

# **A Way Of Growth**

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

# Chapter 1

## Living "Before the Lord" & "Unto the Lord"

*"But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child... And the child Samuel grew on, and increased in favor both with the Lord, and also with men. And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli... And (Eli) said, What is the thing that the Lord hath spoken unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me... And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:18,26; 3:1,17,19-21).*

Those fragments serve to indicate the growth of Samuel, and bring us to the matter of spiritual increase, enlargement, growth. The marks are quite simple and yet quite fundamental.

### "Before the Lord"

"Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child." "Before the Lord." Like Another even greater, he grew up before the Lord, and it is of far greater importance than might be suggested by the little fragment of three words. That is the first thing that must be true of us - that our whole life is not lived before men but primarily before the Lord; that there is always that about us which speaks of an inner life before the Lord. When we are alone, shut in our room with the Lord, then everything is very pure. We know quite well that there before Him there is no deception, there is no feigning and pretending, there is no unreality. We know quite well when we come into personal aloneness with the Lord that everything artificial is stripped off. There we know that we are seen through, we are thoroughly well known; we can put on no camouflage, no disguises, in the Lord's presence. There we are what we are, and we know it, and we make no pretense about it. And this is something which has got to be brought out in our lives when we come from the secret place with the Lord - that everything is to be as it is there before Him, as transparent, as clear, as true, as unfeigned as it is in His presence; no pretense, no makeup, no unreality, no false ways. We cannot be on stilts or on a pedestal in the Lord's presence. When we are with people we may put on a lot of things to cover up, to make believe; we may become very artificial. Even when we are praying in the presence of other people, we can be anything but natural. We are so conscious of them, and begin to preach to them in our prayer. We do not do that when we are alone with the Lord, we do not make up anything then. We are right down on the very bedrock of what we are, a certain kind of naturalness; we cannot be other than perfectly natural there. What we are as before the Lord we have to be when we are with people in public life. It is important, it is essential. You see, anything put on amongst people, anything artificial, is not our measure at all; it is a false measure, and it may be holding us up in true spiritual life and growth.

"Samuel ministered before the Lord." We might well take that for every sphere and every hour of life. "Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23). God said to Abram, "...walk before me..." That may be very simple in its terms, but it is something which has to do with a ground work for spiritual growth. People who are like that will go on, will grow.

The rest of the statement about Samuel is only fresh emphasis upon what that means "being a child." The Lord Jesus Himself put His finger upon that on one occasion. His disciples, grown men, were talking about big things, and high place; He took a little child and set him in the midst and said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). 'This is the way to enlargement. You are thinking about place, position, influence; you are thinking big thoughts; you have big ideas; but this is the way to true greatness - a little child: no assumptions, no pretensions.' "Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child"; and then, of course, you are not surprised that he "grew on."

### **"Unto the Lord"**

Then the next thing - "Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli." If we could put ourselves in Samuel's place, we should find that it was not easy for him in those days. Remember, Hophni and Phineas, Eli's two sons, were there. A most corrupt, base, iniquitous thing was happening, for which eventually they were slain in the judgment of God - a state of things utterly deplorable. Samuel might well have become a cynic, he might have become bitter and sour and critical. It is very easy when things are like that to be cynical, to be disgusted, and to have no interest in what we are doing, even though we ourselves are in no way compromising with the evil. If we must be in it, we simply do it because it is our job. Others involved in it are wrong and corrupt; but the work has got to be done, so without any interest at all, we just do it. But it seems that Samuel closed his eyes to a very great deal, and just kept them on the Lord, and his attitude was: 'All around me is very evil, very corrupt, but I am here for the Lord; I am not doing this for the sake of these people, nor just for the sake of keeping this thing going; I am here, in the midst of it all, for the Lord.' Thus was his spirit kept free from sourness and bitterness and cynicism. "Unto the Lord." He ministered not to Eli, and not to Hophni and Phineas, and not to a mere procedure, to keep it going, but to the Lord.

Remember, that is a secret of growth. We may all have reason to say: 'There is a good deal around me that I do not agree with and which I am sure is contrary to what the Lord would have; and a lot of people who are wrong and difficult around me, even of those who are the Lord's. If I were to take account of them I should give up and leave; but I am here to live unto the Lord, I am only doing it for Him, and so I intend to stay where I am.' That is a way of growth. Eli was the embodiment of the religious order of his time, he was in the place of authority and for the time being had to be recognized as such, and Samuel was submissive. He was not trying to oust Eli, nor to condemn him; he was not all the time saying, 'This whole thing is wrong, I have no place for Eli' - going about gossiping and spreading reports about Eli. It is so easy to do that; because you find something wrong at headquarters, you can easily become disaffected and critical. Samuel was submissive. Later, even when he did not agree with the people's desire for a king, Samuel received commandment from the Lord to go and anoint Saul, and he obeyed, and afterward did all that he could to make it easy for Saul to do the right thing and to fulfill his mission. Samuel did not accept Saul, but he did not get in his way; he did not spread evil reports about him. He gave him a good chance. The attitude of Samuel to Saul is wonderful. He has not accepted Saul, nevertheless he is submissive for the time being to what has to be; and here before Eli, in a like spirit, he takes the submissive and subject position and ministers to the Lord. No wonder he grew.

You will not grow if you are observing the faults and flaws and errors around you, especially in people who are holding superior positions, and if you are talking and spreading reports about them. The Lord will say, "If... thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of

darkness" (Matt. 6:22,23). Beware of getting an evil eye on someone - it will stop your own growth. Samuel did not eye Eli thus; he left Eli with the Lord and himself went on with the Lord. Lay such lessons to heart. Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli, in subjection and in patience, waiting until the Lord took steps to deal with that very difficult situation which must have been eating into Samuel's soul every day. It is our spirit that matters - purity, simplicity, earnestness, reality. That is what it means to grow, and to grow on.

# Chapter 2

## Heart-Revelation of "The Mystery"

*"...making known unto us the mystery of his will..." (Eph. 1:9).*

*"...how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery... my understanding in the mystery of Christ... to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:3,4,9).*

*"This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. 5:32).*

*"...that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19).*

We have traced through the letter to the Ephesians this characteristic word - "mystery." What is its meaning?

It has two sides. First of all, "mystery" means something that has been kept hidden, that could not be recognised, clearly seen or understood. It was a hidden matter - what we call a secret; and we are told that God kept this secret, this mystery, hidden from all ages and generations, but now He has made it known. Something which was hidden, a mystery, has now been declared.

But then there is the other side of this, which is perfectly clear also - that even after the secret has been declared people cannot see it unless God gives them illumination about it. Although this is the age in which it is declared, it is still a mystery until God opens eyes and gives illumination. Paul said "by revelation was made known unto me the mystery"; "ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery"; so that it is a matter of the mystery being explained or illumined to our hearts, and it is in our coming to see it that we come to spiritual enlargement. We move towards fulness by way of seeing "the mystery."

### Two Mysteries

The word 'mystery' is used in several connections in the New Testament, but there are two major connections. You may say that they include the others. Firstly, there is the mystery of Christ. We read the phrase - "the mystery of the gospel" - but that comes within this, that is a part of the mystery of Christ. And secondly, there is the mystery of iniquity. What does the mystery turn out to be when you look into the New Testament? Well, in each case - the mystery of Christ and the mystery of iniquity - you will find it is an incarnation of a great spiritual and supernatural being entering into man form. That is perfectly clear and simple with regard to Christ. God was in Christ - that is the mystery. In the days of His flesh, no one understood that mystery, it was something hidden. They felt there was something mysterious about Him, something that was different, 'other,' superior. They could not get to the bottom of Him, as we say; they could not quite understand Him. 'There is something about this Man we cannot understand. He is different, He defeats all our attempts at explanation. There is a mystery about Him.' "The world knew him not" (John 1:10). It is the mystery of God in Christ, God appearing in the form of man, God made in the likeness of man.

The mystery of iniquity is the same thing - another supernatural, spiritual being coming in man form; eventually Antichrist. The mystery of iniquity is that there is

something in humanity, and heading itself up into a humanity, a man or men, which is not just man himself. There is something about this that is evil, that is sinister, uncanny. You cannot account for it on purely natural grounds. There is a mystery about it. It is an incarnation of a spiritual and supernatural being which is the mystery, whether it be of Christ, or whether it be of Antichrist.

### **The Twofold Mystery of Christ**

But when you come to Christ, you find that the mystery is twofold. Firstly, it is Himself, as we have said; God in Christ personally, so that Christ is God incarnate. But then you find, by what has been revealed to and through Paul, that Christ takes a Body; not a physical body, but a spiritual Body - "the church which is his body" (Eph. 1:22-23); and the Church being His Body again becomes the mystery of Christ; that is, here is God in Christ indwelling a company of people, the elect, the Body of Christ; and the letter to the Ephesians is particularly taken up with that aspect of Christ - that you have here a body of people called the Church, in whom God in Christ dwells. There is a mystery about this people, about this particular Church, there is something here that is supernatural, something here that is spiritual. It is not just a society of people called Christians, a number of people who gather together in the Christian faith and believe certain doctrines. There is something more than that about them. If only you knew it and could understand it, in the deepest and innermost reality of their being they are supernatural; they are not merely natural people, they are not earthly people. There is something hidden within them which you cannot account for on any other ground, and you have to say, 'It is God, it is the Lord.' When you meet these people, when they are gathered together even in a small company, if you move in there you find something extra to the people, something more than what they are; you meet the Lord. There is a mystery about this, and the mystery of Christ of which Paul is speaking here is not just the mystery of Christ personal, but it is the mystery of Christ corporate, of Christ in His Body the Church.

So Paul is speaking about that mystery, and he is saying, 'Now, this is a heavenly thing, a 'spiritual' thing; this is not something that is on this earth, which you can explain as you can explain other earthly things. This is something heavenly, and you cannot explain that by earthly standards at all.'

That is the statement of the fact, but of course that is the challenge to the Church. Is the Church that? Just in so far as we are actually what we are called to be, that is our spiritual measure. Spiritual measure is what we are as to Christ, what Christ is in us.

### **The Mystery Known Only by Revelation**

Then we come to this other point - it is not the fact that makes us grow; that is, it is not the truth of the Body as truth, the facts stated about the Church as information, that brings us to spiritual enlargement. We can see all this as in the Scriptures, and yet it may never make any difference to us as to our spiritual measure, never result in spiritual enlargement. There are a lot of people who have all the truth of the mystery of Christ and the Church, all the truth of the Body of Christ, but they are very small people. Many of them have it and are still living on Corinthian ground where everything is very earthly and self-centered; and many more are living on Galatian ground where all is very legal. In order for it to mean spiritual enlargement, it has to be on what we will call Ephesian ground.

What is Ephesian ground? It is this. Paul says that there was revealed to him this mystery; it was made known to him. And now he tells these people that he prays for them. They are Christians, there is no doubt about that; but he says that he prays for them "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory, may give unto

you (Christians) a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1:17-20). All that has to do with the true, eternal vocation and destiny of this Christ corporate. The knowledge of *Him* is not the knowledge of Christ as a separate person. It is the knowledge of Christ now in all that He means in a corporate way. That is the knowledge he prays they may have; and having prayed thus for them he moves to the matter of spiritual enlargement. He comes eventually to that great point in the fourth chapter - "till we all attain... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." How do you attain unto fulness? What is spiritual enlargement? It results from the eyes of your heart being enlightened as to the true meaning and nature of Christ as expressed in His Body the Church. The point is that you see it, that it breaks on you by revelation. Then you are at once out of a Corinthian position, out of a Galatian position, out of a merely earthly Church with its ordinances, ceremonies, etc. You are in a heavenly position, and now you are going to grow.

Even at the risk of undue repetition - because of the importance of this matter let me say again that the Apostle says as to himself, and as to those believers of his own day, and as to us, that the way of spiritual enlargement is by the eyes of the heart being enlightened. Paul would never have prayed for that, if it were not the Lord's will that it should be so; and if it is His will, then we *can* have the eyes of our heart enlightened to know in this way that Paul knew - by revelation.

### **The Church Heavenly and Corporate**

Now, reverting to what I said above concerning the true meaning and nature of the Church, I wonder if you have noticed in "Romans," "Corinthians" and "Galatians" the connection of baptism? In Romans 6 baptism results in walking in newness of life. "We were buried... with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life." That is very simple; that is the beginning; through the spiritual meaning of baptism you simply walk in newness of life, you have a new life. When you come from "Romans" into "Corinthians" you find that union with Christ crucified means that the mixing up of the old life with the new has to be dealt with; you have a new life, but, you must not mix the old life in with it. So "Corinthians" teaches that you must live altogether and only in the new life, and not bring in the old with it. See 2 Cor. 5. When you move into "Galatians," Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (3:27). In "Galatians," baptism is the putting on of the new man completely; and to indicate that it is an advance upon the Corinthian position, he follows immediately by saying "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus." You put on the new man. The Corinthian divisions are ruled out; baptism in relation to the Galatian position means that we know no man after the flesh. But still in "Romans," "Corinthians," and "Galatians," it is as though we were living as Christians in a new life unto the Lord *here*, on the earth.

You come into "Ephesians" and you read - "God... even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (2:4-6), Now here, the 'us' is corporate. When you come into "Ephesians" you come onto the ground of what I will call a corporate baptism. It has an individual application, but "Ephesians" views the Church as a whole as a baptized thing. It is as though this whole Body of Christ, the Church, has corporately been baptized, and is no longer an earthly thing at all; it

is a heavenly Body. Everything here in this first half of the Ephesian letter is corporate. It was the Church that was foreknown, foreordained, predestinated. It only becomes an individual and personal matter by personal challenge to us in relation to the whole, but it is the Church that is in view, and 'we' who were quickened and raised are a corporate thing; so that, in "Ephesians," baptism sees *the Church* placed in the heavenlies through death and Divine quickening and raising together with Christ. It is something very much fuller than just individual Christian life. You may be baptized as an individual, but you must recognize that God never thinks of you just as an individual in that sense; He never regards you just as one isolated person. He looks upon you from the standpoint of the whole Body and says, 'When you were baptized, you were not only baptized as an individual; you were baptized as part of the Church, and in your resurrection you are seen from heaven in your relatedness to the Church.' Therefore the higher position of "Ephesians" is this - that now, being quickened and raised together with Christ and seated in the heavenlies is a matter of relatedness to other believers, and in that relatedness, you are going to find your fulness. You are never going to find spiritual enlargement just as an isolated, separate individual, but in relation with other believers. "God setteth the solitary in families" (Psa. 68:6), and there is no doubt about it, whether or not you understand or accept the doctrine of it, you can prove very quickly in experience that our spiritual enlargement does come by way of true spiritual and heavenly relatedness with other believers. That is proved by the fact that it is not always easy for Christians to live together for very long. It sounds a terrible thing to say, but you have a lot of other factors to reckon with. If you were ordinary people in this world, you *might* get on very well, but being Christians you have to meet the whole force of Satan working upon any little bit of natural life he can find. So he makes for difficulty between Christians that they would not find if they were not in a heavenly position. They are meeting forces in the heavenlies. There are the rub and friction and all the cross currents that try to divide Christians but which do not try to divide other people, because there is so much bound up with true spiritual oneness amongst the Lord's people - so much for the Lord, and so much against Satan. Satan is going to break up that spiritual oneness if he can. He knows what that means for him, and the Lord knows what that means for Himself - and hence the special and extra difficulties when it is a case of Christians living together, especially for a long time.

Now what is the upshot? When these difficulties arise we must say, 'It is evidently necessary for me to get a new spiritual position, to get on top of this. If I am not going to give it up and leave, I must come to some spiritual enlargement; I have to know the Lord in a new way, to have more grace, love and patience.' That is spiritual enlargement, and it comes by relatedness. (Of course, that is only one way; there are many others by which spiritual enlargement comes by relatedness.) If only we can keep together in prayer, there is spiritual enlargement.

You want spiritual enlargement? Recognize that your baptism is not only an individual and personal thing but from God's standpoint of fulness it is a corporate thing. You may in "Romans" be baptized individually to walk in newness of life, but when you come to "Ephesians," it is corporate; the Church was baptized, it is a baptized Church; a crucified and risen Church, and a Church in the heavenlies that is of spiritual account; not something here; and there you come into the realm of God's great fulness - "strong to apprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19). That is fulness, but notice, that is corporate. We must ask the Lord in the terms of the Apostle's prayer that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened. When we see, it is done. What we need is to see, that we may *know* the hope of His calling.

# Chapter 3

## Subjection to Christ as Head

*"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full" (Col. 2:9-10).*

*"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).*

*"Who is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10).*

*"...not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2:19).*

*"...where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).*

### **Christ's Absolute Headship**

Colossians 1 is the greatest and most magnificent statement in the Bible concerning the Lord Jesus, and, in a word, it sums up all things in Christ. It is a very wonderful unveiling of the place which Christ occupies in relation to all things, and of course that is the standpoint from which everything has to be viewed as to the Lord Jesus - His relationship to all things; and what the Apostle is seeking to make very clear, because of that which had arisen to call forth this letter, is that Christ is at no point, in no way, second in God's universe. He does not come in the slightest degree below the place of absolute pre-eminence, however great might be the position accorded Him by those against whom the Apostle was writing. They were quite prepared to say very good and great and wonderful things about Him, and to accord Him a very high place; and yet that place was less than absolute pre-eminence. So the Apostle wrote this letter in the first place to reveal and declare that the Lord Jesus is in every realm supreme.

You notice the above passages touching upon His headship, and that headship is seen in the several connections as complete. There are no two heads or three heads in God's universe; only one head is possible, and Christ occupies that in every realm. So it is stated here - "that *in all things* he might have the pre-eminence." You cannot get outside of that. When you say 'all,' that is final. He is head over all things.

### **Our Position in that Headship**

Chapter 2 brings us firstly to our position in that headship. Verses 9 and 10 are a statement of our position. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full." Now, that is a positional fulness. That simply means that, by our being in Christ, we come into the place of fulness, and we are made to stand in the fulness of Christ; we are positioned there.

### **Our Progress in the Position**

But when you pass to verse 19 of Chapter 2, it is a matter of progress, progress in the position and by reason of that relatedness. "Holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God." "In him ye are made full," but in Him you have got to increase. That is not a contradiction. Made full by reason of your position, but increasing in that fulness by reason of your spiritual progress. Progress is a matter of

making good all that is in your position. We see in Ephesians the correspondence between that letter and the book of Joshua. When the people came into the land, they were in the land flowing with milk and honey, they were in the place where all the fulness dwelt, but they had to do something about it; and so we find that it was a matter of making good all that was theirs, progressing in the fulness into which they had been placed positionally; and that is exactly what is here. "Increaseth with the increase of God" is a matter of going on in that position to appropriate, apply and make ours the fulness which we have inherited in Christ; or, to put it more closely to the figure of the Body and the Head here in this letter, it is taking everything from the Head.

Now the temptation which was being presented to these Colossian believers was to let go of Christ as supreme, and the Apostle made it perfectly clear that to let Christ's supreme position go was to let the fulness go, and that only as they held fast, not simply to Christ personally - all these people were prepared to hold fast to Christ and not to let Him go - but also to Him as Head, and so recognized that everything came from the headship of Christ, only so would they come experimentally to His fulness.

### **The Practical Application of Christ's Headship**

That is a statement, but what it means is shown in Chapter 3 -

*"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory."*

That is the practical application of headship. "Ye died" - that is necessary to put Christ in His place. "Ye were raised together with Christ" - not apart from Him; not leaving any place for self-government, self-direction, self-sufficiency, self-assertiveness, or any other expression of self at all. "Ye died"; your own headship of your life died with you. All other governments of your life died when you died. You died to all other authorities, to all other rule; to every other kind of direction, government, headship in principle; you died to all except to the headship of Christ; and, being raised, you were raised with Christ. It is "together with Christ"; and now in resurrection it is Christ Who is Head of the Body, the Church.

While this has a personal and individual application, it is the Church which is in view again. This elect body of people called the Church died to all other governments, just as Israel were set aside and buried in Babylon. It was the crucifixion - the death and the burial - of Israel when the captivity took place. They were sent away, out of the place of covenant blessing, the place where the Lord was, the place of the inheritance, the place where everything had been provided for their very existence. They were sent right out of it and were for that time dead and buried, simply because they had let in other headships. Idolatry was the cause; that meant that another headship, that of Satan mediately through the gods of the nations round about, had taken God's place, and God would not tolerate any other headship of any kind at all. So He slew them and buried them in Babylon, and when there was a raising from that grave of a company that came back, it was under the absolute headship of the Lord, and that alone. That is the principle of it. It was a corporate thing, a corporate resurrection, and under one head. From that time, whatever Israel became, however they failed, never again was idolatry found among them. There is that about it; it cured them of idolatry - that is, of another headship. You see the principle.

Now here it is the Church, an elect people, having died and been buried to all other headships; and to be in the Church in resurrection carries with it that which is not optional at all. It is not an option - whether we like it or not, whether we will have it or not - it is an established thing, that you cannot be truly in the *meaning* of the Body of Christ and have any other government than the government of Christ, any other headship than the headship of Christ. It is implicit in resurrection. So then, "If.. ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." Here Christ as Head is seated at the right hand of God. That means He has taken the seat of absolute authority. There is nothing more to be done about this, nothing to be added to it. It is finished, it is final. He sits down in the complete authority which is His. He is on the Throne. And that is the position of the Church, and the Church in every part has to be brought to that place where all direction, all government, all decisions, are taken from the Head, everything is referred to the Head, the whole life has to come right under the Head. There is to be no self-will, no self-choice, no self-direction, nothing at all that comes out from any other quarter. There is no division in the mind of God between our natural will and the will of Satan - they are the same. Satan has put his very will into the fallen creation. It is a self-willed creation working against God, and it comes from the devil. So everything now has to be transferred to the Head and taken from the Head if there is going to be any spiritual enlargement.

It is practical. "Ye died"; "ye were raised"; "Christ who is our life." Those are statements of fact, utter and absolute. Therefore "seek the things that are above"; therefore "put to death your members which are upon the earth... seeing that ye have put off the old man and have put on the new man" (Col. 3:5-10). You see the things that are to be put away because you put on the new man. It is a new position with a government altogether in all matters, and a complete subjection to Him at every point. That is the way to progress in the fullness to which we have been brought positionally.

# Chapter 4

## Living "In the Heavens"

*Reading: Eph. 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12; 1:6,9-10; 3:11,21.*

In meditating on the subject of spiritual enlargement as seen in Paul's epistles, when we pass into this letter to the Ephesians we come into an entirely new realm. It is like passing from one world into another. In 'Corinthians' we find everything earthbound in a carnal and soulish way, and all the features which we find there are due to an earthliness of Christian life. In 'Galatians' we still find things earthbound, but this time in a religious way. When we pass into 'Ephesians,' the earthly ties are severed. The one governing word is "the heavens." It is a new realm with a new time factor. We have passed out of the earthlies into the heavens, and out of time into eternity. We want to understand as far as we can what that means.

### **The Limiting Effect of Things 'On the Earth'**

We can, of course, conclude at once that if our horizons are pressed back so far and if that is our realm, it must surely mean spiritual enlargement. But how? If we want to interpret this word 'heavens' in a practical way, we find the key in verse 3 of the first chapter of the letter - "...hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ." It means that now, in this realm of the believer's life, spiritual values are pre-eminent. That is easily seen by a comparison with the two letters preceding. In 'Corinthians' spiritual values were not really pre-eminent. Personal interests governed there. Everything was judged from the standpoint of the advantage to the people concerned and of its effect upon them here in this life on the earth. Even spiritual things were pulled down, spiritual gifts were dragged into the realm of display with a view to making something of the people themselves.

In the Galatian letter the same thing is true, but from the standpoint of religion. All is brought down to earth. The Apostle put his finger upon the heart of the matter when he said of the Judaizers who were capturing the Galatian believers that they wanted to glory in their flesh (Gal. 6:13); that is, that they might be able to count heads and say, 'See how many converts we have! See how successful our movement is, how many people are joining us!' And he sets that over against the offence of the Cross. The offence of the Cross is that there is nothing to glory in in the flesh. All the glorying in the flesh, even in a religious way, is removed by the Cross. There is an earthliness even of religious life that wants to make of Christianity something here, seen and sentient. It is earthliness in another form. It is an earthly 'Church.'

### **Only Spiritual Value Counts with God**

So here, when we come into the 'Ephesian' position, we are at once introduced to the pre-eminence of spiritual values. That is what 'in the heavens' means - how things are viewed from above; not what they look like and seem to be from the earthly standpoint, not how we weigh and measure them down here on this earth, but how they stand from heaven's viewpoint, how the ascended Lord looks at them. That is what governs all the way through this letter, at every point - spiritual value; not numbers, not what men call success, not all these things which are of such importance to people here, but just that which weighs with God; and that is spiritual value.

"Hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing," or, more properly and literally, "every blessing of the Spirit." We saw how Paul sought, with both the Corinthians and the Galatians, to get them away to the place where the Spirit was the great, dominant reality. Now here that realm is brought fully into view, where the spiritual matters more than anything else. So if we want spiritual enlargement, if we are really coming to that greater fulness, we shall have to forsake these earthly standards and judgments and interests, and get to the place where, after all, nothing matters but spiritual value. How far is a thing of value in the Lord's sight? We may take it as settled that only spiritual value counts with God.

### **Knowledge of Christ in Heaven the Measure of Spiritual Value**

Christ is in heaven. We must know Him now only in a spiritual way, and no longer after the flesh. We do not know Him as men know one another on the earth. He truly said, "The world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me" (John 14:19). For the moment, that raised a problem for His disciples: they could not understand Him. They said "What is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" They came afterward to understand that perfectly well. Christ can be known truly now only in a spiritual way; He is in heaven. So here again the great phrase is "in the heavenlies in Christ"; that is, the great spiritual values are Christ known in a spiritual way. Enlargement is a matter of knowing Christ. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Paul tried to make the Galatians see that. His epistles are full of the name 'Christ' - the Galatian epistle as much as any.

### **Earthly Features Must Not Govern**

Now, the letter to the Ephesians begins - not only ends - with that: "...every blessing of the Spirit in the heavenlies in Christ." That is, knowing Christ in a spiritual way is the way of spiritual enlargement; there is no other way in which we can truly know Him. So in 'Ephesians' we find this idea of the spiritual. The Spirit and 'spiritual' occur frequently in this letter. The earth touch, we have said, is severed. That earth touch seen in the Corinthian letter meant divisions - "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Peter": parties, circles, sects, dividing the Body. That is the earthly aspect and the earth touch, and we always come into the realm of divisions if we touch one another on the earth level. In 'Corinthians' and in 'Galatians' it is - Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female (Gal. 3:28). That is the earth touch, the divisions of the earthly life. But "in the heavenlies" there is no earth touch, and that results in there being no earth man. Here in 'Ephesians' we come into touch with the heavenly man, Christ, and then with the "one new man." Here there is neither Jew nor Greek: it is not Jew and Greek brought together in fellowship; here there are not bond and free; here there is nothing of those divisions at all, but one new man in Christ. "He... made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition... that he might create in himself of the two one new man" (Eph. 2:14). So that spirituality and heavenliness mean that we meet all believers solely on the ground of Christ. We do not meet them for what they are in themselves, nor on the ground of what their connections are religiously - whether they belong to this or that, or do not belong to this or that. Those things do not come into consideration at all. We meet them on the ground of Christ, and the measure of our practical unity will be the measure of Christ. We go as far as we can with the spiritual measure of everyone; we make that the thing that governs.

Now, if we are to deepen and increase in fellowship we must grow in spiritual measure. Spiritual enlargement will result in the fuller expression of fellowship. That is the teaching of this letter.

Spiritual enlargement, then, is a matter of getting away from the old-man-level, 'the earthlies' in the Corinthian sense - and even religiously, in the Galatian sense - to 'the heavenlies,' in this sense, that Christ known in a spiritual way is the ground upon which we live. Other things do not govern at all; it is the Lord Himself and the things that are spiritual which predominate with us. That is heavenly ground. When we get there, we are introduced to the realm of very considerable spiritual enlargement. There is so much more, of course, in this letter, but that is just a beginning.

### **Only Spiritual Values to Concern Us**

Well now, what weighs with me most? Where am I living? Is it on this wretched, earthly ground of people and things down here, or is it on the ground of Christ? Is it spiritual life and spiritual values that matter? If we can get up there and say truly, 'It does not matter one little bit to me how a thing affects me personally; the question is - how much of the Lord is there in this? How much can there be for Him? I am not influenced by people's relationships down here; I take the higher ground of the heavenlies and meet them, not as this, that or something else according to earthly designation, but I meet them on the ground of Christ, the one new man.' On that level there is nothing to impede spiritual enlargement. Spiritual measure is not a matter of anything here, even for the Lord - its success, its support, its maintenance - but just how much it is answering to the full thought of God in a spiritual way. That is what counts, and that is heavenly ground. We know so well that if people are more concerned with the maintenance of something for the Lord on this earth - keeping it going, building it up, making it successful - they are in a realm of spiritual limitation, and not until they are completely lifted out of such considerations with the one question - How far is this answering to the Lord's fully-revealed mind? - and are governed by that alone, can there be real progress and spiritual enlargement. Is it not true? And it is impressive that people who are really tied up with some thing - some organization, some piece of work, some society, some mission, some institution - even though it be for God in all sincerity - if that is their horizon, if that constitutes their world, they are limited spiritually. They go just so far spiritually and no farther. They are bound by their own earthly fences, the fences of that particular thing. Get away from things, out to the vast range of God's eternal, timeless purpose, and you find all fences are down and spiritual enlargement takes place. It is the only way.

So we come back. What is the Lord after? - not just good things for Himself, however good; He is after nothing less than that great summing up of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10).