop it. A gardener may use some flower seed he possesses. He may sow it in the ground and watch it grow to produce a few scraggy blooms. On the other hand, he may tend and care for the plants over years to develop a flower of exquisite beauty. There are many who attempt to use what God has given; there are few who attempt to develop it.

"It is natural, not spiritual gift," I have heard some people say. But where does one draw the line between the natural and the spiritual? Do we mean to say that what is spiritual must contain nothing of what we call the 'natural,' nothing of mental ability and accomplishment? Who made us? Who gave us whatever capacities we possess, physical, mental, or anything else? God, of course. Is it not true then that all these things are God's gifts to us? Let us not think that spiritual gift is something entirely outside which ignores those capacities. Our 'natural' gifts form an essential ingredient in spiritual gift. On the other hand, they can be debased to the service of the world. The difference lies in a will subject to the grace of God which sanctifies them, or a will set to use them in the interests of self. Natural gift plus grace equals spiritual gift (Eph. 4:7).

The exercise of developing the gift of God is of vital importance. There is nothing more calculated towards spiritual conceit than for a person to feel that he is possessed of a gift of God that operates automatically every time he opens his mouth. When we get down to the hard work of developing what God has given us we see at once what stupid, helpless people we really are and are driven back to the Lord again and again for fresh grace to complete the task. To begin to plumb the depths of the counsels of God would require the sum of the intelligence of the world plus the sum of God's grace. Whatever little measure of each we have put to use is so inadequate, certainly nothing of which to be proud, yet let us not despise it. How we need it all. Rather let us go on working out what God has given, drawing constantly upon His grace—in humility.

We each need to know what gift God has given us, but in doing so not to feel that we are unique, a cut above everyone else. We are but partakers of a share of God's bounty which He has distributed as He has thought fit among His people. It is not the possession of gift that makes a person usable to God; it is the measure in which he is prepared to develop it in humility and dependence upon the one who has given. Gift may make a person into a hopeless bore or an insufferable tyrant. The redeeming factor is the imparted grace of God which magnifies the Giver and reduces the gift to its true dimension, a mere property of a vessel of clay.

If the churches are languishing for lack of spiritual nurture, wherein does our responsibility lie? It lies at the point of our acceptance of personal blame. God has given; we have failed to develop the gift. However little we have received, we dare not despise it as 'natural' while we complacently wait for the 'spiritual' that never comes. Neither dare we flaunt it in whatever little sphere we may, as a divine right which the church can disregard at the peril of its soul.

The breath of the grace of God transforms the natural into the spiritual. Our essential part is to cooperate, to develop the seed with patience and labour and trust. Hard work—and hard faith.

## 8. The Word

Last month we were discussing the Christian's authority. This we said was the Word of God. At the same time, we saw how easy it is for a person to recognise this in theory, and in practice to find his final authority for guidance in another person or in some fleeting idea of his own. There are few who are fully aware of the implications of accepting the Word of God as their authority. Our aim is to examine some of these implications.

We must begin by asking ourselves what we mean by the Word. Scripture uses the term 'the Word' in various ways. Obviously it is never used to denote the complete Bible as we today possess it, since the Bible in its present form did not then exist. When our Lord spoke of 'the Word' in John 15:3 for example, He was referring to what He was saying. Elsewhere the term is used of the Old Testament Scriptures, or perhaps of some of the New Testament writings as well, which had already been recognised as inspired.

Basically, 'the Word' refers to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. John states this in the opening sentence of his gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). It is in understanding this that the practical implications for us of the authority of the Word of God become clear.

Why is the Lord Jesus Christ given the title of 'the Word'? Simply, the reason is this: that He is the supreme expression of God's character. We use words in order to express our thoughts. In fact our thoughts cannot be fully expressed in any other manner. A small child may, to some extent, make others know what he wants by his actions, perhaps by pointing to something or making a sign, but until he has learned to use words properly he will be limited in his expression of what is going on in his mind.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Word. He was in the beginning as the Creator. Then 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). In the incarnation man comes face to face with God in a way he has never known before. "Lord, show us the Father," said Philip. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," replied Jesus (John 14:8-9). To look at the Lord Jesus Christ is to see exactly what God is like. To listen to His words is to know what God thinks and says. In the Lord Jesus Christ is the full expression of God's character for all to see. Thus He is rightly called 'the Word.'

We need to remember that every other expression of God's character points either forward or back to Christ. God expressed His thoughts in a number of ways in Old Testament times: in the law of Moses, in the tabernacle, in the temple, in the proclamations of the prophets. All these were expressions, though partial, of God's Word, and looked forward to the complete expression that was to come in Christ. They were, to a degree, the Word of God in their own particular age. God's earthly people, the Jews, were a witness to His glory and purpose to the extent that, by faith, they looked beyond these expressions of the Word to their fulfilment in the promised Messiah.

In the New Testament era, the expression of God's character in His Son has been preserved for us in the Bible. Here we have the actual words of our Lord, as it were a first-hand description of God, His thoughts and ways. In a unique sense this is to us the Word of God, yet it still is based on Christ the living Word. The written Word fulfills God's purpose for us only as we come into personal contact with Christ through its pages. Otherwise it becomes 'the letter that killeth,' just as the Jews' legal, heartless observance of the Mosaic law produced spiritual death instead of spiritual life.

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth has produced for us the Bible as we know it today. The incarnation of Christ the Word brought to birth another expression of

the Word in the form of a Book. Here we find at work a very important principle. The writer to the Hebrews says, "The Word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12). The unique feature of life is its capacity to reproduce itself. God the eternal Word produced the Son. The incarnation of the Son has produced the written Word. Now the written Word must produce a further expression of itself in the lives of the people of God.

Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, very strikingly says, "Ye are an epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Cor. 3:3). In effect he tells the Corinthians that they are an expression of Christ. The living Word of God has become incarnate in men and women so that their lives have become the Word of God to the world around. God is revealed in the person of Christ. God is revealed in a Book. Now God is revealed in a redeemed people. All are an expression of Him. All are His Word.

We find the same thought very forcibly expressed in Matthew's and Luke's interpretations of the seed in the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares. "The seed is the word of God," says Luke (Luke 8:11). "The good seed are the children of the kingdom," says Matthew (Matt. 13:38). These are not contradictory statements. They are complementary. The seed of the Word sown into our hearts must produce the character of the Word to be lived out before men and women as an expression of the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells within us. People of the world first of all read the lives of the children of God. Then they may read the written Word.

All this demonstrates the living nature of the Word of God. Along with the words of Scripture goes the activity of the Holy Spirit. It is important that we should recognise the inseparable relationship between the Spirit and the Word. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life," said the Lord Jesus Christ (John 6:63). We can never really bow to the authority of the Word unless at the same time we are allowing the Spirit to do His work within us. To accept the Word of God as my authority is to live in the presence of the Lord in a spirit of devotion and submission to His will.

Here is where many of God's people get into difficulties, both in personal and in church life. Someone, for example, demands that an erring brother should make an apology to 'put things right' before being restored to fellowship. The demander wins his 'scriptural point,' the apology is duly made, fellowship is outwardly restored, yet spiritual oneness is still as far away as ever. Scriptural principle has apparently been honoured, but instead of a warmth of love for the Lord and the erring brother, there has been a spirit of self-justification. Or there is the enthusiastic church planter who sees that everything is done according to the 'scriptural pattern.' Again Scriptural principle has apparently been honoured, yet the result is somehow terribly disappointing, lacking altogether the warmth and vitality of life in the Spirit. The reason is that the church planter has been more interested in a principle than in a Person, in mechanics than in life. It is here that the basic problem of the authority of the Word lies. Let us never think that we are living by the authority of the Word if we try to enforce it as the Pharisees of old sought to enforce the law.

John tells us of the living Word that "He dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The fact is that the truth of God contains the grace of God. Where there is no grace there is not the fullness of divine truth. The Word contains both. To bow to the authority of the Word is both to obey the truth and to be filled with the grace of God.

When we think of the authority of the Word we are concerning ourselves with three things which must never be isolated from one another: the person of Christ, the people of God, and the Bible. Christ the Lord is THE Word. His people who live in obedience to the Spirit are expressions of the Word of truth which has borne fruit in their hearts. The Bible, the Word, is the written expression of God's character. Christ the Lord must be in

the place of pre-eminence. We must always look through the Bible or His people to Him, and only when we do this can we truly say that we are subject to the authority of the Word. If we look no further than the letter of the Biblical revelation we will become Pharisees. If we look no further than the person whose example of living by the Word has inspired us, we will become hero-worshippers. If we see through both to Christ, and are thus brought to a place of direct allegiance to Him, then alone are we living under the authority of the Word.

The challenge of the authority of the living Word is a challenge to see, through every divine channel, be it written or human, to the person of Christ Himself, to be filled with His grace through the constant working of the Spirit within—and then to obey.

## 9. Authority in the Church

An exaggerated idea of the authority of the church can have a most disastrous outcome in the spiritual life of the Lord's people. Over recent months I have had the opportunity of observing some of these sad effects, so I write this with a particular awareness of the present subject.

We have already discussed the question of authority on this page, but one short article hardly exhausts all that can be said on such a topic. We are concerned in this instance with authority in its precise relationship to the church, and more particularly still, with the extent to which the church itself possesses authority.

The problem, if we can call it such, is by no means new. It goes back to the very dawn of the church's existence. Its root is one of the many paradoxes of human nature, the innate desire of man both to submit to authority and to dominate. Obviously the problem has to be faced within the community of the Lord's people, the church, for the church is the focal point of Christian fellowship, and it is not surprising that the problem should be most acute wherever people recognise the place of pre-eminent importance that the church occupies in the purposes of God.

Much of the variation which exists today within traditional Christianity is due either to an acceptance of rigid authority, or to a reaction against it. The Bible lays stress on the authority of the Lord in His church. On the other hand, it emphasises the individual believer's freedom of access to the Lord, and his responsibility. But how does the Lord mediate His authority through the church? Does He do it through one person, or does He do it through a group, perhaps a group of elders? Whatever may be the case, to what extent is the word of any group or individual final? Is God ever limited in making His will known through them, since men are, after all, human? If He is, how far are others bound to be submissive to what may or may not be the will of God? These and many other questions are posed by the authority of the church. But the less final the authority of the church appears to be, the greater is the room for an emphasis on the individual's freedom of direct responsibility to the Lord. Are these two mutually exclusive?

Differing views on the authority of the church have led to three broad developments within historic Christianity. The first of these finds its ultimate, logical expression in Roman Catholicism. Here we find an emphasis on authority almost to the exclusion of the responsibility of the individual to do anything other than blindly obey. This error has sprung from a fundamental misconception of the nature of the body of Christ. Our brother Paul Madsen of Copenhagen has very clearly expressed the dangers of this error in an article from which I now want to quote. I believe it is of great importance to all of us who are concerned to see the Lord glorified in a valid expression of the church.

The doctrine of the church being the body of Christ is truly Biblical. Paul was the instrument through whom the revelation was given. It is given most clearly in the epistle to the Ephesians.

When we read the Bible, however, we must ask ourselves, 'What does Paul mean when he speaks of the church as the body of Christ and Christ as Head the body?

Augustine, one of the church fathers, more strongly than any other has formulated his understanding of what Paul meant. Augustine's teaching can be summed up in his famous expression 'Totus Christus,' that is that the Head plus the body make the 'whole Christ.' Such an expression had led innumerable Christians to make dangerous and fatal speculations.



When Paul spoke of the church as the body of Christ and of Christ as the Head of the church, he never lost sight of the fundamental fact that there exists an ABSOLUTE separation between God and us. When the Lord gives Himself to us, He never does so in such a way that He ceases to be Himself, and, therefore, He and man are never united in such a way that He as God becomes someone other than the highly exalted one. A saved person always falls on his face before Him, although he is a member of His body. The believer is never exalted to a position in equality with His Saviour, not even as a member of His body. Union in the body of Christ does not lead to man becoming God.

It is this fundamental fact in the relationship between the Saviour and the saved that Augustine began to tamper with, and which thousands right up to our time have confused.

"It is not difficult to foresee the fatal results of a failure to understand this fundamental relationship between the Lord and His people. When it is held that there is complete identity between Christ and His body the church, the latter automatically receives an honour which is not its due. This gives rise to the assumption of an exaggerated authority by those who occupy positions of leadership within the church. They begin to speak as the oracles of God and to resent any thought of their being mistaken.

Rome, of course, has quite openly adopted this attitude. The authority of Christ, they say, has been passed onto the church, and this authority is mediated through the chief apostle, the pope, who, when speaking 'ex cathedra' (i.e., in his official capacity as Christ's representative here on earth) is infallible. This, of course, introduces another factor, the close link between the authority of the church and the conception of apostleship. The subject of apostleship is one of the most difficult in the New Testament, but the very lack of any precise Scriptural statement as to the apostolic function, should at least warn us against endowing it with the legal authority that it so easily tends to assume. The ever-present danger is that the authority of the church should become the authority of one man or the authority of a small group of men.

The second development with historical Christianity is the product of a reaction against the authority of the church which exalts the freedom of the individual to a point of complete independence of others. The church then becomes little more than a convenient social meeting place, suitably organized, but bereft of its vital character. The fact that the Lord does use the church to reveal His will is obscured, and with it the importance of accepting seriously what insight the church may possess. Thus the individual continues on his own way believing that his own ideas alone are important in determining the will of God.

We find this attitude in many 'foot-loose' believers who refuse to identify themselves consistently with any form of church life; or in many also who may have a consistent association with a particular local church, but who accept no obligation with the privilege of fellowship. To those, the question of the authority of the church hardly arises.

The third development that has taken place has been of a measure of freedom within a context of rigid control. It is significant that, very often, those Christian leaders who adopt a most authoritative attitude are also the most outspoken in their proclamation of freedom and fellowship. This usually means that a small group is recognised as the voice of the church. This group, however, may in turn refer back to a leader of its own whose voice may seldom be heard by the local congregation. The most extreme example of this that comes to mind is the Taylor party of the Exclusive Brethren, but there are many others.

In such groups there is often a deep sense of fellowship among ordinary believers, and also among the elders, but if there is a leader, he is usually 'above' the need of fellowship. Fellowship between those different levels within an assembly is generally warm, but touches only more surface matters. The emphasis is upon the authority of the leader or elders who determine the limits within which the fellowship of the church may function. These limits may be very rigid. Provided the believer accepts these limits, owning generally unquestioning allegiance to the 'oracles' of God, he is free to develop whatever ministry the Lord has committed to him.

There are some elements of truth in this position. The extremes have been avoided, the authoritarianism of Rome on the one hand dispensing grace to a passive laity, or the complete individualism which recognises no authority at all. It is also appropriate to remember that the local church is not democratic in character. The elders have a Scriptural and authoritative function. The great difficulty is that authority always tends to become purely legal, and to be exercised in a spirit of fleshly finality that tends to death.

What then is our conclusion? The church possesses no authority of itself. Authority comes only from the Lord who, while in the midst of His people, is also above them. All of us, elders, workers, ordinary believers alike, must find ourselves united in submission to Him, ready to learn of Him howsoever and through whomsoever he may choose. We must recognise and respect God's order of eldership within the local church, but exercising and receiving authority is not merely a matter of position and obligation.

Authority belongs to the Lord, not to us. No man can claim finality for anything he says. It is God alone who, by His Spirit, testifies to His authority through those who are truly yielded to Him. We cannot reveal His spiritual authority, nor can we recognise or receive it, unless we are living lives of personal submission to Him. Apart from this constant experience of personal yieldedness to Christ, authority within the church becomes merely human and legal, a means of death rather than life.

The challenge of our present subject is that to which, in spiritual matters, we inevitably return. It is the challenge that we should allow Him to assume His rightful place within us both individually and corporately: "That in everything, He might be pre-eminent."

## 10. Leadership

I think it was D.L. Moody who once said that he would rather get ten men to work than do the work of ten men. These were wise words. They are the words of a true, spiritual leader.

In many realms, our modern world is experiencing an acute shortage of leadership. This is nowhere more true than it is in the church. Of would-be leaders there are plenty, people with an exalted awareness of their own ability and authority, but invariably persons with such a sharp consciousness of their fitness of prominence are neither true leaders, nor ever will be. A large proportion of church problems are due either to people who are in a position of leadership but should not be, or to people who think they should be in positions of leadership and are not. What this demonstrates is not only the paucity of leaders, but the widespread lack of understanding as to what true leadership entails.

Why does this problem exist? Why are leaders so few? I know some people who would reply simply that God has not given the gift of leadership to many. This is an easy answer, but one that is difficult to accept, for it amounts to saying that God has left the church without providing what He Himself has determined as necessary for its continued, healthy existence. Leadership, to a much greater extent than we are usually ready to admit, is a matter of training. Whatever potential God has given to men, whether it be in the realm of leadership, teaching, preaching, or anything else, will remain ineffective unless man is willing to cooperate with God in developing it.

Where then should training begin? It should begin in the home; it should continue through schooling into adulthood, and in the church till God channels it into the sphere He has chosen. The lack of spiritual leadership is a direct result of the failure of Christian homes. In my contact with the church at large, I have little difficulty in discerning the qualities of leadership. The tragedy is that they are either not being developed, or are beyond the stage where they can be developed. Once a tree has reached twenty or thirty years of age, it is too late to start pruning it into shape. Most of you who read this article may not be in positions of leadership, but whether that is so or not, you can do something towards the training of a leader if only you recognise the need and are willing to accept the cost in personal discipline it involves. But it seems that, for most, that cost is too great.

In this article I want us to think mainly about what leadership involves. I suggest we deal with our subject under three heads: (1) The qualities of leadership. (2) The example of leadership. (3) The dangers of leadership.

### The Qualities of Leadership

Scriptural leadership of the church is vested in a plurality of elders. Beyond that, it is true that, wherever the Lord may entrust a person with the responsibility for some sphere of service, be it great or small, within the context of the church's witness, there the qualities of leadership are also necessary. We would do well then to look at some of the conditions Scripture lays down for elders.

In writing to Timothy, Paul says that an elder should not be 'a novice' lest he be 'puffed up with pride' (1 Tim. 3:6). Much of the basic necessity for leadership is summed up in these words. A leader must be a man of spiritual experience and maturity. At the same time, he must be a person of humility, who is fully aware that his sufficiency for the task lies not in his own innate ability, but in God. This is the opposite of the childishness against which Paul warns the churches. "Brethren, be not children in mind," he writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:20). "That we may be no more children, tossed to and fro," he

says to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:14). Immature leadership is often characterised by a domineering attitude, a spirit that is easily offended, an instability that listens avidly to every piece of gossip, an inability to admit to a fault or mistake, a passion for self-justification. These are the marks of undiscerning childhood which recognises only self as the centre of its world and is quick to judge on the first outward appearance. The leader must rise high above these things.

"An overseer must be blameless, as God's steward." Thus wrote Paul to Titus (Titus 1:7). Having accepted leadership as from God, the leader must exercise a due measure of initiative and responsibility in fulfilling his commission. At the same time, his character must be such in the eyes of others that it commends him as a fit person to hold a divine trust. The leader must have the ability to understand what God requires of him, the vision to carry others wholeheartedly with him, and the decisiveness and perseverance to carry through his commission to the end.

Another important factor in leadership is in cultivating a proper attitude to others, particularly to our fellow workers and those whom we lead. The overseer, says Paul, speaking of his relationship to others, should be 'given to hospitality, a lover of good men, sober-minded, just, holy, temperate' (Titus 1:8). There is divine wisdom in God's order for leadership in the church to be vested in a plurality of elders. It is on this level of working together that we often experience so much difficulty, yet if a person is unable to work with others of a like calling in a spirit of consideration and generosity, his display of those characteristics to others will, in all likelihood, be little more than a veneer, devoid of any real heart concern. He should seriously ask himself whether he is fit for leadership at all.

### The Example of Leadership

The outworking of leadership is pre-eminently a matter of example, of putting into practice the qualities we have already outlined. The world's concept of leadership is vastly different from that of Christ. In the world, leadership means domination; in Christ, leadership means service. It was this that our Lord emphasised to His disciples in Luke 22:25-26. In the order of the world, the person at the top dominates his subordinate, and this process is carried on right down the ladder. "But ye shall not be so," said Christ. He exactly reverses the process. If people would only recognise this, there would be much less of a scramble after position in many churches. "I am in the midst of you as he that serveth," He said (Luke 22:27). And they were no empty words, as the record of the Gospels shows. The principle of Christian leadership is the principle of service. Actually, the word 'leader' in respect to the church is foreign to the New Testament. 'Minister' or 'servant' is the word used.

Nowhere is spiritual example more important than in the application of spiritual standards. The purpose of Christian leadership, in whatever sphere it is exercised, is to see that the standards of God's Word are put into operation and maintained. Yet this becomes impossible if the leader neglects his responsibility of seeing that the standards he proclaims are first of all rigidly applied to himself. The untidy parents who urge their children to keep their things in order cannot expect their orders to have any lasting effect. They must first learn to obey their own instructions.

The purpose of Christian example is to produce the same character in others. Similarly, true leadership should foster and encourage the qualities of leadership in others. The leader who must do everything himself, who cannot bear to see others sharing his work, is a failure. An important aspect of spiritual leadership is in learning to share authority with other people.

## The Dangers of Leadership

The exercise of spiritual leadership is dependent upon a deep level of confidence and fellowship between the leader and those he seeks to lead. If that does not exist, the leader can drive people along through the sheer force of a domineering personality, but he can never lead. He is, therefore, in the centre of a constant spiritual conflict in which the adversary seeks to weaken or destroy his fellowship with others. If he is not a man of mature discernment, he will fall an easy prey to the subtle piece of idle gossip.

A work of God may take many years to build up. The leader is in a position to foster its growth. He is also in a position to destroy it. The work of years can be destroyed in a day by a leader's mistake or self-will. When this actually does happen, the leader is in danger of feeling that his position should exempt him from the necessity of judgement. This is the source of some of the greatest tragedies in Christian work. If a spiritual standard is lowered for a leader's convenience, there will soon be little spiritual standard of any description remaining among those whom he failed to lead aright. "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 13:48). This is no less true with respect to the church's leadership of a testimony of righteousness in the world. "For the time is come for judgement to begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

The danger of pride, as of a Diotrephes who loves to have the pre-eminence; the danger of the corrupting influence of power which brands every disagreement as 'opposition,' fit only to be swept aside; the danger of thinking one's leadership is indispensable and encouraging a spirit of servile dependence; the danger of playing for the applause of men, looking for the 'well done' of men rather than the 'well done' of God; these are some of the dangers of leadership.

Are you a seeker after authority? Then seek it not. And if God gives it to you—still seek it not. Seek to serve. That is leadership.

## 11. Discipline

"He needs strict discipline." So said a father to me about his small son. "He needs strict discipline." This time the speaker was an older Christian worker speaking about a younger Christian worker. I suspect, however, that both meant the same thing—the stick, even if to one it was literal and to the other metaphorical.

It seems to me that neither of these people really understood what discipline is. Now please do not misunderstand me. I am not in the least trying to denigrate the need at times for punishment. The stick may be a very legitimate and necessary item in the maintaining of an ordered household, when judicially used, but it does not sum up the meaning of discipline. Discipline is much more than that. Some people have the very mistaken idea that discipline and punishment are the same thing. That, of course, is not true. Discipline may necessitate punishment, but punishment is the consequence of indiscipline. Punishment is not itself discipline.

The words 'discipline' and 'disciple' have a common origin. Both are derived from a Latin word which means a 'pupil.' From this simple fact alone we can see how important the whole concept of discipline is in the life of the believer. We are called to be disciples, that is, disciplined people. Discipline means at least two things; first it means order and consistency; second it means learning, moving on in the great purpose of all spiritual living—to know Christ. To do anything like full justice to our subject would require a book, not a short article of this nature, but let us attempt to look briefly at the practical implications of discipline on three different levels: that of the person, of the home, and of the church.

### The Disciplined Person

Discipline must always start with me, and that is usually the place where I see least need of it. Discipline has to do with attitude rather than words, our practice rather than our preaching. It is the witness of our lives which should stem from our faith. All of us know how vitally important this is to the stability of our homes, our churches and our relationship with others in general. Personal indiscipline really means that faith has little to do with practical living.

Tidiness of mind is very often reflected in tidiness of habit. A person who is slovenly in his living is usually slovenly when it comes to matters of spiritual perception. I am not saying that if we learn to be meticulously exact in our personal habits it will work a spiritual miracle, but I am saying that if we lay any claim to having experienced a spiritual miracle, there ought to be some evidence of it in the down-to-earth matters of daily living. I often think that people would enter into a much deeper spiritual experience if they only started by tidying up the few bits and pieces of worldly things they possess. We easily pride ourselves in being custodians of eternal truth, but if we cannot take care of the few goods and chattels which living in this old world necessitates, what is the standard of our spiritual stewardship likely to be? You may think this is a very mundane consideration, but if you want to grow in the disciplined life, start there, by being faithful to Christ in that which is least.

It is not necessarily true, however, even in a believer, that an ordered, consistent life is a sign of faith. It may be; it may not. Discipline implies a purpose. It is not an end in itself. We order our lives with some aim in view, even though that aim be, to some extent, unconscious. The undisciplined person, content to muddle along anyhow from day to day, is the person whose life is least purposeful.

Christian discipline implies a very specific purpose, put into words by the apostle Paul when he said, "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). So we begin in any subject of spiritual enquiry with the lordship of Christ. Only on that basis can Christian discipline be meaningful and life-giving. Otherwise it will be void of spiritual content, hard and domineering.

Writing on this page some little time ago I said that to live is to choose. Spiritual life is not automatic. It is a constant succession of choices, choosing Christ. The alternative is to choose self. We would all hesitate to say that we live lives in which we invariably, in matters great and small, choose Christ. We know how often we do not. It is in the realm of discipline more than anywhere else, that it is most easy for the committed child of God to choose self. Discipline can have Christ as its object, or it can be motivated by self-pleasing, the desire to impress others, the desire to assert a measure of position or authority. If we insist on living an ordered life, what is our motive? Is it self or Christ? Are we really living for our own convenience, or for the glory of God?

The jealously guarded, self-centred order (or disorder for that matter) which insists that everything and everybody should fit into my pattern of living is tyrannical and promotes disunity. On the other hand, an order that is truly centred in Christ has a divine power of attraction because it is so genuinely self-effacing. If we think that we are disciplined people, yet are perplexed to find that our efforts at establishing order are not producing what they ought either in ourselves or in others, I suggest that we get down to a honest examination of our motives.

A discipline which is motivated by Christ must have profound practical effects. It will mean order because Christ is the Creator of order. It will mean consistency because Christ is Truth. It will mean a purpose that others as well as ourselves should know Him, because Christ is love. We will see a little more of what this implies under our next two headings.

### The Disciplined Home

So far we have been thinking mainly of discipline as applied to ourselves, or self-discipline. Now we come to the realm of dealing with others. This is the supreme test of the order of our own lives, for the measure of influence we have on others in this respect is but a reflection of our own self-discipline or lack of it.

All of us are constantly influencing others either to order or to disorder, but the circle where this is most obvious is within the family. What a man really is will be seen in his attitude to those nearest to him. Scripture gives full recognition to this fact when it requires of an elder that he be 'one that ruleth well his own house.' This is an oft-neglected condition, and one that never fails to be neglected to the detriment of the church.

One of the commonest difficulties which today seems to beset the lives of believing Christians is that of an unruly family. Of all the requests people bring for prayer, "Pray for my family," is one of the most frequent, and it often comes from those who have an appearance of spiritual maturity. There are spiritual tragedies being enacted in believing homes.

Discipline is purposeful, and purpose implies a sense of responsibility which is not only corrective, but instructive and constructive. I have been impressed (or depressed) by the number of families which are brought up on a diet of family prayer and neglect. Too often people seem to think that prayer absolves them from any form of practical responsibility. Christ not only loved the church but GAVE Himself for it; otherwise His love would have

produced nothing. Prayer without a corresponding sense of practical responsibility is equally barren. Discipline's purpose is actively helpful. It not only tells what to do; it shows how to do it. Scripture is both precept and practice. Our Lord not only taught righteousness; He WAS righteousness. That is discipline, the combination of precept and practice which aims at the revelation of Christ in another.

I once saw a father give a very business-like beating to his young daughter because she gained a very low mark in her maths examination. He was always praying for his children and telling how they were all 'given to the Lord.' But he made no attempt to help her next mathematics test. He would like to think that his family is well disciplined, but it seemed to me that his punishment—even if it was quite just—was motivated more by the disgrace his daughter brought upon the family than by any desire to help her apply the principle of Christian diligence to her studies. In other words, his motive was self, not Christ.

Discipline requires a very strict order and consistency in our own lives. Then it requires a most active participation in applying the divine principles we have learned to the lives of those for whom we are responsible. It is a responsibility far too many people avoid, because it is demanding both on our characters and on our efforts. People can avoid it in many ways. Some can and do avoid it by 'serving the Lord,' not realising, or wanting to realise, that they are doing God a disservice, not a service. Unstable homes mean an unstable church.

I do not want to be unfair or over-dogmatic (though I have to admit I feel rather dogmatic inside) but it appears to me that the basis of most of the family problems I have encountered is not undisciplined children, but undisciplined parents. If you feel like complaining against that judgement, I suggest you take your complaint to the Lord and see what He has to say about it.

### The Disciplined Church

The church lives its life much more in public than does the family. It also has no human bond to hold it together. These two factors emphasise a danger and a need. The danger is that church discipline should be of the demonstrative, self-centred type. The need is that church discipline should be firmly rooted in the example of a Christ-centred life, otherwise spiritual fellowship will tend to disintegrate.

I remember an incident in the office of a large church. A brother who had considerable responsibility in the leadership of the church was busily engaged behind his desk. A young man came in with a request for information. It was a simple request which required a straightforward 'yes' or 'no,' but it was important as it entailed arrangements he would have to make that day. The young brother was genuinely in a hurry as he was on his way to his place of business. "I am sorry," said the brother behind the desk, "I am very busy and cannot speak to you now. Please wait for a while." The request was politely repeated. The same reply was given, more firmly this time, "I am very busy." It is true that he was very busy. It is also true that he could have replied to the question in a fraction of the time it took him to insist that he must be waited upon. After about half an hour the young man received the monosyllabic answer he required and left late. The brother behind the desk was well known as a strict disciplinarian.

The point is, of course, that discipline must be constructive. If I genuinely recognise the need of a Christ-centred, ordered life, I must understand that the need applies not only to me but to others as well. If I am in any position of Christian leadership, my responsibility is to encourage order in the lives of others, not to maintain the order of my own life at the expense of the order of another person's, as occurred in the illustration I



have just used. That is an example, not of a Christ-centred discipline, but of a self-centred discipline, which leads ultimately to disorder and irresponsibility.

The church can allow an excellent field for the self-centred discipline of a Diotrophes. It can also be the sphere in which a life of Christ-centred discipline wins its supreme response, the response not of compulsion but of love. To the extent that we personally have learned what it means to be disciples, to that extent will we help to impart to the church a discipline that becomes part of its nature. It was this that the example of the Lord imparted to the early church.

“Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations,” is our great commission. But what about ourselves? Have we learned to be disciples—disciplined people?

## 12. Responsibility

An ability to accept responsibility is one of the marks of adulthood. A child begins life by having everything done for him. He is dressed, fed, carried about from place to place. He lacks the power of choice. He is unable to accept responsibility for even the simplest of actions. As time goes by, he learns to move about unaided. He learns to feed himself, to dress himself. He is beginning to learn responsibility, and his parents do all they can to encourage him. One of the most important aspects of education is to teach children to grow up into responsible adults, people who can face the complexities of life with decisiveness and a proper sense of duty.

A sense of responsibility does not come naturally to us. It has to be taught and encouraged. Man by nature is irresponsible, concerned only about pleasing himself, and with little sense of duty either towards God or to other people.

Not infrequently we meet the tragedy of people who, though sound in mind and grown-up in body, are unable to cope with the responsibility of living. They have money, but they do not know how to use it. They have a house, but do not know how to run it. They have a family, but do not know how to order it. They have numerous jobs which they cannot hold, or so muddle through on the jobs they have that they never advance. The business of living seems to be just too much for them. If they take their failing seriously they are likely to be bowed down with despair. If they do not take it seriously, they are likely to be the despair of all their neighbours and friends whose helpful advice is shrugged off with a careless laugh.

We call such people unstable and irresponsible, but often fail to recognise that they are so because of the fault of others, very often the fault of parents. We all know people who, even when their children have reached maturer years, insist on deciding everything for them lest they make a mistake. They are desperately concerned to shield them from the realities of the world lest they be contaminated, but they expend much less effort in building spiritual character which is the only true protection against the subtle temptations of the godless age in which we live. The result is that when their children are thrust into situations where they have to make decisions for themselves, they have no idea how to act. When they find themselves faced with the hard realities of a world they hardly knew existed, they go to pieces. In body they are adults, but in other ways they are children. It is very solemn to recognise that we ourselves can be the means of consigning other people to live such tragic lives.

What we have just been saying is equally true in the spiritual realm. In fact spiritual irresponsibility is much more sadly common than the natural irresponsibility which is such a perplexing part of many lives. One of the most vital aspects of a spiritual ministry is to encourage believers to be responsible Christians. It is because we do not see this as one of our main duties that there is the general lack of leadership from which the churches are desperately suffering in these days. Whatever other qualities may be necessary in a leader, he must be a responsible person.

As we have seen, responsibility is not an innate quality which develops automatically. It has to be taught, encouraged, fostered. To encourage responsibility, we must first of all impart a sense of values. A child, for example, is taught that books are valuable and must, therefore, be treated with respect. They should not be used with dirty hands, flung around, torn, or scribbled upon. When he has learned that, he can perhaps be given the responsibility of looking after the little Sunday School library. Since he has learned the value of books, he will do his job properly. A sense of values and responsibility should develop together. Since this is so, it follows that from the earliest time we are aware of values, we should be taking responsibility for something or other. Responsibility is not

only meant to be the province of the mature. It is true that the mature person can shoulder much greater responsibilities than an immature person, but his capacity is developed through accepting very minor responsibilities to begin with and discharging them efficiently. No one becomes capable of assuming major responsibilities if he has not first learned responsibility in lesser realms.

At every stage of life, certain responsibilities devolve upon us. It is of the greatest importance that we should learn what our responsibilities are, and what responsibilities belong to other people. Having learned this, we must not usurp the responsibilities of others, but do everything we can to encourage others to discharge their responsibilities efficiently. Failure in this direction is one of the chief causes of difficulties in the life of the church. It is also one of the main reasons why we fail to produce the spiritual leadership that is so sorely needed among God's people in these days.,

There are three circles of responsibilities which figure predominantly in the life of the believe: personal responsibility, family responsibility, and church responsibility. When we have learned to accept our responsibilities before God in each one of these spheres, we will have a sure guide for faithful discharging of our responsibilities in business and other relationships in the world in which we live.

The sanctity of the individual, the family, and the church is clearly taught in the Bible. While each has a vital relation to the others, each must also allow the others to assume their own particular responsibilities freely. Not to do so will end in spiritual weakness and confusion. For example, it is the responsibility of each person in his earlier years to decide what profession God wants him to follow. He may receive advice both from his family and the church, which he should view with all due respect, but ultimately the responsibility of making a decision is his own. It belongs neither to his family nor to the church. Similarly, in a family the parents have the responsibility of deciding on the upbringing of their own children. This is neither the responsibility of anyone outside the family, nor is it the responsibility of the church, though both of these latter may offer helpful counsel. The local church has the responsibility of exercising discipline among those within its fellowship. Here again others may contribute their insight on what the Lord wants to be done, but the final responsibility belongs neither to any individual, nor to any single family within the church, but to the church itself.

We could also mention the special responsibilities which God sometimes thrusts upon individuals. Many of the great exploits which have been done for God in spreading the gospel down through the ages are in this category. They were responsibilities in which the individuals who bore them should have been encouraged by the church and all who had the Lord's interests at heart, but which often had to be carried alone.

When we recognise these circles of responsibility of which our lives are composed, we are immediately brought face to face with what to some is the most difficult responsibility of all, the responsibility of allowing others to bear their responsibilities. Yet it is only when we are willing to do this that both we ourselves and others can develop to spiritual maturity. The Lord needs leaders, and one of the prime marks of leadership is the ability to encourage responsibility in others.

In my own spiritual experience I owe much to the insight of a simple remark made by a great man of God. As a student seeking the mind of the Lord for the way ahead, others urged me to ask his advice. When I did he simply said, "The Lord will show you." He put me right back on God to shoulder my own responsibility before Him. And the Lord did show me.

## 13. The Ministry

Almost everywhere, companies of God's people are suffering from the lack of an adequate ministry of the Word. The consequences of this lack are painfully obvious: smallness of spiritual understanding, absence of spiritual discernment, weakness of spiritual character, and a limited capacity to work together in fellowship with others.

There are many misconceptions as to the nature of the Christian ministry but, broadly speaking, these could be divided into two. At one extreme there is the idea that the capacity to minister the Word is purely a matter of education in the proper techniques. The opposite extreme is the belief that an effective ministry is dependent upon direct inspiration from God which depends to no great extent upon a person's actual understanding of the Word. Neither of these extremes is the truth. That education in the knowledge of the Scriptures plays an important part is undeniable, yet it is by no means the only factor involved. On the other hand, it is certainly unwise to claim the inspiration of the Spirit for every or any sermon we preach. "The Lord led me to say it," can be a far too easy excuse for a confusion of words that has nothing at all to do with the Spirit's guidance. It is always much safer to allow others to judge whether or not the messages we give have come from the Lord. And we usually do well to accept such judgement. The principle, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20), applies to our character as believers, but it equally applies to our spoken ministry. If it is from the Lord, it will produce the fruit of the character of Christ in those who hear.

So it is of great importance that we have a proper understanding of the basis of the ministry. The call to exercise a ministry of the Word is not to be entered upon lightly, nor can it be exercised easily. It can be fulfilled only in a spirit of constant burden to exemplify the Word we preach.

### The Basis of the Ministry

What then is the basis of an effective ministry? There are many factors involved. All are important. First, there is the factor of our own actual relationship with the Lord. Let those who place so much emphasis on the leading or inspiration of the Spirit always remember this. The inspiration of the Spirit is not something that takes over the moment we stand up to preach. Inspiration is the product of God's constant dealings with us. It is the product of maturity and experience, the experience of walking in obedience to God's ways. It is the product of a devotion to the Lord that has gained victory over the things of self. Apart from these there can be little inspiration of God upon our ministry. We have no ground to claim that in our ministry we have been led of the Lord if we do not respond to the daily leading of the Lord which produces spiritual attitudes and righteousness in our day-to-day living. The inspirational touch of God includes every aspect of living and service. If there is a true inspiration of God in preaching, it will be accompanied by an equal inspiration of God in living.

So the first basic essential in a ministry of the Word unto life is a relationship with God which involves a continuing experience of the cross. It was in the cross that the will of Jesus the Man was surrendered to the will of the Father God. "Not my will but Thine be done." It was in the cross that the ministry of bringing life and immortality to light was fulfilled. Likewise our own ministry can only be fulfilled when we know the working of the cross in a life which is conscious of its own weakness and utter dependence upon Christ. The ministry of the Word demands a spirit that has seen an end to pride, whether it be pride of person (which shows itself in bigotry and censoriousness) or pride of the very truth that is proclaimed.

A second essential in the ministry of the Word is an experience of the Word. The Word that we proclaim must first have taken root in our own lives, producing in us the standard we preach. It is pointless to preach grace if we ourselves are ungracious. We cannot preach down condemnation upon pride if we ourselves are full of conceit, though all the time we may profess humility, a profession that deceives neither God, others, nor ourselves. It is hypocrisy to demand judgement upon the sins of others if we have not first judged our own sins. Only to the extent that we live in obedience to the Word of God can the Lord minister to others through us.

We cannot order our lives by a standard we do not know. For ourselves and our ministry to others it is important that we should learn 'rightly to divide the Word of Truth.' The Bible affords us an inexhaustible source of study. If we are to fulfil our ministry, we must possess an inexhaustible concern to enter into more of its fullness. If we would be teachers, we must be learners also. The moment we lose the capacity to learn through others and through the Scriptures, we forfeit the right and the ability to be ministers of God.

### The Purpose of the Ministry

The purpose of the ministry is to bring people to an experience of the grace of God in Christ, and to see them develop in spiritual stature. That much is obvious, but it is incomplete. The ministry of the Word must be centred in God, not in man. That ministry, however fluent and profound, is a total failure which is meant to enhance the reputation of the one minister, or is exercised simply to build up those who listen within the limits of their own willingness to obey the Lord. The ministry must ever have God's standard in view both for ourselves and for others. Its object is to build up the saints not just to satisfy our own conception of spiritual maturity, but to satisfy God. A God-centred ministry can have no room for considerations of personal prestige or position. It is essentially selfless.

We often hear people speak of a ministry as being 'in life.' What is often meant is probably little more than that a particular sermon has been easy to listen to, yet 'life' should certainly characterise the ministry. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "The Word of God is living" (Heb. 4:12). In other words, ministry must be reproductive. By our ministry we should produce ministers. If we have any gift from God, we must be concerned to see that same gift born in others.

It is a sad fact that very few servants of God seem to be in the least concerned about encouraging the gift of God in others. This attitude is a solemn indication of the immaturity and incompetence of so many who claim to be divinely commissioned to preach the Word. The Christian worker usually appears perfectly satisfied if the 'flock' he presumes to shepherd continues in a spirit of reasonably happy fellowship, and if he is able to sustain a busy programme of Gospel-preaching activity. He may even actively discourage a competent ministry through others in his desire to maintain his own position. How often I have seen the incompetence of a Christian worker prevent the development of a God-given gift in someone else. Our purpose and responsibility as ministers of the Word is to see the ministry that has been given to us reproduced in others.

### The Proof of the Ministry

I have often been impressed at the amount which a stable work of God owes to the quite unassuming ministry of some relatively unknown saint in a previous generation. Church history amply demonstrates that God seldom, if ever, works in isolation from the ministry

of the Word that has gone on before. The real fruit of our ministry is revealed after we have left the fruit of our labours.

The tendency today is to judge the effectiveness of a ministry on the immediate impression it makes. The evangelist whose preaching results in many souls being 'saved' is considered a success. The worker who can keep an assembly alive with a fervour of activity is considered to be fulfilling his commission. But this may not be so at all. The proof of an evangelistic ministry is not in the number of souls 'saved' today, but in the number of souls who are still saved in a few years time. The proof of a God-directed ministry in an assembly is not in what happens during the period of the ministry, but in what happens after the minister has gone. Many apparently successful servants of God would find that, were they to leave the company to which they minister, it would collapse. The truth is that the assembly is dependent upon a personality, not upon the Lord, and the ministry is a failure.

What is the basis of the ministry we exercise? Is it self or God? What is its purpose? To do something only in the present, or to be a channel of God's working down through succeeding generations? What will be left when our ministry is over? A people in whom the Lord continues to work—or nothing?

## 14. Authority

There is a well-worn tale of a preacher who against Point No. 2 in the notes of his message red-pencilled the remark, "Weak point. Shout loud and thump table." I have some friends, of course, who could never be accused of doing this. They think it is unspiritual to preach from notes. But I could not vouch for the fact that they do not associate spiritual authority with a loud voice.

The progress of the work of God is dependent upon the exercise of spiritual authority. In giving His commission to the disciples the Lord said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations..." He delegated His authority to the eleven, and through them to His disciples of all ages. On the exercise of this authority depended the fulfilment of the commission.

The importance of spiritual authority in the church has always been recognised. This, historically, has given rise to the differentiation between clergy and laity, and the different means which have been and are employed to protect the authority of those in whom it has been vested.

It is very easy to understand how authority should come to be associated with an ecclesiastical position. John in his third letter tells us of one 'Diotrophes who loveth to have the pre-eminence.' There is no reason to believe that Diotrophes was the one solitary example of spiritual despotism in the early churches. If our knowledge of human nature is any guide (and, after all, human nature is not something that alters with the years) he must have been typical of a problem that was as common then as it is today. What was the answer? Why, to 'recognise' someone whom everyone liked (except Diotrophes) as leader of the group. It is in this way that the hierarchical bishop came into existence.

The earliest 'bishops' of whom we have record held a position similar to that of the present-day pastor. The diocesan bishop with jurisdiction over a large number of congregations was a considerably later invention. There is little doubt, however, that bishops came into being as a means of protecting the churches from the authoritarianism of self-styled 'leaders.' Whether this was a legitimate or Scriptural method of dealing with the problem is more than doubtful, but its merits or demerits are not our present concern.

When spiritual authority becomes associated with a recognised ecclesiastical or administrative position, there is always the danger that the position may become the dominant feature. In fact, this usually happens. A person comes to consider that he has a particular authority simply by virtue of the position he occupies. This can be true on any level of church administration, but more so when the person who fills the office has not himself grown up spiritually in the fellowship he serves, for he is then more likely to approach his task with a sense of having been 'appointed' by someone. This sense itself magnifies his position. A Scriptural eldership, therefore, provides the greatest safeguard against the difficulty we are considering.

What we are really faced with is the conflict between two concepts of authority, the human and the divine, and I have been trying to show to what a great extent the human dominates our thinking. Human authority is based upon character. Even the world gives some recognition to two levels of authority when it speaks of 'moral' leadership.

An officer in an army gives his commands. His men obey. He has been appointed to a position of authority, and obedience is a legal duty. His personal life may be good or bad, but his authority remains the same because it is based upon his position. His men may

despise him, but they still obey. On the other hand, an officer may, by his very character, win the loyalty of his men. They obey willingly, not out of mere compulsion. This, his moral leadership, thus strengthens his position, but his rank remains the basis of his authority nevertheless.

Spiritual authority works in the other direction. Its basis is character. Position is purely secondary. The tragedy of so much of the church is men who begin with an authority given of God and end with an authority that is merely positional. Paul reflects something of this ever-present peril when he writes to the Corinthians, "But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (Cor. 9:27). How many people there are today whose main claim to a hearing and respect is that they have been 'ordained,' or 'set apart' or 'sent' by some person or church.

I am quite aware that there is an opposite problem; that of the self-centred critic who will recognise no authority outside himself, spiritual or otherwise, because he himself has not submitted to the direct authority of Christ upon his life. But that still does not alter the truth that spiritual authority is based solidly in character, not in position.

If spiritual authority is not based upon position, and confined, therefore, to a certain elite within the church, it follows that it should be characteristic, in some measure at least, of all true children of God. This is exactly what is indicated again and again throughout the New Testament. The Lord emphasised it in His parables. We see authority in the householder of Matthew 13, in the required use of the talents of Matthew 25, and in the use of the pounds in Luke 19. Paul graphically portrays the fact to the Corinthians when he says, "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). He was speaking not of a few select believers, but of the assembly as a whole. All had the responsibility and authority of representing Christ in the world.

Everyone exerts some influence on others. The believing Christian is called to exert that influence from the dignity and authority of a Christ-like character. True, within the church there are some who are called to exercise a much greater degree of authority than others, but authority as such should be a characteristic common to all followers of Christ, and its basis is the same in everyone.

Let us look a little more closely at the actual foundation of spiritual authority. Our Lord summed it up when He said, "And whosoever would be first among you, shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:27). Here lies one of the great paradoxes of the spiritual life. The one who will be first is the one who will accept the position of the least. But he accepts it not in a spirit of fatalistic resignation, nor with a wary eye all the time on the top of the ladder, but in a spirit of positive service to Christ. He is seeking first the Kingdom of God. If your one ambition is to wield spiritual authority, you will never attain it. To the extent that a person strives after spiritual authority, to that extent will it ever elude him. Paul's one desire right at the end of his life was 'that I may know Him' (Phil. 3:10). That summed up his ambition. It was the secret of his great authority.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," said the Lord. On the face of it this saying is contrary to every generally accepted idea. Yet history is adequate demonstration of the authority of the life lived in the Spirit. Within the last two thousand years kingdoms have risen and collapsed; men who made their mark on the world of their own day have been forgotten; but the authority of Christ ruling within the hearts of His people, witnessing through His church to the world, has remained.

The authority of Calvary has its foundation in the same meekness. Read Paul's great passage on the self-emptying of Christ in Philippians 2. Christ was 'in the form of God,'



the complete expression of God's character. "I and the Father are one," He could say (John 10:30). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Of Him the Father could say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Yet this divine character was revealed in Christ's willingness to divest Himself of its glory. His glory became evident to all when He refused to hold onto it. His authority was established because He laid it down. In other words, the authority of Christ was not dependent upon His supreme position as Head over all things, but upon His inmost character.

We find a reflection of this same fact in the qualification laid down for elders in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. There is a marked absence in these passages of anything that would suggest the self-assertiveness of character or 'position consciousness' which is generally associated with leadership in the world. The emphasis is on a selfless stability and consistency which ministers to others in grace and will earn respect within any sphere of influence. This does not condemn as useless such qualities as initiative and resourcefulness which are normally associated with authority, but it does show that these, without the basic elements of a humble, Christ-like character, do not comprise spiritual authority. They may, in fact, make it impossible.

The delegation of our Lord's authority to those who would be His disciples is one of the most far-reaching of Scriptural truths. All who are true children of God are called to exercise this authority in some measure, whether as witnesses in the world, as parents in a family, as elders in a church, or in any other sphere. The tragedy of much so-called witness, of many churches, is the attempt to preach the principles of Christ without the living example of Christ. It is always doomed to failure. In fact, not only that; it not only fails, but is an encouragement to the defiance of basic spiritual standards.

Let us be sure of this: there can be no authority owned of God that is not solidly based in a Christ-like character and practical Christian living. The extent to which many who profess to know the Lord recognise this will cause the homes and churches to be transformed.

It is recorded of Christ that "He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). He who was born in a stable held no earthly position from which to demand the respect of men. Whence did His authority come if not from the fact that He was 'full of grace and truth.' Are we Christians who simply preach, or are we of those few who practice?

## 15. Sacrifice

Probably all of us feel that sacrifice figures somewhere in the Christian life. Yet it is a subject that is surrounded by many complexes. Those who sacrifice most speak least about it. Others feel they have nothing to sacrifice, that sacrifice is the duty of the rich, not of themselves. Sacrifice, it is true may have to do with our material circumstances, but it also has a much wider application. In the early churches, believers were deprived of many of their rights in society. For some, it meant the giving up of wealth, but more often it meant the sacrifice of prospects and position. Position is something that people often hold much more dear than money. Sacrifice lies first of all in a right attitude to what we have, much or little, and a willingness to commit all to the Lord.

### Material Sacrifice

The world in which we live is made up of both rich and poor. There may be a great measure of injustice which leaves a few with so much and many with so little, but we must remember that the Bible condemns neither. People can use their wealth to gratify themselves. People can equally use their poverty as an excuse for not submitting to Christ. When we think of the responsibility of sacrifice, it is always dangerous to look too much on others. It is much more important that we look to our own willingness to commit what we have, little or much, to the Lord.

There have been men and women of God who have been led to give up all they had for the furtherance of the Gospel. A fairly recent example of such a man is C. T. Studd who, born into a wealthy English family, gave away all his inheritance and devoted his life to preaching the Gospel in different parts of the world. He made the sacrifice that God had demanded of him. Anyone to whom such a call might come can refuse it only to his own spiritual impoverishment.

There are, however, much lesser levels of material sacrifice that touch us all and are an equally valid test of the sacrificial spirit. These have much to do with our willingness to adjust to other circumstances. How ready are we to sacrifice our living habits or our eating habits for different ones? These may seem to be small, unimportant things, but they are frequently great stumbling blocks in the lives of the Lord's people. This is so not only when the Lord asks us to adjust to a standard that is higher. We have built in prejudices which look with disdain upon any way of living other than our own, and we refused to sacrifice them.

### Sacrificing our Prejudices

When we talk about sacrificing our prejudices we come much nearer the heart of our subject. If we are willing to give up these, our attitude to material things will adjust itself automatically.

Our world is becoming smaller and smaller. Fifty years ago, the countries of another continent were remote. Today, they are but few hours away. People of different countries exercise an influence over one another such as was impossible in the fairly recent past. This has brought potential for both good and evil. Among the Lord's people it can be a means of rich spiritual blessing if we are able to profit from the insights which God has given different people into His Word. This requires, however, that we be able to recognise and abandon the deeply engrained prejudices which are very much a part of all of us. These prejudices do exist. Let us make no mistake about it.

In various countries I had the opportunity of observing the reactions of those who find themselves foreigners in a strange land, whether Easterners in the West or Westerners in

the East. One thing that has impressed me has been the very few who are really able to adjust to their new circumstances. This is equally so with believers, and it cuts them off from both spiritual blessing and spiritual usefulness. They cannot sacrifice some deeply held traditional belief. It may be something relatively small, concerning say Christian gathering, which involves no Scriptural principle but, "The way I have been brought up to worship the Lord is the only right way for spiritual people. Those who do not agree must be unspiritual." This is the attitude. Not so long ago I met a family of believers in one of the largest cities of the world. They seemed to spend most of an evening trying to tell me that there was not a spiritual Christian in the place. Although I personally knew a number of fine companies of believers, all came in for the most stringent criticism. They were all un-acceptable basically because they did conform to a traditional pattern that was foreign to their whole way of living. This family, who had a fine witness in their own country, had never been able to sacrifice their prejudices. It is here, first of all, that all of us need to learn sacrifice. Let us not excuse ourselves by pointing at the apparent lack of material sacrifice in others.

### Sacrificing our Prospects

This is a realm in which sacrifice is all too little understood. I believe that, in our modern world, it is foolishness to decry the need of a thorough education. When an increasing proportion of the population is specialising in some field of secular knowledge, for God's people to glory in ignorance is neither glorifying to the Lord nor sound common sense. Many people do recognise this, but once they become experts in their field they seem to think it inconceivable that the training they have had should be used for anything but to advance their own reputation and wealth. Often the few who think otherwise are sadly misunderstood. I have often heard professional men who have given of their skills in the service of the Lord being criticised for 'making money' when a little thought would have served to show that they were living on a mere pittance. It had simply never entered the critics' minds that anyone could use his accomplishments for other than his own selfish ends.

Some of the most widely used of God's servants have been men who have been highly qualified professionally and have sacrificed their prospects of worldly fame and fortune to apply the mental discipline they have acquired to the service of God. The Lord needs many more such. Sometimes I am tempted to think that the service of the Lord is confined to the halt, the lame and the blind, while the healthy, strong-limbed and seeing complain that they are not being spiritually fed. That they are not being adequately fed is often too true, but whose fault is it? The tragedy of so many of the blessings and opportunities we receive is that we use them for ourselves rather than for the glory of God. We are unwilling to sacrifice the opportunity of self-gratification that our divinely given capacities offer.

So the subject of sacrifice need not leave any of us untouched. It is not God's call to everyone to give up all the material goods he possesses, but it is His call to all of us to hold everything we have, material possessions, attitudes, ambitions, prospects, lightly, that they may be used in whatever way He wants. Sacrifice is the attitude which leaves all of our lives, our relationships, our comings and goings completely at the disposal of the Lord to be given or retained as He may desire. May we all learn to know a little more of the spirit of true sacrifice.

## 16. Balance

Someone has said that the most difficult thing in the world is to keep balanced. Spiritual balance is certainly not an attainment that comes easily. It may even be doubted whether it ever comes completely to any of us. So many things militate against a balanced outlook. Prejudice and immaturity are two of them. The trouble is that these are two of the last things we are willing to recognise. Consequently, few are the people who are ready to admit that their spiritual perception is not exquisitely balanced.

The spiritually balanced person has the capacity so to hold the truths of Scripture that he does not emphasise one to the exclusion of another. Balance is the ability not so to over-emphasise some practice, which we may consider Scriptural, as to feel that anyone who does not emphasise it as we do is of a lower spiritual order; it is the capacity to understand which matters are of major and which are of minor importance in our living.

### Balanced Thinking

How many people believe what they do because of a conviction imparted by the Spirit of God that it is true, a conviction gained from a personal, thorough, study of the Bible? The answer to this question must be that there are very few indeed. The conviction which most people say they hold so strongly are not based on an impartial searching of the Scriptures at all. They are based very often on tradition, though many believers would hotly deny any such thing. They are based often on a personal allegiance to some other person, so that whatever that other person may say is automatically accepted as right. They are based not infrequently on what a person considers convenient to the way he wants to live. In a word, any or all of these considerations, or others, outweigh what God really wants to say.

The way to balanced thinking lies in our personal relationship with the Lord. It is very easy to say that our lives are given over to the Lordship of Christ, but the fact of the matter is that there are very few believers who are not far more easily swayed by other consideration by the mind of the Lord. By the grace of God, this must be changed. We must so know the Lord that all our personal prejudices fall away. We must so know the Lord that we see through every tradition, or every other person, to Him. The Lord must so dominate our thinking that every piece of human advice is brought to Him for scrutiny. Only then will we begin to move along the way to balanced thinking.

### Balanced Doctrine

Down through the history of the church God has, at different periods, raised up individuals with a particular doctrinal emphasis which has been especially necessary at the time. The reformation brought to the fore the doctrine of justification by faith. The puritans stressed the authority of the Word of God. The early Brethren re-emphasised the nature of the church with the ground of Christian gathering being the relationship of men and women with God in Christ. All of these emphases, together with many others, were true and necessary. It was fitting that, at a time when they had been largely lost to view, they should be brought plainly before the minds of the Lord's people. Yet in the very stress with which these truths were presented, there was a sense of imbalance. To begin with it was necessary, for no truth can be stated in isolation without some appearance of having an importance greater than any other. But if this imbalance is not corrected, it simply leaves the people of God with an outlook as limited as ever, if somewhat changed. Many people, in their sincere attempts to hold a doctrinal balance, merely move from one unbalanced position to another.

How many times I have heard people criticize others because of some minor point of doctrine with which they say they disagree. "They do not follow the truth", they will say, when the fact is that neither part has a monopoly of the truth. What they do not appear to understand is that the local church is based upon relationship with Christ, not upon a balanced understanding of Christian doctrine. If the latter were the case there could be no real church at all, for no one has attained a perfectly balanced comprehension of the truth as it is in Christ. It is equally wrong, of course, to feel that the church can be based on limited understanding of Christian doctrine. This is sectarianism, and we become sectarian whenever we think that, because of our understanding of the truth, we are the church. Even so-called 'church truth' can become the basis of the most bigoted sectarianism which prevents those who hold to it from advancing any further in the things of the Spirit.

We attain most nearly to a balanced understanding of the truth as it is Christ when we recognise our proneness to overemphasis, and make sure that we do not allow our partial understanding of the moment to be the basis of our fellowship in the local church.

### Balanced Living

The greatest hindrance to balanced spiritual living is the tendency to divide between the sacred and the secular. Life is composed of a great variety of activities. Some of them have to do directly with our relationship with the Lord, such as prayer and Bible reading, or our gathering together with other believers in worship. Others directly concern our relationship with society, the employment in which we are engaged, our dealings with other people, whether within the circle of our own family or outside.

I have met many people who appear very devoted to the Lord in their attention to Bible reading, prayer, and other such religious exercise, but have constant trouble in their relationships with others, and little concern to do well the work which they make their living. They love to pray, but not to work. It could hardly be said that they are spiritual people. Their lives lack balance. They have not learned that spiritual living does not consist only of praying, reading the Bible and going to meetings but that these things should be the source of a spiritual energy which will be revealed in the most mundane of everyday tasks. Balanced spiritual living brings Christ into everything we say and do.

A familiar mark of imbalance is the proud, critical spirit in which many believers condemn others for minor failings. We need a much deeper realisation of the seriousness with which the Lord looks upon sins of the heart. To think that God is greatly displeased with someone who chews betel nut, while excusing our own sins of pride and jealousy, shows not only that we lack balance in spiritual living, it is also sheer hypocrisy. Balanced living, can only be known when the standard of the Word of God is applied equally to our hidden attitudes and our outward habits. When, by the grace of God, we come to some place of inner balance, then and not till then, are we in a position to correct others in more obvious matters of Christian living.

Spiritually balanced living is one of the most necessary qualities in a servant of God if his ministry is to be one of edification rather than confusion. In the conditions laid down for elders in I Tim. 3:2-7 observe the exquisite balance between Tightness of the inner life and of the outward act.

Those who aspire to be servants of the Lord need to be constantly concerned about the high standard that Scripture demands of them.

The perfectly balanced life may be beyond our attainment in this life, but there are certainly many aspects in which there is great room for improvement. How our thinking needs to be freed from the undue influence of tradition or dependence upon men. How charitably we should deal with matters of doctrine where we differ with other believers.

How much more we need to be concerned about balance in practical things, so that we consider important what God considers important.

It may be that the most difficult thing in the world is to keep balanced, but, by the grace of God, let us see more victory in this realm than we so often do at present.

## 17. Charisma

These days charisma is a word one may find as commonly in some secular journal as in a religious paper. Frequently one hears some great political figure referred to as a charismatic leader.

The word primarily denotes a gift given by God used with extraordinary power to influence others. The extent to which the word is used in non-religious circles, however, shows that all gifts used to such effect does not necessarily have a divine source. The great men of the past and present who have built empires and moulded the character of nations have generally been charismatic leaders. Some have been good men, some bad. It would be difficult to say that their capacity to influence men was always God-given. It would be equally difficult to say that their gift had its source in the devil, though it could well be that there was some Satanic force at work in an evil genius such as Hitler, or in someone like Rasputin, the mad monk whose uncanny power dominated the lives of the Romanovs, the last of Russia's imperial dynasty.

The nature of charismatic power is not so easily determined. Martin Luther was a charismatic leader, so was Ignatius Loyola, the remarkable founder of the Jesuits and a leader of the Counter-Reformation. Did both these men derive their inspiration from the same source? It is evident that divine inspiration is not so easily discerned as may first appear.

One factor that is frequently forgotten or not known is the tremendous potential of the human personality. Man is possessed of frightening natural powers the extent of which is even today but imperfectly understood. The fact that most people do not understand them at all makes them all the more susceptible to them. The jungle dweller hearing a transistor radio for the first time may be convinced it is the voice of God. The voice, however, holds no mystery for a person living in civilized society. He is familiar with the principle of radio and knows that the person he hears speaking is an ordinary human being sitting comfortably in front of a microphone some miles away. We must not imagine that education has opened up for us all the mysteries of man. There are still sides of his character of which we know very little, and it is still easy with our limited understanding to mistake the human for the divine.

We may say then that there are two types of charisma. One is a charisma of divine inspiration, which from now on we may call 'spiritual charisma'. The other is charisma that is completely controlled by human factors even though our knowledge of these factors may be incomplete. The less aware a person is of this human charisma the more liable is he to be misdirected by it. Most people are easily impressed by the dramatic. An unusual happening, the emotional impact of a sermon are quickly attributed to the working of God.

Someone once tried to interest me in a Gospel campaign where, he said, miracles of such an order were taking place that no one could fail to admit that they were due to the power of God. I tried to explain to him that even though his reports were true, such happenings were not a necessary proof of God's working. He left offended at my 'unbelief. Not long after I heard that the 'charismatic' miracle worker had been exposed as a charlatan.

The emotional impression left by a sermon can equally lead to a false conclusion. Emotion is not confined to the meetings of some sensational preacher who whips up the excitable feelings of an expectant crowd. Emotion is equally present in the most quiet and orderly of gatherings. Nor is emotion to be condemned out of hand. It would be a cold world that was bereft of love, joy, grace, appreciation of beauty, and a multitude of

other God-given emotional faculties. But just as our understanding can lead us astray, so can our emotions. It is interesting at times to listen to the reactions of people after a meeting. Time and again I have heard expressions such as, "He (the preacher) was full of the Spirit", but as often as not the person who made the remark is quite unable to say what he learned of the Lord from the sermon. He was aware only of the impact of what he thought must be the Spirit of God, but beyond that what was said had no meaning to him.

This, of course, does not deny the possibility of the speaker's spiritual charisma. Spiritual charisma may be present though unrecognised by many, just as many think it exists where there is none. The illustration I have used simply points out that the presence of spiritual charisma is not proved by an emotional response.

To add to our difficulty there is the fact that the human element intrudes into every work of God. I doubt whether it is ever true of any person that the divine so operates in spiritual charisma as to exclude the possibility of human influence. The spiritual warfare is as real in the realm of the Christian ministry as anywhere else. The struggle between truth and prejudice, the gift of God and the power of human personality is relentless. To recognise spiritual charisma we must be able to distinguish between what is of God and what is of man in a mixture of both. To do this requires a considerable measure of discernment. It is not a task for a novice or the person with an axe to grind.

Of what does spiritual charisma consist? Many people here make the mistake of trying to divorce the spiritual from the natural as though a gift of God were something quite apart from the person's human qualifications. This is not so. The natural is the material of which all spiritual gift is composed. Natural capabilities are God-given and are not to be despised. They can be neglected, used for self advancement, used in the service of others, or sanctified by the grace of God for a divine purpose. The natural charisma of which we have been speaking is such a talent used for a limited, earthly aim, good or bad. Spiritual charisma consists not in the gift itself, but the gift plus the attitude in which it is used. What transforms natural talent into a spiritual power is the sovereign grace of God. Spiritual charisma operates just as far as a person is completely submitted to the Lord. It is liable to be withdrawn at any time, or during those moments of utterance when self assumes control.

Spiritual charisma can be unfailingly recognised only in retrospect. It would be a rash person who would claim dogmatically to recognise it in the present. There are too many imponderable factors as we have seen. At the same time, there are certain definite indications of spiritual charisma. Without them it does not exist, however vivid an impression a person's life or oratory may make upon others.

The first of these indications is self-effacement. A person who is dominated by the grace of God will be urgent to point others away from himself to a dependence upon the Lord. The purpose of the Christian ministry is to point to Christ as the source of supply for every need. The pre-eminence of Christ is the most vital of all spiritual truths. Spiritual charisma will fight off every attempt to exalt man. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30) is the watchword of the man truly gifted by God.

A second indication is the fruit that is produced. Human charisma may leave an indelible impression, but very often the impression is indefinable. Spiritual charisma builds up. It results in a solid, lasting work and leaves people with a richer understanding of the Lord, it lays in the souls of men the foundation of Christ upon which alone a stable and victorious spiritual work can be built.

If the Lord's people hold before them these two conditions of spiritual charisma, they will be saved from being swept away by the forcefulness of some imposing personality, and



they will be able to profit through those who exercise in humility a gift truly owned of God.

## 18. Faith

Surely every believing Christian knows what faith is! This may well be your first reaction to our subject this month. But is it true? Some months ago I mentioned the great danger of religious jargon, of using terms which, for all practical purposes, are meaningless. We can preach the need of faith without ever pausing to ask ourselves what faith really is. If we did, we would perhaps find that we were not quite sure. Not that any of us can ever pretend to give a fully adequate explanation of faith, but the danger is that we give a totally inadequate explanation, and others accept it as final. I am thinking particularly of the idea that faith is simply the assent of the mind to the facts of the Gospel. This is certainly included in faith, but faith is very much more.

To most believing Christians faith is associated with a crisis experience which is the entrance into a completely new plane of living. It is unfortunate, however, that emphasis on this crisis of faith has often obscured the vital importance of the walk of faith. In insisting that faith can be the experience of a moment, we tend to forget that the act of faith must be followed by the life of faith. To say this is not to say anything very profound. When we are dealing with God, we are dealing with life. Anything that has to do with God is living. The attributes of the spiritual life are not dead, static things. They are living and active. Life means activity and progress, so while we may be blessed by an experience of faith or grace or love which flashes in upon us with startling suddenness, yet the experience is only divine if it is followed by the one inevitable sign of life—progress.

So we will approach our subject of faith from two angles. We will look first at the crisis of faith, and then at the progression of faith.

### The Crisis of Faith

We will soon see that our distinction is little more than a matter of convenience. There is no actual division between the crisis and the progression of faith. We are not born with faith; we are born separated from God. So faith must BEGIN somewhere. The crisis of faith is its beginning, the point where we enter into the progression of faith.

This is vividly illustrated in the experience of the apostle Paul. It would be difficult to deny the magnitude of the crisis that Paul experienced on the Damascus Road, a crisis which shook the very foundations of his living and left him an entirely changed man. This, of course, is what faith must do. An account of Paul's experience is given to us within the compass of a few verses in Acts 9. It is interesting that, in the other two accounts of his conversion in Acts 21 and Acts 26 the story is told in almost precisely the same words. We are given no additional information, though there is doubtless much more that could have been said. We can only believe that in these brief accounts the Spirit of God has provided a record of What is most vital to all spiritual experience.

"Who art thou, Lord?" was Paul's response to the divine questioning (Acts 9:5). These words may appear very simple to us, almost commonplace, but to the apostle Paul they were of the most tremendous significance. The word 'Lord' is a word which today is used very easily, and often glibly, by believing Christians. Not so to Paul. The Greek word translated 'Lord' in the New Testament was the counterpart of the word 'Jehovah' in the Old Testament. Jehovah is the most familiar of the Old Testament names of God, and is also the greatest. It signifies a God absolute in holiness and sovereignty, a God who must be approached with the utmost humility, a God to whom we must be utterly subject. So great was the Jew's respect for the name of God that he would not take it upon his lips unless in the context of the greatest reverence. There were, in fact, rules by

which it was determined when, and only when, it was allowable to speak the name of God. This is reflected in the third commandment.

As a Jew and a Pharisee Paul would have been meticulously exact in the observance of these laws. His zeal in the service of Jehovah was the reason for his journey to Damascus. He was persecuting Jesus because he believed that, in doing so, he was doing the will of God. But when Jesus spoke, Paul ascribed to Him the one name that implied supreme Lordship. The name which belonged to Jehovah was now given to Christ, and with it Paul surrendered his will to a new Master. This was Paul's entry into the experience of faith. True faith can be nothing less than what Paul experienced on the Damascus road. It is a 'yes' of the will to the Lordship of Christ.

It is very important that we should understand the relationship of the will to faith. Self-will is the basis of sin as Isaiah tells us. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). The surrender of that self-will to Christ is the basis of salvation, or, in another word—faith.

### The Progression of Faith

"That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith." Thus wrote Paul to the Galatians (Gal. 2:20) nearly twenty years after his first encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very obvious that what happened on the Damascus Road was no isolated experience. It was where Paul's faith began, but it was not where it ended. Faith from that time on became the basis of his everyday living. The surrender of his will to Jesus and the Lordship of Christ that resulted henceforth determined his attitude to the people around him, and the course of his every action.

There are three verses in the Galatian epistle where Paul speaks of the 'crucifixion' of some aspect of his life. In ch. 2 vs. 20 it is the T self that is crucified. In ch. 6 vs. 15 his subject is the 'world'. "The world has been crucified unto me, and un to the world." In ch. 5 vs. 24 he speaks of the crucifixion of the 'flesh'. These are three things which can and do dominate the living of the natural man. The T is man's right, as he thinks, to be independent; the 'world' is the desire for one's rights, for status, for the place which is due to one in society, be it high or low; the 'flesh' is the desire for material things, things which pander to the love of creature comforts. When Paul said that all these things were crucified, he meant that his life was no longer dominated by them. He was no longer anxious to live his life in his own way. Reputation and material things were a secondary consideration. Everything, day by day, was subject to the Lordship of Christ. Paul's will was completely given over to Him. This is faith.

What Paul wrote to the Galatians were no empty words. We need only read the book of Acts or his experiences as they are recounted in other epistles to see how practical it was to have Christ enthroned as Lord of his life. The faith which he had found on the road to Damascus was to guide his life on this earth right up to the time some thirty years later when he met the Lord face to face near the city of Rome. All this time Paul's faith was being tested and strengthened till, in the last letter he wrote, he could express his unshakable confidence in these wonderful words. "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which he hath committed unto me against that day" (2 Tim. 1: 12).

There is one other thing that must be said about faith. It has to do with preaching about faith. We can only preach faith from a life that is actively submissive to Christ. Here, as elsewhere, our lives are our most potent testimony. All of us who have been born again through the power of a risen Christ are commissioned to be ministers of faith to others. The lives we live will, more than anything else, impart to the world around an impression of faith that is true or false. Here is the challenge, to live out the faith that we say is

ours. It is useless testifying to a faith experienced in the past if we live not by that same faith today. Faith means the Lordship of Christ as a practical, present fact, a will that is surrendered to Him—TODAY.

## 19. Service

What does it mean to serve God? Most people have a very limited conception of Christian service. For many it could be summed up in one word, 'preaching'. Others would concede that it includes such activities as publishing, broadcasting or anything to do with the spreading of the Christian message.

Often, however, Christian service is viewed simply as an activity with little concern for the attitude and spirit that lies behind it. Thus we can have the contradiction of someone supposedly serving God in the preaching of the Gospel, and at the same time wittingly engaged in some sinful practice. How can this happen? It happens because so few have a scriptural conception of Christian service.

It should hardly need to be pointed out how much stress the Bible lays on the need for pure motive. Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount is an urgent emphasis on the fact that right action must be rightly motivated.

The great teaching epistles of the New Testament clearly explain the content of the message we are to proclaim to the world; but when the New Testament speaks specifically of serving Christ the main emphasis is on what the servant IS, not on what he SAYS. What we say is, of course, of great importance, but its effectiveness is dependent upon what we are.

The New Testament uses a variety of words which, in the Authorised Version of the English Bible are translated by the word 'serve' or one of its variations. Each of these words has a specific connotation. Together they show us the solemn character of Christian service and its responsibilities.

### Douleuo

This is one of the most common words in the New Testament meaning to 'serve'. Slavery was an accepted practice in Roman times, and a 'doulos' was a slave answerable only to the master who had bought him. With a slave there could be no question of divided loyalties.

This is the word our Lord uses when He says, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). The Lord demands a complete and undivided loyalty in our service. Our allegiance to Him must be such as excludes self-seeking and any attempt to compromise with the low standards of the world around us.

In any household where servants are employed it is important for the servant to know to whom he is responsible. If a number of people try to order his work, the result is confusion. Conflicting commands mean that none of them can be carried out efficiently. Neither is the servant satisfied nor those who are over him. To serve God is to serve one Master and to make His interest paramount in all we do.

Serving God entails serving others. Paul uses the same word for service when he urges the Galatians, "By love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Christian service means serving others with a view to God's interests in them. This is strange to the world in which we live. Public service is usually careless and performed out of a grudging sense of obligation. Even the service of others within a family circle may be performed merely to avoid problems. The spirit of the world is to serve others for the benefit we ourselves may derive from it. The spirit of Christ is to serve others for the benefit God may derive from it.

## Diakoneo

Another word commonly used in the New Testament for service relates primarily to the actual tasks involved in serving God. From it we derive our English word 'deacon'. Deacons are generally those who are chosen to deal with the more practical tasks in the administration of a local church. Here it is not so much the question of the motive in our service as a willingness to apply ourselves to any necessary work.

We live in a society in which people are very concerned to maintain the dignity of their position. The clerical worker would hardly stoop to accept a task involving manual labour. The preacher is careful to do nothing to detract from the respect he feels is due to him as a preacher. Jesus said, "If any man serve me let him follow me" (John 12:26). Here he uses this word which indicates a readiness to accept any service great or small. The Lord demonstrated this type of service in His own life and death. The Lord of glory in serving us went far beyond a readiness to do some common task. He subjected Himself to the death of the cross which stripped Him of the last shred of human dignity.

Such men as the apostle Paul were well aware of the price that had to be paid in dignity to serve Christ. Paul, because of his education and natural capabilities could have commanded the highest respect of the world of his day. Casting all this aside, he accepted the path of lowly service. Thus must we be ready to serve the Lord and one another.

## Hupereteo

This word is used in Acts 13:36 where Luke reminds us how David 'had served his own generation by the will of God.' Broadly speaking, hupereteo views service in the light of the one whom the servant represents. It is also translated 'minister' in 1 Cor. 4:1. Here the apostle Paul urges the Corinthians to recognise Apollos, Cephas and himself as alike representatives of Christ. The Lord Himself uses the word when He says, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36).

Service in this sense is a commission to represent someone who has a specific aim in view. Not only does it require an undivided allegiance and a willingness to do anything, but character, humility and dignity which is worthy of the one who is represented. In our dealings with other people whether believers or unbelievers, we need to be concerned that the methods we adopt are such as our Lord would be pleased to own. Many attitudes would be changed, many things would be left unsaid or said differently, many actions would be avoided if only we were to ask ourselves the questions, "Would the Lord have done things in this way? Are we worthily representing Him?" Spiritual character is the foundation of spiritual service.

## Latreuo

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Here we have a fourth aspect of service, a service offered as a homage to a sovereign God. Paul exhorts us to offer our lives in their entirety.

Latreuo is also translated 'worship'. In fact, true worship and true service are inseparable. Worship is not confined to its public expression. Neither is service confined to the word of direct witness. To serve God is to recognise His sovereign control over our lives and to perform every task as unto Him. This is an aspect of service which, in practice, few recognise. We quickly tend to feel that the mundane tasks of every day are a hindrance to Christian service when they may be the greatest opportunity. How many times the witness of a zealous believer is spoiled because of serious faults which are only

too obvious in his daily living. There are many people who can only 'serve' Christ away from the environment of their own homes. In the circle of their own neighbors their witness is nullified by the lives they live. They have not learned that serving God is living as well as speaking. If God is not honoured in our homes, our places of work, in our attitudes to others, He will not be honoured by our preaching.

Serving God demands the exercise of all our faculties. It requires that no part of our lives be closed to His searching scrutiny. It calls us moment by moment to recognise His supremacy and to give ourselves entirely to Him.

## 20. God's Inseparables

It is often said that the Christian faith is full of paradox. This is true. In Scripture we frequently find linked together qualities that, in ordinary living, we usually feel cancel one another out. It is important that we should recognise this. The imbalance which is so evident in the lives of many believing Christians is often due to a failure to see that these apparent opposites can and should exist side by side. Someone, full of righteous indignation at a sin committed, will lay down the law of judgment in such an attitude of stern unbending justice as to preclude the very thought of grace. On the other hand, another person in the same circumstances may be so concerned to show grace that he completely ignores the necessity of discipline. Both are demonstrations of immature spiritual character. The maturity we seek should combine both law and grace, judgment and mercy.

Some of the paradoxes of Scripture such as divine sovereignty and human free-will have taxed the minds of theologians for centuries. Here, however, we shall not concern ourselves with such weighty problems, but let us look at some of God's 'inseparables' which do vitally affect our daily life and ministry.

### Faith and Works

This is one of the most obvious of opposites in the Bible. It is also one of the most important, important enough for one whole letter to have been written about it, the Epistle of James. Martin Luther was so full of the glorious truth of salvation through faith alone that he refused to accept James' letter as part of the inspired canon of Scripture. James, he said, preached a doctrine of salvation through works, so his letter must be rejected.

But the Epistle of James is perfectly consistent with the message of the rest of the New Testament. The whole purpose of God is concerned with the manifestation of spiritual character in the lives of men and women. This is precisely what Paul says in writing to the Ephesians, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2: 10). The fruit of faith is righteousness.

Human religion has always tended to divorce faith from practical living, and this is invariably the first sign that spiritual life is beginning to wane. We emphasise the language of Zion rather than its life. We are much more concerned about a profession of the new birth in the correct jargon than we are about its evidences in the daily walk. In the evangelical world of today there is a great deal of unregenerate experience hidden behind Scriptural terminology. Never before was it necessary to emphasise the balance between faith and works. Let us always expect a change in the character of those who profess to come to know the Lord, and if there is no change let us be quite sure that true faith is absent.

### Fellowship—Personal Responsibility

It is of vital importance that each of us should learn to accept the responsibilities which the Lord has committed to us. It is also important, however, that in the fulfilment of these responsibilities we should accept the balance of fellowship.

I was going to head this paragraph INDEPENDENCE—INTERDEPENDENCE. Then I thought that perhaps this would be open to misunderstanding by any who did not read beyond the first word. Life in Christ is the very opposite of that type of independence which sees one's own self as the centre of everything. This is the very thing from which the Lord saves us. But independence in the sense of distinctiveness of function is part of God's



order in the church. It makes a vital contribution to the whole and is meant to be used to that end, not for the purpose of self-gratification.

The members of a church are never represented in Scripture as parts of a machine all of which respond automatically to the lead of another, neither are they represented as separately functioning units. This is the wonder of the figure of the body with which we are so familiar. One part does not necessarily move in a particular manner because another part does. Yet if there is health there is also harmony as each part, functioning according to the dictates of the Head, purposefully does its work to harmonise with the others.

Just as divine sovereignty never violates man's free-will, however, inexplicable that may be to our limited thinking, so personal responsibility does not violate fellowship. In fact a true sense of personal responsibility brings with it a deeper sense of the need of fellowship. If my hands are thoroughly aware of the work they ought to be doing, they will recognise the need of the feet to take them to the scene of their labour, and of the eyes to enable them to see what they are doing.

#### Authority—Humility

"The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be first among you must be your servant; and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Though the Lord taught and demonstrated so clearly that spiritual authority is the product of humility and service, this must be one of the most neglected truths of the Bible. The experience of centuries has demonstrated that probably the most common cause of confusion among the people of God is this spirit of lording it over others of which the Lord says, "It shall not be so among you." It is no less common in the days in which we are living.

That authority and humility should go together is not only contrary to human logic, it is also contrary to human impulse. Man's natural impulse is to dominate, and will remain so unless he has had an experience of Christ which has completely shattered the illusion of his own maturity and importance. As long as we cling possessively to ideas of our own rights over others, ideas of the respect and obedience that is due to us, we will never be people who have spiritual authority. In saying, "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve," the Lord was showing us that He came with no 'ulterior motive' of His own exaltation. His motive was to serve, and only to serve. His authority was the the outcome of this spirit of self-giving.

#### The Cross—Resurrection

Our experience of faith and righteousness, fellowship and responsibility, authority and humility all ultimately depend upon the extent to which we have experienced the greatest paradox of all, that of death and life, the cross and resurrection. To the world in its hopelessness death is the end of all. To the child of God it is only the gateway to life more abundant.

Self in all its sordid selfishness is the great enemy of spiritual advancement. Through love of self we try to cling on to faith and trim our righteousness to suit our personal convenience. Through love of self we try to monopolize our responsibilities lest, in accepting the strength of fellowship, others should think that we are not completely competent to handle our own affairs. Through love of self we try to domineer and whip others into subjection to us lest, in serving, others take us for servants instead of masters.

This is what needs to die, the 'I' of self, that the life of the resurrected Christ might take its place. To God, death and life are inseparable. We must see them as inseparable, not in the emotion of some short-lived period of 'heart-searching', but in the daily relationships that make up spiritual living. Only when this is our experience will we know the triumph of which His triumph has made us heirs.

## 21. Preaching

As a student, I lived for some years in a city of great preachers. It was something of a sermon tasters' paradise. I admit I did quite a lot of tasting, but each taste was a feast of erudition, oratory and expository skill that carried with it a real spiritual impact. The preachers were not advocates of the ten minute sermon, but people crowded to hear them. Many left provoked to deeper thought and stimulated to a more faithful witness for their Lord.

Has the distance of time lent enchantment to the view? Perhaps to some extent. Yet great preaching is surely less common today than it was twenty years ago. I do not agree with those who say that the day of the great sermon is entirely over. God still has His giants though few they be. How one longs at times to be able to sit under the sound of some really thought provoking ministry.

There are many different types of preaching. We are living in the age of the topical sermon. A topical sermon takes a theme (freedom or fellowship for example) and seeks to explain it in the light of Scripture. Topical preaching obviously has its place. It also has its own peculiar dangers.

Good preaching requires a lot of hard work. It is hard to give a good topical message. It is relatively easy to give a bad one. At its all too common worst, a topical sermon is a set of personal opinions on some subject draped over a number of Scripture 'pegs'. The pegs consist of proof-texts usually used without any thought of their context. This highlights the main danger of topical preaching. The preacher is apt to approach his subject with preconceived ideas and to read these ideas into isolated verses. For example, the promise of the power of the Spirit in Acts 1: 8 is not an assurance of personal power for those who will but wait for it. The promise has to be viewed in the light of the fellowship of the church which the Spirit's coming was about to institute. To remove the text from its context is to misunderstand it completely. Topical preaching can easily become the resort of the incompetent or of the person with an axe to grind. When this is the case it can do great harm.

At its highest, the topical sermon requires no little expository skill. Since a part of Scripture can only be properly understood in relation to the whole, we will find it difficult to understand the Biblical attitude to any subject unless we can apprehend the broader scope of spiritual truth. We could say that an ability to expound the Scriptures—at least to ourselves—is basic to all good preaching. Of all forms of preaching, expository preaching is certainly the greatest and the most fruitful. Let those of us who preach aim at being expounders of the Word. Even though we may never reach the goal, we are bound to learn a lot in the process.

There is no easy road to expounding the Scriptures. It does not come by direct revelation. The Scripture it self is our revelation. Our job is diligently to apply our minds to it in order to understand it aright. Obviously the first thing we need to know is what a passage actually says. To do this we must get as close as we can to the meaning of the original writings. Today, through modern translations of the Bible, we are in a much better position to do this than ever before. Anyone who is seriously interested in understanding the message of the Bible should take full advantage of these means. Sometimes the readings of a more up to date version will at once lighten up much that is obscure.

Having discovered as nearly as possible what the passage we are studying actually says, we need to remember that though all Scripture was written FOR US, it was not written TO US. All the injunctions of Scripture do not apply to all of us in all circumstances. We must first understand what a passage meant to those to whom it was written before we

can understand what it ought to mean to us today. Only then will we be able to differentiate between principle and practice, which is so important. To do this we will find it necessary to know something of the background of the Scriptures, and to refer to the writings of others. Here we will find a volume such as the New Bible Dictionary of immense help. Our understanding of those circumstances will enable us to see more clearly why a particular book of the Bible was written and to grasp its general message. This is essential if we are to understand properly the meaning of its component parts. It will save us from many errors of judgment.

How often I have heard people blame Barnabas for the dispute between him and Paul over John Mark (Acts 15: 36-41). The reason invariably given for this judgment is that Barnabas is not mentioned again in the Acts, proof, it is said, that he forfeited the blessing of God. But is this so? What is forgotten is that the second part of Acts is pre-eminently the account of the spread of the Gospel out into the Gentile world through Paul the missionary to the Gentiles. From chapter 13 Paul dominates the scene. Not only does Barnabas disappear from view, but many others as well. Peter, for example, who figures so prominently in the earlier chapters. Does this mean that God stopped using him also? When we view the incident between Barnabas and Paul in the context of the Acts we find that we need much more evidence to pass a judgment than the book supplies.

While a verse reveals its meaning in the context of the chapter, and a chapter in the context of the book, it is well to remember that the Bible itself is a harmonious whole. The exposition of any particular passage must be consistent with the whole revelation. It follows then that one passage of Scripture may shed much light on another. Learn to compare Scripture with Scripture. Use the references in your Bible and a concordance for this purpose. Then compile references of your own.

Read the Bible in an up-to-date version. Get to understand the background of the book you are studying. Look for the main theme of the writer. Study each passage in the context of the whole book. Allow the rest of the Bible to throw light on your subject. When all this has been done we find there is a limit to our unaided grasp of Scriptural truth. We will come across passages that continue to bewilder us. It is here that we ought to recognise our need of the help of others. To no one does the Spirit of God give an understanding of all truth. He has given to the church gifts of gifted people, and it is through them that we and they together increase in spiritual knowledge. Let us not neglect this provision that God has made for us. C. H. Spurgeon once said, "It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves should think so little of what He has revealed to others." Let us take this exhortation to heart.

Apply your preaching. The Scriptures have been given to us as a guide to living. Notice how the apostle Paul applies the principles he teaches to daily life. The second half of his letter to the Ephesians, for example, is taken up with the outworking of the doctrines he expounds in the first half. We must set clearly before others the challenge that the great doctrines of the faith brings to us in our relationship with other believers and with the world around. It is here that we ourselves have to face the challenge of the price of a faithful ministry. A faithful ministry is bound to evoke a response. Its aim is that it should result in spiritual quickening, but where people are not ready to accept the standard of Christ it may well result in opposition. We find many examples of this in the Bible, and should be ready for it ourselves. At the same time, if the word we preach brings offence we would do well to ask ourselves whether the offence comes from a faithful presentation of the Scriptures or from a hard attitude within ourselves. It is we who first need to apply the word to our living. "Speaking the truth in love", is always a timely exhortation.

Be systematic in your preaching. The preacher who feeds his congregation on odd tit-bits found by rummaging through the Bible is unlikely to build up anything substantial. Wholesome spiritual food is of a different order. A systematic presentation of spiritual truth and the books of the Bible will alone build up strong spiritual people.

Finally, be yourself in your preaching. The preacher is not a substitute for a tape recorder. The power of preaching lies in the impact of a spiritual personality presented through the spoken word. Your preaching, therefore, must reflect your own experience, and your personality must not be a feigned one. How many people ruin their usefulness for God-by trying to mimic some preacher they admire. God has made us who we are and never means that we should lose our individuality. Peter never became a Paul, nor Paul a Peter. Be yourself for God—and be diligent in preaching the Word.

## 22. Failure

I have just been reading an account written by a friend of mine of a very trying experience in his ministry through which he recently passed. When it became perfectly plain that the situation he was facing could not be retrieved he said his reaction was, "Now the Lord has trusted me with failure." He then went on to testify to the triumph that had come out of the failure and the many valuable lessons he had learned from it.

In many ways the story was a tragic one. Yet it was like a breath of fresh air. Failure, we shrink from ever admitting such a thing. But if we have not learned to face failure we are lacking in something that is the very basis of spiritual progress. The tragedy of spiritual failure is writ large upon the experiences of men of God and of the church down through history. The greatest tragedy of all is that so often failure has ended in plain, unmitigated tragedy when God could have turned it into triumph. The grace of God can make failures into some of our most valuable experiences, but if we refuse to recognise them and learn from them, they are sheer, stark catastrophes.

Peter's failure in denying his Lord led to an experience of self-realisation and spiritual maturity that maybe would have been possible in no other way. The defeat of the children of Israel at Ai was transformed into victory when they were ready to accept their failure and its consequences. Looking back, the prophet Hosea sees a divine principle in this incident. There is, he says, a door of hope in the valley of Acher (Hosea 2:15). Failure can only be ignored at our spiritual peril. The hope of triumph lies in admitting failure and facing up to its results.

At the root of our capacity to face failure lies our willingness or lack of it, for self-criticism. Some time back I quoted on this page a conversation I had some years ago with a Christian specialist who was on a tour of this country lecturing to specialists in his own field. Of those who attended his seminars he said three things. Their ability to assimilate facts, he said, was excellent. Their ability to apply these facts to actual situations was poor. Their capacity for self-criticism was practically nil. It has often struck me how true this is of God's people. We can advance in any branch of knowledge only as far as we are able and willing to face up to our mistakes. And nowhere is this more true than in the spiritual realm. Immediately we refuse to recognise failure our spiritual usefulness is hindered. Strict self-criticism and readiness to accept seriously the criticism of others is an essential condition of spiritual health.

### Personal Failure

We are all liable to fail. It may seem trite to say so, yet how many times we do fail and are unwilling to admit it. We can never remind ourselves too often that we are made of fallible flesh and blood. We fail in our understanding of God's ways. We fail to put into practice what we do understand. We fail in matters of guidance. Let us be careful in thinking we have found a key that inevitably opens a door into the full counsel of God. Let us be careful in thinking that at last we have mastered the technique of guidance. Knowing the will of God is first a question of right relationship and attitude to the Lord and to others. If we fail in these, whatever 'Scriptural' rules we may follow, our guidance will be but a reflection of our own will.

Many times on this page I have emphasised the paradoxical nature of the spiritual life. We find it again in relation to our present subject. In guidance, each one of us has so to meet God that we can act with assurance and conviction. On the other hand we must never so stubbornly cling to our guidance as to preclude finally the possibility of our having been mistaken. To do so is to make a claim to infallibility such as no man possesses. Let us always remain open to correction. Even in the midst of his inspired writing Paul, in explaining his own guidance on a certain matter is careful not to presume

to speak as the voice of God. "And I THINK that I have the Spirit of God," he says (1 Cor. 7: 40). Paul's note of questioning is a sign of a spiritually mature man.

Why is this element of self-criticism so necessary? It is, necessary because its absence leads not to a greater confidence in God, but to a greater confidence in ourselves. We become complacent in the false assurance that we have God's ear in a special way. The result is self-deception and all the evils that go with it. Self-deception can so warp our understanding that we come to accept truth as error and error as truth. We have not sufficiently grasped the fact that we are terribly liable to fail. John points this out with great frankness when he says, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1: 8). Where there is no indwelling sin there is the possibility of practical failure. The person who refuses to face up to the fact of failure seldom deceives others, but he deceives himself. The refusal to face up to failure leads to self-assurance. Self-assurance leads to deception.

### Corporate Failure

Perhaps the Bible's most terrible picture of corporate failure is in the Spirit's message to the church at Laodicea. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

The tragedy of the Laodicean church was that it was a spiritual failure but thought it was a spiritual success. The picture is one that is dismally familiar down through the pages of church history, and is no less familiar today. The multitude of divisions which make up modern Christendom largely represent the remains of spiritual movements that were once vibrant with the life of Christ. Each one ultimately reached the point where it was faced with failure. When it refused to take the path of resurrection through an acceptance of failure,, it joined the pathetic company of the spiritually impotent, usually proclaiming loudly its possession of the power of God.

The failure of the church is, of course, a reflection of the failure of the individual. If we who are in positions of responsibility in the work of God do not learn to face failure, we soon begin to credit the work we do, with success, even when it is in the process of disintegration. Our refusal to face reality itself destroys what we are claiming to build up.

Every church, as every individual, one day reaches the point of failure. I believe God brings it there. It is the place where we are faced with the humiliating fact that we are not, as we perhaps thought we were, unique, with an unique grasp of God's ways, and a unique capacity to know the divine mind. At heart we are no different from the weakest of God's people. We are just as fallible, just as liable to failure, more so maybe since our self-assumed maturity has made us more self confident. Yet that point of failure is also the point of opportunity. It can be the door on to the road that leads to resurrection.

God challenges us to accept our failures. To deny them is to make tragedy out of what we think are our triumphs. To accept them is to find triumph in what we know are our tragedies. Such is the marvellous grace of God.

## 23. The Next Generation

Some time ago in speaking with a Christian worker he used the phrase 'nominal believers'. It was quite a new phrase to me, but it highlighted a problem that goes back nearly two thousand years, the problem of the second generation assembly. On another occasion, I was interested to hear a rather mercenary minded man speak of someone else as being 'in the category of believers'. The reference was not complimentary.

'Nominal believers', people 'in the category of believers', are phrases with a similar ring, though the first came from a person who was committed to Christ, and the second from a person who was not. They are the admission of a believing Christian that there can be a shell of apparent devotion to Christ which contains nothing of the reality of spiritual life; and the insight of a careless world which easily looks beyond the sham of an empty profession of spiritual life and despises it.

Believing Christians themselves are often deceived into thinking that spirituality can be judged by a person's conformity to a certain outward pattern, while ignoring the much more decisive factor of a person's attitudes. Someone, for example, maybe looked upon as a believer because he has stopped chewing pan, smoking and cinema going, says that he believes the Lord Jesus Christ has saved him from his sins, accepts baptism, and prays long and loud in prayer meetings. A person who follows this pattern falls into an easily observable 'category' of believers. He may be proud, jealous of others, self-sufficient, but these characteristics are ignored or partly obscured by the more obvious pattern of life he has adopted. He is not noted for the quality of his life but for his mechanical religious habits. These latter distinguish him as belonging to a particular 'category' of people. Apart from that he may be no better or worse than anyone else.

We must always be careful against judging by the outward appearance. Spiritual character will certainly lead to the adopting of good habits, but the converse is by no means always true. Because a person abstains from certain things and acquires the habit maybe of going to meetings and taking some part in them, it does not follow that he is a person of deep spiritual character. It is very easy for an assembly that has been filled with the life of Christ to degenerate, in the second and subsequent generations, to a company void of spiritual life, yet which continues to observe the same outward procedures and restrictions as before. Let us make no mistake about it, no assembly can escape the dangers of a second generation Christianity. The less we are aware of these dangers, the less will we be able to combat them effectively.

The difficulty, of course, has its roots in the first generation. An assembly testimony is generally born in a hunger for the things of God, a longing to know more of His word, a zeal to witness. The difficulties of establishing the testimony only drive God's people to more fervent intercession, to greater efforts. When this initial period of travail is over there comes a period of consolidation. It is here that the greatest tests lie. Opposition to the work of God from outside may have dwindled, but a new set of difficulties appears from within. There is an increased consciousness of differences in personality. The individual weaknesses of one and another become more apparent to all. Varied degrees of spiritual maturity produce differences of understanding on spiritual matters. A combination of these factors brings with it a greater temptation to dissension. These are some of the problems that face the church in its struggle towards maturity.

Such circumstances not only constitute a potential danger to the life of the assembly, they also form the necessary basis of true spiritual growth. They offer an opportunity to work out in actual practice what Christ means to us. What is this Gospel? Has its teaching really made us a new creation in Christ? The conflicts of understanding and personality which we face challenge us to see this new creation in action, healing our differences,



uniting us practically in the body of Christ, giving us a ministry of edification in love one to another.

At this vital stage of a church's development, there are two ways open to us. The first is the way to spiritual maturity in which, through much personal travail, the life of Christ is worked out in our relationships one with another. To follow this way is to know what the Gospel really means. The other way is of spiritual impoverishment which, alas, many take. The machinery of prayer, Bible study, worship and witness continues, but the assembly is beset by undercurrents of distrust and disunity. Pride prevents growth. The result is a warped understanding of the gospel, the pitiful belief that the 'mechanics' of assembly life is all that matters.

Spiritually, we produce people in our own likeness. To live in spiritual defeat (Though we may protest all the time that we are living in victory) while supposedly witnessing for Christ, is the surest method of producing an assembly of 'nominal believers'. The reason is simply this, that in not finding victory through Christ in our relationship with fellow-believers in the assembly, we are denying that the gospel really works when faced with the problems of daily living. The gospel then becomes a mere matter of religious mechanics.

Many believers unwittingly divide the gospel in this fashion. They do not accept that it must have an effect on every aspect of living. Life becomes divided into a portion which is 'for the Lord', and a portion which is not. This is a serious error. We must steadfastly maintain that the whole life of the believer is sanctified unto God and, therefore, spiritual. A failure to hold to this contributes very substantially to the decreasing spirituality of assemblies of the Lord's people.

A substantial proportion of any congregation which has been in existence over thirty years or so will consist of those whose parents before them were active participants in assembly life. Believing parents obviously desire that children should grow up to follow the Lord and take their part in the life of the church. Often, however, many of this second generation are of a distinctly inferior spiritual calibre. One reason for this may simply be wishful thinking on the part of the parents. Unable to believe that their offspring can be other than they want them to be, they insist that the meeting-going habits of their children are marks of true spirituality, when in fact they are little more than an empty tradition. Such parents are usually oblivious of the faults of their own families.

But the deeper reason for the spiritual failure of the second generation is the tendency to divide the be-believing life into activities with which God is concerned, and others with which He is not. A person who has come to an experience of Christ in adulthood will not till then have understood the place and value of such exercises as prayer and Bible reading. It is understandable that he should want to emphasise these things to his own family from their childhood. If, however, he emphasises them to an exclusion of the importance of other things, his children will grow up with a warped outlook on the spiritual life, believing that only 'spiritual' exercises matter, other things do not. Their father, coming to Christ later in life, had by force of circumstances to relate his faith to his work. They, however, have been taught of Christ in isolation from other circumstances, with the result that they always hold faith separate from anything else they might do.

The Christian life is not meant to be one long prayer meeting and Bible study. Prayer and Bible study form apart, and a most important one, but there is more than that. For the adult there is the daily round of work, for the child there is school and play. At his school and )lay the child learns to relate to others, as does the grown man in his office, field or factory. Only when /e fully recognise this wholeness of the spiritual life which includes

the most mundane, ordinary tasks, will we be able to protect the future generation from having form of godliness but denying the power thereof.

The next generation in the church depends upon the faithfulness of this present generation. I believe that our spirituality will ultimately be judged not so much by what we appear to be now, but by what we produce in the generation of the church to come. God in Christ has cleansed all of our life. Let us not call any of it common, and by practice and precept let us encourage those who come after us to be a generation not of 'nominal believers', but of people who know their God.

## 24. Conformity

Every person has to come to terms with the society in which he lives. No individual can live as a completely isolated unit. Society, however, makes demands, and according to whether or not a person accedes to these demands, he is acceptable or is a misfit. The price of acceptance is conformity to society's code of conduct.

If this is true in a general way within the framework of a particular culture or nation, it is equally true in much more limited spheres. As the world is made up of many cultural divisions, so each cultural division can itself be divided into classes. Though much is said in our modern world about a classless society, whether this is possible is doubtful. Differences of wealth, interests and education become focal points for the coming together of like-minded people. So we have societies within society each one with its own code of conduct and its demand for conformity.

On a more restricted level still there is the circle of a person's occupation, maybe in a factory, in an office or some institution. Here again there is the need to conform to a recognised code. The same is true of the family, the smallest and most intimate unit of society, or of the church.

The question would be a lot easier if each person were faced with only one demand for conformity, but this is not the case. Demands to conform come from a number of different sources at once, and not infrequently the standards that call for acceptance are mutually contradictory. The person who conforms meticulously to the etiquette of polite society may conform to a very different code of conduct in his business dealings. Within his own family circle his standard may be different still. The double-minded (or treble-minded!) man is the natural product of our modern world.

A realization of the inconsistency of life's demands is the reason for much of the present world-wide reaction of the young against society. "Why conform to the code of our class, college, church or family," they say. "They only make us hypocrites." There is more than a grain of truth in this, but what these young people do not realise is that it is impossible to be free of all conformity. To react against conformity in one direction is only to accept conformity in another. To refuse conformity to law is to accept conformity to the mob. To refuse conformity in dress is merely to accept conformity to another style. There is really no such thing as non-conformity. The non-conformist is often the most rigidly bound conformist of all.

The question then is not whether or not a person should conform to some standard, but to what standard he ought to conform and why.

The believing Christian is faced with two opposing principles, the principle of self which largely dominates society, and the principle of Christ whose life was one of self-giving. Ultimately the choice lies between conformity to one or the other. From whatever source the demand to conform comes, the basic reason the world gives is always the same, "If you conform, it will save you from trouble. It will help you." Man and the supply of his own selfish wants is thus squarely presented as the aim of living.

The principle of Christ is so different. The contrast is summed up in two sentences from Paul's letter to the Romans, "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). "Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8: 29). The believer is called to be conformed not to the conflicting standards of the world, but to the one standard of Christ which applies equally to every realm of living. This was the alternative that faced the early Christians, confronted with the demand to conform to the code of Roman heathenism. They chose to be conformed to Christ, though their choice meant persecution and suffering.

One fact that stands out in the pages of the New Testament is the early Christian's intense personal devotion to Christ. The aim of being conformed to his image drove them to an ever deeper personal relationship with their Lord. The preaching of the apostles and their letters always pointed away from themselves to Christ. They were concerned that God's people should see beyond every means and person whom God used, to the Lord Himself. Christ alone, apprehended by faith, was the standard of conformity.

Few people are sufficiently aware of the intensity of the struggle within the church or the individual between the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ. The tragedy of the church so often down through history has been that it has paid lip- service to conformity to Christ while living in conformity to the world. This is a matter in which believing Christians need to be thoroughly alive to the danger of self-deception. The transition from a Christ-centred to a man-centred basis of working within the church is subtle and practically imperceptible. We can see it taking place even in the church of the New Testament times.

An assembly may have its origin in a glowing devotion to Christ which unites believers together in an eager hunger to learn more of Him through His Word. In the thrill of a new-found life, conformity to Christ is their obvious aim. As time passes, however, the vision of Christ becomes blurred. Convenience and the inevitable problems which be set any community of people begin to dictate changes which alter the whole nature of the assembly's object. Loyalty becomes centred in a form or in a man, though believers may be quite unaware that they have deserted Christ as their foundation. The human demand for conformity within the assembly is mistaken for the voice of the Lord. The church may maintain its spiritual veneer, but in reality the world has taken over.

The demand for conformity by the world within the church has a certain attraction, though the very nature of the attraction shows that the demand is of the world and not of Christ. Conformity to a human code releases the individual from all personal responsibility. He does not have to think for himself. He requires no initiative. He can side-step the agonizing self-appraisals and decisions required in facing up to the question of personal guidance. All he need do is obey-unthinkingly. It saves so much trouble, but it means death both to a person's vital relationship with Christ and to his ability to minister effectively to others. The final tragedy is when people recognize a human demand for conformity for what it is and decide that, if they are going to conform to man's wishes, they may as well conform to their own. The church which began in the spirit has ended up in the flesh and is on the point of disintegration.

To be conformed to the image of Christ is a never ending quest that requires all the believer's energy, initiative and responsibility. It may be hard, terribly hard, but the anguish is the anguish of spiritual growth which is life itself and life-giving to others.

All of us have been faced with the common problem of people who, brought up in the atmosphere of an apparently spiritual assembly, have become carelessly indifferent to spiritual things or even openly hostile to them. Why is this so often the case? I believe that in a large measure it is due to pressure to conform to a code of conduct that is based rather in tradition than in a passionate allegiance to Christ. The demand to conform does not ring spiritually true. The unconverted person, be he a child or an adult, easily identifies the spirit of the world in a child of God however much it is camouflaged by pious language. Only when conformity to Christ fills our vision can we expect those to whom we minister to be filled with the same aim. When we see families and fellow-believers following hard after the world, it is a time not for criticism but for heart-searching.

The whole aim of the church, of the ministry of the Word, of personal testimony, is the exaltation of Christ. When anything, be it man, so-called truth, church, or anything else, tends to dim my perception of Him, or to vie with Him for my allegiance, I am in a place of grave spiritual danger. "He must increase, but I must decrease," is a vital word to us all if we are to be conformed to the image of the Son of God.

## 25. Stress and Strain

Stress and strain are part and parcel of our modern world. In the highly sophisticated societies of the West the incidence of nervous disorders has risen sharply as the pace of life and its demands have increased. All nervous tension, of course, is not harmful. Any sense of purposefulness which demands the harnessing of a person's physical and mental powers is accompanied by a sense of strain. As He faced the fulfilment of His purpose here on earth, our Lord said, "How I am constrained till it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50). His anticipation of the cross was accompanied by a continuous tension.

Most of us, however, suffer at times from stresses and strains which are both unnecessary and harmful. Their cause lies deep down within the mind. Work is not the cause of tension as some people suppose. Its cause is basically mental, not physical. One of the most distressing things about tension is that it affects others as well as ourselves. Other people sense it, and this forms a barrier to spiritual communication. Not only are we unable to exercise a helpful influence, we tend also to drag others down to our own state of inner turmoil. Mental confusion, spiritual depression and physical illness are the result.

What are the actual causes of these harmful tensions?

### Worry

Some people are chronic worriers. They approach every situation with a spirit of anxiety. Health, study, relationships with others and many other simple matters are all viewed with apprehension. With some people the tendency to anxiety is hereditary and they think there is nothing they can do about it.

Worry is distracting. It makes concentration difficult. Instead of giving the attention to our work that is required, the mind is constantly being drawn to the uncertainties surrounding some personal issue. We become double-minded. The result is instability, strain and stress.

### Fear

Closely allied to worry is fear. It is well known that physical fears, which may be quite justified, can have far reaching effects on a person's mental and spiritual stability and on his health. There are other fears, however, which are more insidious and just as harmful. Fear of the untried experience or of accepting responsibility can, in some people, produce an agony of tension. Fear of failure causes many to fail. The strain of fearing brings failure, and failure in turn adds to the stress.

Solomon tells us that, "The fear of man lays a snare" (Pro. 29:25). It is a snare which grips its victims in a merciless tension. Fear of man, of what he will think or say, produces a strain which drives people to wrong actions, or holds them back from doing what they know they ought. It encourages duplicity, scheming, flattery, which in trying to avoid strain only makes it worse. Fear is the opposite of faith. It hinders relationship with God because it gives greater precedence to the object of fear than to almighty power. It makes a mockery of prayer because it will accept only the answers that fear allows.

### Wrong Attitude towards Others

Paul exhorts the Colossians to put off 'anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk' (Col. 3: 8). All of these spring from a wrong attitude to others, an attitude of distrust, envy and jealousy. The apostle has good reason to be concerned about such things. Not only do

they harm others, they are soul-destroying to the people who practice them. Inner resentments work havoc on a person's spiritual life and produce intolerable strain.

### A Sense of Insufficiency

What Christians, eager to follow the Lord, does not suffer from a sense of insufficiency? Crying need abounds on every hand. Responsibilities increase. Problems multiply. Who is sufficient for these things? Everyone of us is constantly faced with situations where we feel our meagre spiritual and mental equipment to be totally inadequate. To feel otherwise would itself be one of the surest evidences of spiritual incompetence.

In our acute sense of need we strive to overcome our shortcomings till we can be brought to the very point of despair. Again strain and stress are our inevitable companions.

Worries, fears, wrong attitudes, a sense of insufficiency present a formidable opposition to spiritual character and effectiveness. All conspire together to produce a situation in which inner peace is shattered and tension rules supreme.

What is the answer to stress and strain? Is there an answer, or must we accept tension as an unavoidable part of spiritual living? There can be no question that tension has its answer in the Lord. He is our sufficiency in this as in every other aspect of living. Some time ago I read an article entitled, "Your God is too Small." I forget where I saw it or who the author of the article was, but the title is a message in itself. With all our sermonizing on the greatness of God and our testimony to His almighty power, our faith in His ability to answer our human problems is woefully weak. We can speak of His saving souls and granting eternal life, when the mark of a 'saved soul' is some perfunctory repentance and a glib profession of faith in Christ, but when we need to trust Him for an answer to our own resentment or jealousy, we plead our weakness and go on in defeat. Our God is too small. We need a fresh vision of the greatness of God whose resources are greater by far than our greatest need.

This is the basic answer to stress and strain, a rediscovery of the Lord. Like most effective answers to our needs, it does not come easily or quickly. The Lord may occasionally grant such a mighty revelation of His greatness that every vestige of unbelief is once and for all swept away, but this is not a usual experience. We must rediscover the Lord through accepting the affirmations of His Word, recognizing His sovereignty in our lives, His purposefulness in every experience, and His resources, therefore, to meet every need.

There is another side to the answer to stress and strain. It is the need to strike a resolute blow at self which lies at the root of defeat. Worry, fear, distrust, envy, jealousy are all self-centred. To recognise this honestly will set us on the road to victory.

Self is the root of stress and strain even as it is the root of all sin. Many of the characteristics which blight our relationship with God and others spring from self pity. We pity ourselves for our lack of ability, so we envy and are jealous of those whose talent is greater than our own. For the same reason we fear responsibilities which show up our shortcomings. We distrust people who do not pander to our wishes. This envy, jealousy, fear, distrust in turn encourages our self-pity. We are caught in a vicious circle.

How can we break out of this circle of stress and strain? We can do so only by an active choice of the will which looks beyond ourselves to Christ and His purposes for us. Every day, moment by moment, we must choose Christ. We must choose to react to provocative circumstances not in a spirit of self-pleasing resentment, but in a spirit of learning. Even if we are wounded by what someone says or does. God means it for good. To nurse our wounds in self-pitying resentment means stress and strain. To choose Christ in our hurts means growth and victory.

When all is said and done, the answer to stress and strain is the same as the answer to every other difficulty, the supremacy of Christ. Let us take Paul's word to the Colossians into all our worries and fears, our wrong attitudes, our feelings of insufficiency, and in doing so banish the, "That in everything he might be pre-eminent."



## 26. The Autocrat

We do not need to look far to find the autocrat. He is inside everyone of us just waiting for the opportunity to assert himself. He may be pompous or humble, capricious or benevolent, but beyond the outward appearance lies the thought that his is the right to rule, and the responsibility of others is passively to obey. We are all autocrats by nature. It is part of the heritage of the fall.

Autocracy literally means 'the rule of self. Generally we use the word to denote the domineering rule of one person over others, but autocracy can be much more subtle than that. True, it is the spirit of autocracy that makes a person domineer over his fellows, but it is the same spirit that makes a person resist authority. Both leader and led need to ask themselves whether they are autocrats.

### Autocracy and Leadership

In practically every section of church life today there is a crying need of leadership, a subject which we discussed some months ago on this page. If we are not thoroughly aware of the nature of spiritual leadership we are very apt to confuse it with autocracy. Superficially, the two things may appear to be the same, but actually they have little in common. Basically, the difference is this, autocracy is concerned with getting things done in the present; leadership is concerned with moulding the character of people so that they will be effective servants of Christ not only in the present, but in the future as well. Effective service for the Lord is based upon spiritual character. That is the greatest reason of all why autocracy in any form amongst the people of God is a travesty of the truth.

Let us take a simple example. Someone comes to me with a request for guidance on a particular matter. It involves a spiritual principle which the person concerned may not have recognised, but I see at once exactly what he ought to do. If I am an autocrat I will simply tell him what to do. If I am a leader I will explain the spiritual principle and tell him that he must accept responsibility for making his own decision before the Lord.

What is the likely outcome of these two different courses? Look at it first from the autocratic standpoint. Supposing the person disobeys my order (though I may have called it advice, a suggestion, or by a host of other euphemisms) my most likely action is to adopt an 'I told you so' attitude. I may even offer a little condescending sympathy, but the warning will be clear enough, "Don't let it happen again. Why can't you do as I tell you?" The poor person who made the mistake will be so conscious of his error that he will be back asking for guidance at the next available opportunity. He will make sure ever afterwards that he does not repeat his mistake. He will do as he is told, and should on some future occasion he follow a piece of my advice that proves to be mistaken, he will almost certainly try to justify it. The tragedy of all this is that his spiritual character has not been allowed to develop. He has become an automaton. He does not do anything because it is right or because he has a deep personal conviction that it is the will of God, but because I tell him. My autocracy has not helped him to grow spiritually. Rather it has done the opposite, even if all I have told him to do has been right. When his guide is taken away from him he will be completely at a loss for he has never really learnt to be guided by the only one who will never leave him, the Lord.

Suppose I adopt the attitude of spiritual leadership. I explain to the person the spiritual principle involved in his problem and cast him back on God. He may come to the right conclusion, but on the other hand he may not. If he makes a mistake, I repeat the principle over again and tell him to return to the Lord to discover how the principle applies to his circumstances. If he wants to learn, the Lord will teach him. Though he has

stumbled on the way he has learned through his error to respect the Word of God. He has also come to know the Lord more intimately for himself.

So the difference between the autocrat and the leader is not difficult to understand. The spiritual autocrat may see a vast amount of work done, he may make a great impression on his immediate surroundings, but his influence will die with himself. He cannot produce that which is itself spiritually reproductive. Spiritual leadership, on the other hand, is not nearly so straightforward. It is not nearly so easy, but its source is God, not self, and it produces those who also find their source directly in God. It is the principle of life in action.

I owe much in my Christian experience to the guidance of a mature servant of God when I was young in the faith. I was looking for a clear sense of direction from the Lord. "Have a talk with so-and-so," said some well-meaning friends, "He will tell you what to do." The brother in question gave a few words of encouragement. Then he said simply, "The Lord will guide you." And he did. That was true leadership.

There are many autocrats. There are few leaders. There are others who are both autocrat and leader rolled into one. I suppose to some extent that is true of all, and it is this mixture that is so perplexing. We must learn to discriminate. The fact is that we are engaged in a great spiritual struggle. The contenders for Lordship over our lives are Jesus Christ and self. The surrender of self to Christ must be a continuing experience, yet which one of us could say that no piece of service is ever done, no decision is ever made on the basis of our own desire? No person is beyond making an autocratic decision. By the help of the Spirit we need, in humility, to learn to discriminate, to recognise that this mixture is in all of us, and to be more conscious of the need of a personal, daily surrender of self to His Lordship.

One further remark. The busy leader easily becomes an autocrat. Autocracy is easy, convenient, quick. Spiritual leadership is demanding, time-consuming. If you are over busy in a position of spiritual responsibility, beware lest you destroy the work of God by taking the easy, 'efficient' way of becoming an autocrat.

### The Dangers of Autocracy

Some of the dangers of autocracy are subtle and far-reaching. First of all the results of autocratic rule are superficial and deceptive. It may be very satisfying to be able to discern what should be done in a particular set of circumstances. Satisfaction develops into a sense of accomplishment when my discernment is automatically accepted and put into practical effect. I saw what should have been done. I gave directions to that end, and the end has been achieved. Thus I reason, congratulating myself on my ability to rule. But the result is deceptive, for it is no more than a superficial acceptance of my own ideal based more in a respect for me than a respect for God. Its root is not faith and spiritual vision, so it cannot be a ministry of life to others. What has been accomplished has been the product of my own effort, not the working of God. As such it will fail.

Secondly, the autocrat by his very attitude produces more autocrats. I know some lovable, discerning Christians who are yet spiritual autocrats. The difficulty is that most of their disciples develop into autocrats pure and simple without either their discernment or their grace. They have seen what they think is the effectiveness of absolute authority and try to reproduce it. The result is confusion.

Spiritual autocracy must be condemned on another ground. It demands of others what it does not accept for itself. It expects submission but does not itself submit. This is a violation of a basic spiritual principle. Paul writing to the Corinthians puts it thus, "They gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us" (2 Cor. 8: 5). The life in Christ is a life of

submission to the Lord and to one another. The authority of the believer is dependent directly upon his submission to Christ, just as the authority of our Lord was the result of His implicit obedience to the will of the Father. In the spiritual realm the will to rule, to be an autocrat, can only lead to defeat. Our one desire must be to submit to the rule of Christ. In our submission we will not find an opportunity to demonstrate our own authority, but God will find an opportunity to demonstrate His divine authority.

## 27. Equality

All men are equal—or ought to be. The demand for equality is universal. What equality means is not always so evident. Sometimes it would appear that those who use the word most know least about it and are least concerned about seeking a proper definition. After all, we need to be careful about defining our terms. There is always the uncomfortable possibility that something we have loudly advocated should turn out to be quite different from what we hoped. Many people find it much more convenient to leave their terms undefined. Then they can mean whatever the whim of the moment demands. That is unless someone is naughty enough to ask for an explanation. Few do. Most ordinary folk are too embarrassed at not understanding something that everyone is supposed to know anyhow. And who in the world does not know what is meant by equality?

But one thing is sure. Whatever equality means, there is much more of its opposite. Inequality abounds on every hand, inequality of wealth, of status, of opportunity, of achievement, of mental capacity, of privilege, of happiness. The list could be lengthened endlessly. Will things ever be any different? Will it ever be possible to reduce all to any equal sameness? If it were possible, would it be desirable?

No creature is subject to greater variations and inequalities than man. In the animal world there is a certain uniformity of instinct and habit. A bird will build its nest according to the pattern of its particular breed. A crow builds differently from a swallow. If these birds are bred in isolation for some generations without ever having seen a nest or having contact with another bird that has seen one, they will still, when given the opportunity, build according to the pattern of their own breed. Their lives are lived within the bounds of certain strictly determined limits. In the animal kingdom equality is much more obvious than it is among men. Equality, in an absolute sense, is the common acceptance of the same limitations and the refusal to go beyond them.

Of course, what man wants is a limited equality, equality of privilege with the most privileged, equality of opportunity with the most favoured. He sees clearly enough that equality in some other realms is impossible, equality of intellect, equality of character. And in still others he flees the thought of equality like the plague, equality of responsibility with those who carry the greatest burdens, equality of output with those who are most industrious. What inconsistent beings we are.

All men may have an equal right to the basic material necessities of living, food, clothing, shelter. Many look upon this as equality and naively believe it is the basis of equal happiness. But once these things are gained they tend to produce inequalities in other directions. Material plenty for all does not alone produce equal happiness or sense of purpose. When these ends are not forthcoming the vanity of material equality is soon plain. The result is disillusionment and frustration. This is being plainly demonstrated in many of the advanced countries today.

What then is the purpose of equality? Unless we are going to remove the fact of personal responsibility and reduce man to a machine, equality seems to be little more than an illusion. Men are not equal nor ever can be. Every effort to establish equality ends in failure. The more we seek after total equality the more meaningless it seems to become.

Yet there is something in the conscience of the civilized world that condemns the blatant inequalities of society. Such inequalities our conscience tells us are wrong, but at the same time equality is both unattainable and meaningless. This is the dilemma in which we find ourselves. Even the moralist who condemns the inequalities inflicted upon his fellows is by his very pronouncements demonstrating how superior or unequal he is to others who are resigned to their lot in a way that he is not. Though a person may

demand that all men be regarded as equal (even if he knows not exactly what he means) the whole bent of man's nature opposes it.

The trouble is that we live in a man-centred world. All that we have said so far is built on this premise. It is a premise that leads to defeat and despair. Introspection serves to show how unequal we are. Equality finds a true meaning when man learns to look beyond himself, and this he does only in Christ. Here is where we must begin our quest. The gospel opens up for us a whole new realm of living. One of its chief characteristics is fellowship. Fellowship is based on the equality that comes from a common dependence upon Christ. To demonstrate this is the greatest challenge that faces God's people today. It is also the most potent form of witness at our disposal. This is what our Lord referred to when He prayed, "That they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that thou has sent me" (John 17:21).

The equality of the believing Christian begins at the cross. There all the inequalities of man fade into nothing before what God has done. The cross is the symbol of dependence, of complete submission to the will of God. It is the source of all the believer possesses. Without it he has nothing.

To recognise the extent of what Christ has done for us on the cross at once brings the gifts we possess into a true perspective. Our need far outweighs our possessions. When we realise this it is an end of pride and the spirit of superiority with which we view those less endowed than ourselves.

If we are equal in our need of the Lord, we are equal also in our liability to err. Trust in God brings distrust of self. We begin to recognise as never before the subtlety of human nature. Even in our apprehension of the will of God the subtleness of self again and again intrudes to bring self-deception. Often what we think is the will of God is only a reflection of our own prejudices. The more mature we think we are the more liable we are to be self-deceived. Dependence upon the Lord does not bring with it a confidence of maturity, but a conviction that we are "the very least of all the saints" (Eph. 3: 8). We are all equal in our liability to err.

The Lord's people are equal in their possession of the Spirit. Paul tells us that the Spirit "apportions to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). The measure of gift may differ widely, but all who are Christ's alike possess the Spirit. This should inculcate in each of us a profound respect for all who truly belong to the Lord. It will enable us to learn from those whose gift is greater than our own. It will also enable us to understand that the least endowed may yet possess some insight into the ways of the Lord that we do not have. Whatever the measure of gift it will be exercised and accepted in humility.

There is another respect in which all God's people ought to be equal, though alas, it is not always so. They ought to be equal in their purpose to know Christ. Nothing unites like a common aim. Nothing makes us so aware of how we need one another.

A sense of equality does not come naturally to man. It is Spirit given. Because of this it is a mark of spiritual maturity. It is a mark of how far the cross has had its effects in our lives, of how far we have really apprehended the gospel.

Equality does not mean a lack of respect for what the Spirit has given to others, but it does mean that we recognise all gifts to have their source in God, not in man. It is a oneness of humility, not of pride.

The believing Christian who is afflicted with a sense of superiority or inferiority towards his fellow-believers is in a precarious position. If his attitude is one of superiority, he cuts himself off from one of the means God has given for his spiritual growth and enlightenment. If he adopts an attitude of inferiority, he tends to respond only to man

and not to God, again to his spiritual loss. How seldom we find a sense of equality among God's people, yet probably more than anything else this is needed for the growth and stability of the church today. When the Lord sent out His disciples two by two I think He had this in mind, that they should learn their equality in Him. In this way alone would they be prepared to lay a solid foundation for the church so soon to be established with Christ, not man, as its Head.

Many times I have thanked God for the blessing of working together in a fellowship where we regard one another as equals. We may have our problems, but the blessings far outweigh them. I have a great pity for the lonely Christian worker who considers no one his peer. Let us learn that we are all equally dependent upon the grace of God, and let this fact mould our relationship with our fellow-believers. It will mean a lot for our own spiritual health, and for the health of the church.

## 28. Paul did It

"But the apostle Paul did it." Usually when someone makes this remark it is at the end of the discussion. It is the final justification for some action. If, however, we follow the remark to its inevitable conclusion, we at once find ourselves in difficulty. The apostle Paul did it, therefore it must be right, therefore Paul was infallible. This is the logic from which we cannot escape if we insist upon accepting Paul's or anyone else's action as an inviolable precedent.

The ramifications of this position go much farther. If Paul, as a mortal man, was not liable to error because he was an apostle, it follows that there may well be others who can claim freedom from the liability to make mistakes on the ground of spiritual position. This is what the Roman Church teaches when it says that the Pope, speaking 'ex cathedra', that is, from the position as supreme pontiff, is infallible.

But if we agree that Paul and the other apostles could and did make mistakes, what then is the basis of guidance? If we are not to do something simply because Paul did it, how are we to know what to do and what not to do? If Paul was wrong at times, how can any of us have the assurance that we are ever right? A proper understanding of this subject is of great importance, for it entails either a right or a wrong usage of the Scriptures which will effect the ordering both of our personal lives and of the life of the church.

The basic question is this. Is Scripture given to us as a set of precedents meant to govern minutely every aspect of our living, or is it given to us as illustrative of inviolable, divine principles which we are responsible to apply to the circumstances and age in which we live? I believe the latter. Scripture is given by inspiration of God. In it we find clearly set out the principles of holiness which are basic to all of God's purpose. In it we also find men acting as men, whether they be apostles, prophets or anyone else. At times they walk according to divine principles, at times they do not. Their obedience or disobedience are for our instruction and warning.

A young preacher once asked me this question, "I have just been reading the life of D. L. Moody," "he said, "What a Spirit-filled man he was. Why is it that we are not able to preach every time with the same unction that, he knew? Sometimes without doubt we know that the Lord is speaking through us, but at other times we are just as conscious that what we say is inadequate and ineffective." I replied that I believed D. L. Moody had his 'off days' as we all do, only biographers seldom lay as much emphasis on that side of their subjects' lives. All of us know this from experience either of preaching or of listening to others preach. We need only listen regularly over a period of time to the ministry of one man. He may be in the category of the 'great', but we will find that not all his sermons are great. Some, be it only the occasional one, are pretty thread-bare. This is not meant to be a censorious criticism. It is simply an admission that the preacher is a man. We will find that even the great are very human if only we can get close enough to them.

Human biographers almost invariably tend to emphasise the spiritual victories of a person's character to the exclusion of his defeats. The triumphs of Christ in a life are certainly a source of immense encouragement, but there is much needed instruction also in the trials and foibles of men of God which are so often kept in the background.

Scripture, on the other hand, is completely honest when it sets out to depict character. There was Peter who, in probably the most dramatic spiritual experience of his life, learned that "both Jew and Gentile are made one in Christ" (Acts 11: 1-18). Later in the churches in Galatia he flagrantly denies this glorious truth by an act of compromise. (Gal. 2: 11-12) There was James of Jerusalem, beloved of all for his gracious character. He fails to withstand the legalizing influence of converts from Phariseeism which permeates

the whole life of the Jerusalem assembly. We also find him supporting the dissemination of this bondage in Galatia. (Gal. 2:12) There was Paul who compromisingly identifies himself with an act of Jewish ritual in order to placate the feelings of his fellow Jews. The whole scheme back-fires on himself. (Acts 21:20-28) There was Paul whose impetuous nature got the better of him and had to apologise to the High Priest for insulting him. (Acts 23:1-5)

So we see that we cannot accept all the actions of the apostles as precedents. We have to accept what Scripture fully recognises, that all of God's people are human and, therefore, fallible. We must look behind every action for the spiritual principle that underlines it and if the action denies a spiritual principle it has to be rejected.

Speaking of the 'light of the knowledge of the glory of God', Paul tells the Corinthians, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4: 7). Paul was the first to realise that if, in any measure, his life reflected the character of Christ, it was due solely to the grace of God. On the other hand, he was also conscious of the limited measure in which Christ is revealed in us as long as we are in this mortal body. His epistles abound in exhortations which point those to whom he writes to the goal of full spiritual stature, the fulfilment of redemption which we will know only when we see Him face to face. Of his own spiritual understanding Paul says, "Now I know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). Of his awareness of his liability to err he says, "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage; lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (1 Cor. 9: 27). Of his determined journey towards spiritual fullness he says, "I press on towards the goal" (Phil. 3: 14).

The road which the apostles trod to know Christ was the road we all have to walk, the road of constant crucifixion of self and subjection to Christ's lordship. The eternal life which they possessed through faith was the same life which in us has to develop towards maturity. The apostles were not higher than mortal men. The divine inspiration which has produced for us the Scriptures did leave the apostles with a vivid awareness of the eternal goal and of spiritual principles which we can all now share, but they too had to press on towards that goal and walk in those principles as fallible flesh and blood even as we are.

This is what the New Testament presents so graphically to us, men of God with the living hope ever set before them, pressing ever forward, the eternal principles of the eternal Christ their guide, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling in the confidence that God is working in them both to will and to work, for His good pleasure. They make their mistakes; at times they fail; but laying hold afresh on grace, they move ever onward. That is Paul, Peter and many others as the Word of God presents them to us. If we can at all learn from the experience of others, God has left on record for our benefit the victories and the defeats of some of His choicest saints.

The purpose of all Scripture, then, is to establish basic spiritual principles. Historic events, biographical details, details of the foundation or life of the churches, are recorded for us as illustrative of these principles. They may demonstrate the outworking of these principles, but at times they also show the violation of these principles and its consequences. This is particularly so in the pictures of assembly life which emerge from the epistles. I have not yet heard anyone say, "It was done in Corinth, so it must be right." In Corinth, as in many of the other churches certain spiritual principles are honoured, others are dishonoured. We do not accept the prevailing conduct as automatically right because it is in the Bible. We judge the conduct according to clear spiritual principle and thus find our guide.

Scripture is not precedent, but principle, and that for another reason. Precedent takes us back to the law, not the moral law which has its vital place today as it always had, but



the ceremonial law which was but a symbol and has been replaced, through grace, by the life that is in Christ. Here lies the great danger of the precedent-hunter that, under the guise of Scripturalness, he formulates as the basis of a 'New Testament church', anew 'ceremonial law' which can be observed quite apart from divine life.

I am always concerned when a person seems to lay all his stress on Scriptural pattern or procedure. Pattern is not unimportant, but Scriptural pattern only emerges as the outflow of spiritual life. Lay all your emphasis on pattern, and you will produce a machine. Be concerned to grow in the life that is in Christ, and the body that God made to contain it will develop as He intended.

We will find spiritual enlargement for ourselves and for the church not when we mould our actions on the precedent of a Paul or a Peter, but when, rightly dividing the Word of Truth, we discover the eternal principles that are in Christ and, in the power of the Spirit, walk in them.

## 29. Our Bible

Here in India I often meet people who hold a strong prejudice against any other English version of the Bible than what we call the Authorized or King James version. This is a great pity. As believing Christians, it is our duty, by every possible means, to understand what God wants to say to us in His Word, and one of the greatest aids we have to understanding consists of our modern translations of the Bible. When I ask for a reason why a modern version of the Scriptures should not be used, not infrequently I receive a reply such as, 'It is not inspired,'—which always reminds me of the story of someone who said that since the Authorized version was good enough for Paul, it was good enough for him!

Believing Christians all hold to the inspiration of the Word of God. This, however, is much more easily stated than defined, and it is far too great a subject to deal with here. Let it suffice for our present purpose to state that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as originally recorded, were given by divine inspiration. Having said this, it is at once evident that all the versions of the Bible in common use today, be they in English or in any other language, are translations of the original and contain, therefore, a human element. Let us look briefly at how the Bible came to us.

### The Old Testament

The Canon of the Old Testament as we know it today was settled some time earlier than the 2nd century B. C. It was written in the Hebrew language. Obviously the origin of great portions of it was much older. The Pentateuch, for example, dates back to approximately a thousand years earlier still. What we have today are, first manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, and secondly, versions of the Old Testament in other languages.

There are no very ancient manuscripts of the complete Hebrew Bible at present known to exist. Many of these were destroyed in the Middle Ages. The oldest known manuscript is in the British Museum and dates back to about the 10th century. There are, however, manuscripts in Hebrew of the synagogue rolls and copies used for private reading containing various portions of the sacred text. It is from the text of these, compared with ancient versions in other languages, that a correct copy of the Old Testament has to be derived. The best known of the non-Hebrew versions of the Old Testament is the Greek Septuagint which comes from the 2nd Century B. C.

The Talmudists undertook the herculean task of collating the many existing texts of the Old Testament, and the text was fixed in the 6th Century A. D. by the Jewish Doctors of Tiberias known as the Massoretes. For the sake of accuracy they introduced into the text vowel points, which had been unknown before. The result of the Massoretes' labour became the recognised standard from which all other texts were derived.

### The New Testament

In determining the original text of the New Testament a great mass of valuable manuscripts are available to scholars. The works of many classical authors are derived from ten or twelve manuscripts dated many centuries beyond their death. In contrast, the text of the Greek New Testament is attested by some four thousand manuscripts, more than a hundred of which are dated earlier than the 9th Century. Three of the most important of these are the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscripts of the 4th Century, and the Alexandrian of the 5th Century.

Ancient non-Greek versions of the New Testament include the Vulgate, a Latin translation commenced in A. D. 383 by Jerome. In the 4th Century a Gothic Version was produced

by Ulfilas and also an Ethiopic version. A Coptic version dates back still earlier, to the 3rd Century. It is still in use though now the language is generally unintelligible to the congregation.

### The English Bible

From what has already been said, it is evident that the formulation of an 'original' text, before the translation can even be begun, is a truly formidable task. How much we owe to scholars who have poured out their lives in the devoted study of the Word of God. Let those who tend to despise scholarship remember that, but for the learning of many who have gone on before, we would have no Bible at all today. In the early days of the translation of the Bible into English, however, many manuscripts had not yet been discovered.

It is said that Aldhelm, Bishop of Shorborne translated the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon at the beginning of the 8th Century, but the first complete Bible in English is associated with the name of John Wycliff. It was translated from the Latin Vulgate in 1384. The Bible, however, which became the foundation of subsequent English editions and the first to be printed, was the translation of William Tyndale from the original Hebrew and Greek. Tyndale was cruelly persecuted, and executed in 1536. His work notably influenced the translations of Miles Coverdale (1535) and Thomas Matthews (1537), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishops' Bible (1568). In 1582, at Rheims, a literal translation of the New Testament was made from the Latin Vulgate. The translators of the King James or Authorized Version of 1611 took into account all of these previous versions, but owed most to that of William Tyndale. The Authorized Version was not accepted at once, but eventually won its way by its intrinsic merit and has influenced the lives of millions over two and a half centuries during which no other translations were made.

Further revisions of the English Bible have taken place since late in the last century. Apart from numerous translations by individuals, there have been also the Revised Version of 1885 and the Revised Standard version of 1952 which is one of the most recent.

### Why a new Translation?

What is the case for continued new translations of the English Bible? There are a number of very valid reasons.

1. Language is a living thing and the English of today is not the English of 1611. Many forms of expression in the Authorized version have become archaic. Many words are now obsolete. Still others are used today in a substantially different sense from the 17th Century. Take such examples as 'prevent', 'communicate', 'comprehend', 'allege'. A complete list would extend to over three hundred words. If we believe that God's Word should be available in language that ordinary people can readily understand, then there can be no question of the need for new translations.
2. The translators of 1611 were not in possession of the wealth of material that we have today for the reconstruction of the original text. In fact the most ancient of all existing manuscripts of the New Testament was discovered only in 1931.
3. Archaeological research of the past eighty years has recovered an immense amount of material which has led to a more accurate understanding of the language of the New Testament and, therefore, to a more accurate translation.

Why has the Lord not allowed us to possess a version of His Word of which we could say with assurance that every syllable is exactly as He dictated it? I do not know, but two facts are plain. The clarity of God's Word is such that no one has any excuse for disobedience. At the same time, there is a sufficient element of doubt in many matters to provide a permanent incentive to enquiry as to what the Lord really has to say. This quenchless thirst for a fuller understanding of divine things is one of the essential elements of spiritual life. In moving towards this fuller understanding, new translations of the Scriptures provide an invaluable help. May I commend them to you. When next you buy a Bible, why not an R. V. or an R. S. V.? You may find that the Word of God will open up to you in a completely new way.