

## Chapter 12: The Cross and the Soul Life

God has made full provision for our redemption in the Cross of Christ, but He has not stopped there. In that Cross He has also made secure beyond possibility of failure that eternal plan which Paul speaks of as having been from all the ages "hid in God who created all things". That plan He has now proclaimed "to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:9-11).

We have said that the work of the Cross has two consequences which bear directly upon the realizing of that purpose in us. On the one hand it has issued in the release of His life that it may find expression in us through the indwelling Spirit. On the other hand it has made possible what we speak of as 'bearing the cross'; that is, our co-operation in the daily inworking of His death whereby way is made in us for the manifestation of that new life, through the bringing of the 'natural man' progressively into his right place of subjection to the Holy Spirit. Clearly these are the positive and the negative sides of one thing. Equally clearly we are now touching more particularly on the matter of progress in a life lived for God. Hitherto in dealing with the Christian life we have placed our main emphasis upon the crisis by which it is entered. Now our concern is more definitely with the walk of the disciple, having especially in view his training as a servant of God. It is of him that the Lord Jesus said: "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27).

So we come to a consideration of the natural man and the 'bearing of the cross'. To understand this we must, at the risk of being tedious, go back once more to Genesis and consider what it was that God sought to have in man at the beginning and how His purpose was frustrated. In this way we shall be able to grasp the principles by which we can come again to live in line with that purpose.

### The True Nature Of The Fall

If we have even a little revelation of the plan of God we shall always think much of the word 'man'. We shall say with the Psalmist, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" The Bible makes it clear that what God desires above all things is a man -- a man who will be after His own heart.

So God created a man. In Genesis 2:7 we learn that Adam was created *a living soul*, with a *spirit* inside to commune with God and with a *body* outside to have contact with the material world. (Such New Testament verses as 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 confirm this threefold character of man's being.) With his spirit Adam was in touch with the spiritual world of God; with his body he was in touch with the physical world of material things. He gathered up these two sides of God's creative act into himself to become a personality, an entity living in the world, moving by itself and *having powers of free choice*. Viewed thus as a whole, he was found to be a self-conscious and self-

expressing being, "a living soul".

We saw earlier that Adam was created perfect -- by which we mean that he was without imperfections because by God -- but that he was not yet perfected. He needed a finishing touch somewhere. God had not yet done all that He intended to do in Adam. There was more in view, but it was as yet in abeyance. God was moving towards the fulfillment of His purpose in creating man, a purpose which went beyond man himself, for it had in view the securing to God of all His rights in the universe through man's instrumental in this? Only by a co-operation that sprang from living union with God. God was seeking to have not merely a race of men of one blood upon the earth, but a race which had, in addition, His life resident within its members. Such a race will eventually compass the downfall of Satan and bring to fulfillment all that God has set His heart upon. It is that that was in view with the creation of man.

Then again, we saw that Adam was created neutral. He had a spirit which enabled him to hold communion with God; but as man he was not yet, so to speak, finally orientated; he had powers of choice and he could, if he liked, turn the opposite way. God's goal in man was 'sonship', or, in other words, the expression of His life in human beings. That Divine life was represented in the garden by the tree of life, bearing a fruit that could be accepted, received, taken in. If Adam, created neutral, were voluntarily to turn that way and, choosing dependence upon God, were to receive of the tree of life (representing God's own life), God would then have that life in union with men; He would have realized 'sonship'. But if instead Adam should turn to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would as a result be 'free' to develop himself on his own lines apart from God. Because, however, this latter choice involved complicity with Satan, Adam would thereby put beyond his reach the attaining of his God-appointed goal.

## **The Root Question: The Human Soul**

Now we know the course that Adam chose. Standing between the two trees, he yielded to Satan and took of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. This determined the lines of his development. From then on he could command a knowledge; he 'knew'. But -- and here we come to the point -- the fruit of the tree of knowledge made the first man *over-developed in his soul*. The emotion was touched, because the fruit was pleasant to the eyes, making him 'desire'; the mind with its reasoning power was developed, for he was 'made wise'; and the will was strengthened, so that in future he could always decide which way he would go. The whole fruit ministered to the expansion and full development of the soul, so that not only was the man a living soul, but from henceforth man will *live by the soul*. It is not merely that man has a soul, but that from that day on the soul, with its independent powers of free choice, takes the place of the spirit as the animating power of man.

We have to distinguish here between two things, for the difference is most important. God does not mind -- in fact He intends -- that we should have a soul such as He gave to Adam. But what God has set Himself to do is to reverse something. There is something in man today which is not just the fact of having a soul, but which constitutes a living by the soul. It was this that Satan brought about in the Fall. He trapped man into taking a course by which he could develop his soul so as to derive his very life from it.

We must however be careful. To remedy this does not mean that we are going to cross out the soul altogether. You cannot do that. When today the Cross is really working in us, we do not become inert, insensate, characterless. No, we still possess a soul, and whenever we receive something from God the soul will still be used in relation to it, as an instrument, a faculty, in a true subjection to Him. But the point is, Are we keeping within God's appointed limit -- within the bounds set by Him in the Garden at the beginning -- with regard to the soul, or are we getting outside those bounds?

What God is now doing is the pruning work of the vinedresser. In our souls there is an uncontrolled development, an untimely growth, that has to be checked and dealt with. God must cut that off. So now there are two things before us to which our eyes must be opened. On the one hand God is seeking to bring us to the place where we live by the life of His Son. On the other hand He is doing a direct work in our hearts to undo that other natural resource that is the result of the fruit of knowledge. Every day we are learning these two lessons: a rising up of the life of this One, and a checking and a handing over to death of that other soul-life. These two processes go on all the time, for God is seeking the fully developed life of His Son in us in order to manifest Himself, and to that end He is bringing us back, as to our soul, to Adam's starting-point. So Paul says: "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:11).

What does this mean? It simply means that I will not take any action without relying on God. I will find no sufficiency in myself. I will not take any step just because I have the power to do so. Even though I have that inherited power within me, I will not use it; I will put no reliance in myself. By taking the fruit, Adam became possessed of an inherent power to act, but a power which played right into Satan's hands. You lose that power to act when you come to know the Lord. The Lord cuts it off and you find you can no longer act on your own initiative. You have to live by the life of Another; you have to draw everything from Him.

Oh, friends, I think we all know ourselves in measure, but many a time we do not truly tremble at ourselves. We may, in a manner of courtesy to God, say: 'If the Lord does not want it, I cannot do it', but in reality our subconscious thought is that really we can do it quite well ourselves, even if God does not ask us to do it nor empower us for it. Too often we have been caused to act, to think, to decide, to have power, apart from Him. Many of us Christians today are men with over-developed souls. We have grown too big in ourselves. We have become 'big-souled'. When we are in that condition, the life of the Son of God in us is confined and almost crowded out of action.

## **Natural Energy In The Work Of God**

The power, the energy of the soul is present with us all. Those who have been taught by the Lord repudiate that principle as a life principle; they refuse to live by it; they will not let it reign, nor allow it to be the power-spring of the work of God. But those who have not been taught of God rely upon it; they utilize it; they think it is *the* power.

Let us take first an obvious illustration of this. Far too many of us in the past have reasoned as follows. Here is a delightfully good-natured man, with a clear brain, splendid managing powers and sound judgment. In our hearts we say, 'If that man could be a

Christian, what an asset he would be to the Church! If only he were the Lord's, what a lot it would mean to His cause!

But think for a moment. Where did that man's good nature come from? Whence are those splendid managing powers and that good judgment? Not from new birth, for he is not yet born again. We know we have all been born of the flesh; therefore we need a new birth. But the Lord Jesus had something to say about this in John 3:6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh". Everything which comes not by new birth but by my natural birth is flesh and will only bring glory to man, not God. That statement is not very palatable, but it is true.

We have spoken of soul-power or natural energy. What is this natural energy? It is simply what *I* can do, what *I* am of myself, what *I* have inherited of natural gifts and resources. We are none of us without the power of the soul, and our first need is to recognize it for what it is.

Take for example the human mind. I may have by nature a keen mind. Before my new birth I had it naturally, as something developed from my natural birth. But the trouble arises here. I become converted, I am born anew, a deep work is effected in my spirit, and essential union with God that has been set up in my spirit, but at the same time I carry over with me something which I derive from my natural birth. Now what am I going to do about it?

The natural tendency is this. Formerly I used to use my mind to pore over history, over business, over chemistry, over questions of the world, or literature, or poetry. I used my keen mind to get the best out of those studies. But now my desire has been changed, so henceforth I employ the same mind in the things of God. *I have therefore changed my subject of interest, but I have not changed my method of working.* That is the whole point. My interests have been utterly changed (praise God for that!), but now I utilize the same power to study Corinthians and Ephesians that I used before to pursue history and geography. But that power is not of God; and God will not allow that. The trouble with so many of us is that we have changed the channel into which our energies are directed, but we have not changed the source of those energies.

You will find there are many such things which we carry over into the service of God. Consider the matter of eloquence. There are some men who are born orators; they can present a case very convincingly indeed. Then they become converted, and, without asking ourselves where they really stand in relation to spiritual things, we put them on the platform and make preachers of them. We encourage them to use their natural powers for preaching, and again it is a change of subject but the same power. We forget that, in the matter of our resource for handling the things of God, it is a question not of comparative value but of *origin* -- of where the resource springs from. It is not so much a matter of what we are doing, but of what powers we are employing to do it. We think too little of the source of our energy and too much of the end to which it is directed, forgetting that with God the end never justifies the means.

The following hypothetical case will help us to test the truth of our argument. Mr. A. is a very good speaker: he can talk fluently and most convincingly on any subject, but in practical things he is a very bad manager. Mr. B., on the other hand, is a poor speaker: he cannot express himself clearly but wanders all round his subject, never coming to a point; yet on the other hand he is a splendid manager, most competent in all matters of business. Both these men get converted, and both become earnest Christians. Let us suppose now

that I call on them both and ask them to speak at a convention, and that both accept.

Now what will happen? I have asked the self-same thing of both men, but who do you think will pray the harder? Certainly Mr. B. Why? Because he is no speaker. In the matter of eloquence he has no resources of his own to depend upon. He will pray: 'Lord, if you do not give me power for this, I cannot do it'. Of course Mr. A. will pray too, but maybe not in the same way as Mr. B. because he has something of natural resource upon which to rely.

Now let us suppose that, instead of asking them to speak, I ask them both to take charge of the practical side of affairs at the convention. What will happen? The position will be exactly reversed. Now it will be Mr. A.'s turn to pray hard, for he knows full well that he has no organizing ability. Br. B. of course will pray too, but perhaps without quite the same urgency, for though he knows his need of the Lord he is not nearly so conscious of his need in business matters as is Mr. A.

Do you see the difference between natural and spiritual gifts? Anything we can do without prayer and without an utter dependence upon God must come from that spring of *natural* life, and is suspect. We must see this clearly. Of course it is not true that those only are suited for a particular work who lack the natural gift for it. The point is that, whether naturally gifted or not, they must know the touch of the Cross in death upon all that is of nature, and their complete dependence upon the God of resurrection. All too readily do we envy our neighbor who has some outstanding natural gift, and fail to realize that our own possession of it, apart from such a working of the Cross, may easily prove a barrier to the very thing that God is seeking to manifest in us.

Shortly after my conversion I went out preaching in the villages. I had had a good education and was well versed in the Scriptures, so I considered myself thoroughly capable of instructing the village folk, among whom were quite a number of illiterate women. But after several visits I discovered that, despite their illiteracy, those women had an intimate knowledge of the Lord. I knew the Book they haltingly read; they knew the One of whom the Book spoke. I had much in the flesh; they had much in the Spirit. How many Christian teachers today are teaching others as I was then, very largely in the strength of their carnal equipment!

Once I met a young brother -- young, that is to say, in years, but who had learned a good deal of the Lord. The Lord had brought him through much tribulation to gain that knowledge of Himself. As I was talking to him I said, 'Brother, what has the Lord really been teaching you these days?' He said, 'Only one thing: that I can do nothing apart from him.' 'Do you really mean', I said, 'that you can do nothing?' 'Well, no', he replied. 'I *can* do many things! In fact that has been just my trouble. Oh, you know, I have always been so confident in myself. I know I am well able to do lots of things.' So I asked, 'What then do you mean when you say you can do nothing apart from Him?' He answered, 'The Lord has shown me that I *can* do anything, but that *He* has said, "Apart from me ye can do nothing". So it comes to this, that everything I have done and can do apart from Him *is nothing!*'

We have to come to that valuation. I do not mean to say we cannot do a lot of things, for we can. We can take meetings, and build churches, we can go to the ends of the earth and found missions, and we can seem to bear fruit; but remember that the Lord's word is: "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13). God is the only legitimate Originator in the universe (Gen. 1:1). Anything that *you* plan

and set on foot has its origin in the flesh, and it will never reach the realm of the Spirit however earnestly you seek God's blessing on it. It may last for years, and then you may think you will adjust here and improve there and maybe bring it on a better plane, but it cannot be done.

Origin determines destination, and what was "of the flesh" originally will never be made spiritual by any amount of 'improvement'. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and it will never be otherwise. Anything for which we are sufficient in ourselves is 'nothing' in God's estimate, and we have to accept His estimate and write it down as nothing. "The flesh profiteth nothing." It is only what comes from above that will abide.

We cannot see this simply by being told it. God must teach us what is meant, by putting His finger on something which He sees and saying: 'This is natural; this has its source in the old creation; this cannot abide.' Until He does so, we may agree in principle but we can never really *see* it. We may assent to, and even enjoy, the teaching, but we shall never truly loathe ourselves.

But there will come a day when God opens our eyes. Facing a particular issue we shall have to say, as by revelation: 'It is unclean, it is impure; Lord, I see it!' The word 'purity' is a blessed word. I always associate it with the Spirit. Purity means something altogether of the Spirit. Impurity means mixture. When God opens our eyes to see that the natural life is something He can never use in His work, then we find we do not *enjoy* the doctrine any longer. Rather we loathe ourselves for the impurity that is in us; but when that point is reached, God begins His work of deliverance. We are going on shortly to look at the provision He has made for that deliverance, but we must stay for a little longer with this matter of revelation.

## **The Light Of God And Knowledge**

Of course, if one does not set out to serve the Lord whole-heartedly, one does not feel the necessity for light. It is only when one has been apprehended by God, and seeks to go forward with Him, that one finds how necessary light is. There is a fundamental need of light in order for us to know the mind of God; to know what is of the spirit and what is of the soul; to know what is Divine and what is merely of man; to discern what is truly heavenly and what is only earthly; to understand the difference between things which are spiritual and things which are carnal; to know whether God is really leading us or whether we are walking by our feelings, senses or imaginations. It is when we have reached a position where we would like to follow God fully that we find light to be the most necessary thing in the Christian life.

In my conversations with younger brothers and sisters one question comes up again and again. It is: How can I know that I am walking in the Spirit? How do I distinguish which prompting within me is from the Holy Spirit and which is from myself? It seems that all are alike in this; but some have gone further. They are trying to look within, to differentiate, to discriminate to analyze, and in doing so are bringing themselves into deeper bondage. Now this is a situation which is really dangerous to Christian life, for inward knowledge will never be reached along the barren path of self-analysis.

We are never told in the Word of God to examine our inward condition.[15] That way ends only to uncertainty, vacillation and despair. Of course we have to have self-

knowledge. We have to know what is going on within. We do not want to live in a fool's paradise; to have gone altogether wrong and yet not know we have gone wrong; to have a spartan will and yet think we are pursuing the will of God. But such self-knowledge does not come by our turning within; by our analyzing our feelings and motives and everything that is going on inside, and then trying to pronounce whether we are walking in the flesh or in the Spirit.

There are several passages in the Psalms which illumine this subject. The first is in Psalm 36:9: "In thy light shall we see light". I think that is one of the best verses in the old Testament. There are two lights there. There is "thy light", and then, when we have come into that light, we shall "see light".

Now those two lights are different. We might say that the first is objective and the second subjective. The first light is the light which belongs to God but is shed upon us; the second is the knowledge imparted by that light. "In thy light shall we see light": we shall know something; we shall be clear about something; we shall *see*. No turning within, no introspective self-examination will ever bring us to that clear place. No, it is when there is light coming from God that we see.

I think it is so simple. If we want to satisfy ourselves that our face is clean, what do we do? Do we feel it carefully all over with our hands? No, of course not. We find a mirror and we bring it to the light. In that light everything becomes clear. No sight ever came by feeling or analyzing. Sight only comes by the light of God coming in; and when once it has come, there is no longer need to ask if a thing is right or wrong. We know.

You remember again how in Psalm 139:23 the writer says: "Search me, O God, and know my heart". You realize, do you not, what it means to say "Search me"? It certainly does not mean that I search myself. "Search me" means "You search me!" That is the way of illumination. It is for God to come in and search; it is not for me to search. Of course that will never mean that I may go blindly on, careless of my true condition. That is not the point. The point is that however much my self-examination may reveal in me that needs putting right, such searching never really gets below the surface. My true knowledge of self comes not from my searching myself but from God searching me.

But, you ask, what does it mean in practice for us to come into the light? How does it work? *How* do we see light in His light? Here again the Psalmist comes to our help. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (psalm 119:130 A.V.). In spiritual things we are all "simple". We are dependent upon God to give us understanding, and especially is this so in the matter of our own true nature. And it is here that the Word of God operates. In the New Testament the passage which states this most clearly is in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "The word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12,13). Yes, it is the Word of God, the penetrating Scripture of Truth, that settles our questions. It is that which discerns our motives and defines for us their true source in soul or spirit.

With this I think we can pass on from the doctrinal to the practical side of things. Many of us, I am sure, are living quite honestly before God. We have been making progress, and we do not know of anything much wrong with us. Then one day, as we go on, we meet with a fulfillment of that word: "The entrance of Thy words giveth light".

Some servant of God has been used by Him to confront us with His living Word, and that Word has made an entrance into us. Or perhaps we ourselves have been waiting before God and, whether from our memory of Scripture or from the page itself, His Word has come to us in power. Then it is we see something which we have never seen before. We are convicted. We know where we are wrong, and we look up and confess: 'Lord, I see it. There is impurity there. There is mixture. How blind I was ! Just fancy that for so many years I have been wrong there and have never known it!' Light comes in and we see light. The light of God brings us to see the light concerning ourselves, and it is an abiding principle that every knowledge of self comes to us in that way.

It may not always be the Scriptures. Some of us have known saints who really knew the Lord, and through praying with them or talking with them, in the light of God radiating from them, we have seen something which we never say before. I have met one such, who is now with the Lord, and I always think of her as a 'lighted' Christian. If I did but walk into her room, I was brought immediately to a sense of God. In those days I was very young and had been converted about two years, and I had lots of plans, lots of beautiful thoughts, lots of schemes for the Lord to sanction, a hundred and lone things which I thought would be marvelous if they were all brought to fruition. With all these things I came to her to try to persuade her; to tell her that this or that was the thing to do.

Before I could open my mouth she would just say a few words in quite an ordinary way. Light dawned! It simply put me to shame. My 'doing' was all so natural, so full of man. Something happened. I was brought to a place where I could say: 'Lord, my mind is set only in creaturely activities, but here is someone who is not out for them at all'. She had but one motive, one desire, and that was for God. Written in the front of her Bible were these words: 'Lord, I want nothing for myself', Yes, she lived for God alone, and where that is the case you will find that such a one is bathed in light, and that that light illuminates others. That is real witness.[16]

Light has one law: it shines wherever it is admitted. That is the only requirement. *We* may shut it out of ourselves; it fears nothing else. If we throw ourselves open to God, He will reveal. The trouble comes when we have closed areas, locked and barred places in our hearts, where we think with pride that *we* are right. Our defeat lies then not only in our being wrong but in our *not knowing that we are wrong*. Wrong may be a question of natural strength; ignorance of it is a question of light. You can see the natural strength in some but they cannot see it themselves. Oh, we need to be sincere and humble, and to open ourselves before God! Those who are *open* can see. God is light, and we cannot live in His light and be without understanding. Let us say again with the Psalmist: "O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me" (Psalm 43:3).

We praise God that sin is being brought to the notice of Christians today more than hitherto. In many places the eyes of Christians have been opened to see that victory over sins, as items, is important in Christian life, and in consequence many are walking closer to the Lord in seeking deliverance and victory over them. Praise the Lord for any movement toward Himself, any movement back to real holiness unto God! But that is not enough. There is one thing that must be touched, and that is the very life of the man, not merely his sins. The question of the personality of the man, of his soul-power, is the heart of the matter. To make the question of sins to be everything is still to be on the surface. Holiness, if you only regard sins, is still something on the outside, still superficial. You have not yet got to the root of the evil.

Adam did not let sin into the world by committing murder. That came later. Adam let in sin by choosing to have his soul developed to a place where he could go on by himself apart from God. When, therefore, God secures a race of men who will be to His glory, and who will be His instrument to accomplish His purpose in the universe, they will be a people whose life -- yea, whose very breath -- is dependent upon Him. He will be the "tree of life" to them.

What I feel more and more the need of in myself, and what I feel that we all as the Lord's children need to seek from God, is a real revelation of ourselves. I repeat that I do not mean we should be forever looking in on ourselves and asking: 'Now, is this soul or is it spirit?' That will never get us anywhere; it is darkness. No, Scripture shows us how the saints were brought to self-knowledge. It was always by light from God, and that light *is* God Himself. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, Paul, John, all came to a knowledge of themselves because the Lord flashed *Himself* upon them, and that flash brought revelation and conviction. (Isa. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 10:8; Luke 22:61, 62; Acts 9:3-5; Rev. 1:17).

We can never know the hatefulness of sin and the hatefulness of ourselves unless there is that flash of God upon us. I speak not of a sensation but of an inward revelation of the Lord Himself through His Word. It does for us what doctrine alone can never do.

Christ is our light. He is the living Word, and when we read the Scriptures that life in Him brings revelation. "The life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Such illumination may not come to us all at once, but gradually; but it will be more and more clear and searching, until we see ourselves in the light of God and all our self-confidence is gone. For light is the purest thing in the world. It cleanses. It sterilizes. It kills what should not be there. In its radiance the 'dividing asunder of joints and marrow' becomes to us a fact and no mere teaching. We know fear and trembling as we recognize the corruption of man's nature, the hatefulness of our own selves, and the real threat to the work of God of our unrestrained soul-life and energy. As never before, we see now how much of us needs God's drastic dealing if He is to use us, and we know that, apart from Him, as servants of God we are finished.

But here the Cross, in its widest meaning, will come to our help again, and we shall seek now to examine an aspect of its work which meets and deals with our problem of the human soul. For only a thorough understanding of the Cross can bring us to that place of dependence which the Lord Jesus Himself voluntarily took when He said: "I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 5:30).