

THE WILL OF GOD IN RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE

Part 1

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OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

These messages and this ministry are based upon a three-fold supposition, or assumption:

1. That you have a very real concern to know the will of God.
2. That you are quite prepared to consider anything that may be a help to you in that direction.
3. That you are of a mind to obey any light that the Lord may give as to His will.

Given that foundation, I think the Lord will find a clear way of meeting us and speaking to us, through this message.

The business of any servant of the Lord is, perhaps in many ways, to bring His people to know what is His will concerning them, and it is on the heart of this servant of the Lord, if He will help, to give you a fuller understanding of what that good and perfect will of God is. We will come back to that more specifically as we go on.

The Bible, which is the charter of the christian faith, is altogether occupied with that one thing. You can read through your Bible, and perhaps you will find some of it rather tedious, and other things you might not understand, but the whole Bible, altogether, is concerned with that one thing — the will of God. So it is as well to read the Bible everywhere in that relationship: What has this to do with the will of God?

God moving according to purpose

In other words, the Bible is a revelation of God moving according to purpose. That is only another way of speaking about the will of God. God is seen, from the first words in the

Bible to the last, moving according to purpose, moving *in* and *with* purpose. He is a God who is motivated by one final and all-inclusive object, which we understand in New Testament language as God's eternal purpose.

The first section of the Bible, which consists of the first five books, shows us, clearly, fully and meticulously, God moving according to purpose. It is a section of movement forward, and although in the fifth book, the book of Deuteronomy, there is a retrospective aspect, a looking back with this word: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee" (8:2), even that retrospective aspect has a forward aspect connected with it, for the remembering is related to what is yet to be. As you know, it is the book of people between a past history and a new history of the future, and it is looking back to pick up the lessons of the past in order to carry them into the future. So we move into the book of Joshua with all that the past history has taught as the foundation, and how meticulous the Lord is in that book of Deuteronomy! He is reiterating and re-emphasizing, and laying a very sound and very particular foundation for the future. It is important to note that in the light of what we are going to say, for we are going to be occupied with the laws of God by which His will — which is His purpose — is realized, fulfilled and accomplished in His people. So all this first section has the future in view, with the will of God governing.

The last section of the Old Testament, the Prophets, is occupied with the tragedy of lost purpose. The cry of the Prophets is that God's will has not been realized and fulfilled. It is a tragic cry of failure and disappointment, and you must listen to it, for as you listen to these Prophets and hear their anguished cry over these people you are hearing just this: "What God meant has not been realized, and that is a terrible thing!" The Prophets have a voice of tragedy, pathos and anguish, because God has been disappointed over His purpose in these people, and they have missed what He intended for them.

So we have the first and last sections of the Old Testament. We are not here occupied with the whole of the Old Testament, but just notice these in connection with the will of God. Of course, I am talking about the big, comprehensive will of God,

not about what we might call the little wills of God with which we are occupied every day, when we say: "What is the Lord's will for me in this, or that?" No, that is not what I am talking about but, mark you, all those expressions of the divine will in the particular matters and situations are gathered into the big will, and until you get into that big will, you really do not have the ground for the little wills of God, the particular application of that will.

Turn over to the New Testament, and in the first section God is taking up His purpose again. Now He is taking it up in the person of His Son, and in Him the purpose and will of God is embodied and personified. Now it is all gathered into a *Person*. It has been expressed, as the writer of the Hebrew Letter says, in many different ways and "by divers portions" at different times. Now the whole thing is summed up in the person of Jesus Christ, who says: "I am come ... to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). This whole will and purpose of God, therefore, is personified, or incarnated, in Jesus Christ, God's Son; and although you have heard that a thousand times and have listened to many, many messages about it, it may not have occurred to you that there is one statement by the Lord Jesus which comprehends all this: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). That is a comprehensive statement as to the whole will of God.

"I am the way"

What do you have a way for? To get somewhere! A way implies a goal, a moving toward an object. "I am the way of this eternal purpose of God. I am the way of its realization. I am the way, the embodiment of the will of God." "I am come to do thy will, O my God." The way is a Person.

"I am the truth"

That simple clause, or definition, is so immense that many hours are needed to explain it! Men have been preaching on it for centuries. In effect the Lord Jesus is saying: "I am set in a realm which has been deceived and led away from the will of God, from the divine purpose. I am in a world that is now a lie in

its constitution. I am the truth over against all that which is false in the human race, in the creation, in this universe.” If the will of God is all-comprehending, vast, and great, the lie of the devil is an immense thing, and it is something that has to be overcome in you, in me, and in the whole race. Truth has to be put into our constitution to destroy the lie that is there.

I dare not dwell upon that, but just indicate it in the connection with which we are concerned — the will of God. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). We talk about “conversion”, and, you know, a fundamental factor in conversion, in turning round in the opposite way, is turning from what is false to what is true, coming *into* the truth of God, as to why we have a being in His purpose, why He is dealing with us as He is according to His great will, and what it all means. Do you and I not need every day to know the good of that conversion, the real and true meaning of God in Christ for us?

“I am the life”

We have far too small an idea of that! There is a marvellous statement in the letter of Paul to the Colossians, where he speaks of the life which God foreordained unto His glory. Before ever the world was created and man upon it, God’s thought was centred in this thing called “life”. It was in His eternal counsels. That is the battleground of the ages, and is the key to so much — what God means by life, the life of God’s eternal purpose, the life of His all-captivating will, the life which the Lord Jesus is.

We were reading this morning of the Lord Jesus, having received the sentence of crucifixion, walking towards the Hill with Simon carrying His cross, and the women of Jerusalem weeping and wailing for Him. I was impressed again with the way in which He turned to them and said: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me. There is no need to weep for Me. You weep for yourselves and for your children, but not for Me!” What does that mean? That this cross, toward which He was going, on which He was going so soon to be impaled, and all that was going to fall upon Him there, was not the end. The women may have thought so, but He knew that it was not. Even

then tears for Him were not justified: "... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross ..." (Heb. 12:2). The way of the cross was life, not death. This was how He was going to secure that for which He had come, and which God had intended for man all down the ages, and from before the world was.

"I *am* the way, the truth, and the life." Dear friends, we cannot get outside of that! If we comprehended what those three terms mean, that would be all that we need. They compass everything.

The New Testament, then, introduces this eternal will and purpose of God in a Person; but what is the rest of the New Testament about after the Gospels? It is simply the working out of these three things. All the rest of the New Testament is gathered into the way that Christ is, the truth that is in Jesus, and the life that is by His death and resurrection.

Having said that, we can come to our particular message for this time.

The divine laws of realizing the divine purpose

We must read some Scriptures to get to this:

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (or, as the margin says, *"deal wisely"*; Joshua 1:8).

"And now, O Israel, hearken unto the statutes and unto the judgements, which I teach you, for to do them; that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:1,2).

"These words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thy house, and upon thy gates” (Deut. 6:6-9).

“He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

The divine laws of realizing the divine purpose, of knowing, of doing the will of God, which is the ultimate thing in Christianity. Here it is perfectly clear that it is the law of the absolute government of the Word of God.

We have read from Joshua, and we have intimated already that the book of Joshua is the resumption, after a nation’s failure and perishing in the wilderness, of the divine will and purpose, and moving forward now under that government. Right there at the beginning, the foundation of this new movement and all that is involved in it, all that it means against a repetition of the failure and tragedy that has been, is the meticulous observance of the Word of God. The Word and the will of God go together, and there is no progress in this great calling into which you and I are called in the mind, the purpose and the will of God except by the Word of God. There must be obedience to the Word, the cherishing of the Word, the binding of the Word upon our lives in all matters. I have said how meticulous the Lord was in that book of Deuteronomy because, on the one side, there was the terrible tragedy which had taken place and, on the other side, the tremendous prospect. There, in chapter after chapter, He is saying: “Remember what I said? Remember what I said! Call to remembrance all that I have said to you.” The law of prospect is the government of God’s Word. The people had been forty years on probation in the wilderness, and the one thing that stood over that forty years was a testing of the heart as to the Word of God. Remember Deuteronomy 8:2: “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to *prove* thee, to know what was in thine heart, *whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not.*” In other words: “Whether thou wouldst obey His Word, and what place His Word had in thy heart.”

The probation of life is always the testing of a wilderness experience. The trials of the journey and of the experiences are,

in God's mind, to see what is in our hearts, whether we really have a heart for the Lord and whether, after all our professions and protestations, the will of God is really *the* thing which governs our whole life. The Lord is trying us out on that — "Whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not." The testing is by the Word of God, and perhaps we know something of that daily?

So we come to Joshua, and a new phase begins on the other side of Jordan with a reaffirmation that the Word of God is to be kept always before the face, on their arms, on their foreheads, on the thresholds of their homes. The Word is always there to govern them. They were a called people, called by God out of Egypt, and called by His name, but the calling is not enough. We have all been called, but, after the call, comes the testing; then, when the testing has been proved, we are chosen.

The results of failure to obey God's Word

Everything in the Word of God turns upon this one thing: the government of God's Word. Where the Word of God was not honoured there was disaster, and because of failure to do what God had made known as to His will there was calamity. Again and again in the Old Testament we find disaster as the result of a failure to keep the Word of God always before them. Even Moses, who had sacrificed and suffered so much for those people, was at the last forbidden by the Lord to ask any more that he might go into the land. Why? Because the Lord had said something and Moses had not meticulously observed what He had said. "Well," you say, "that is terrible! He is a hard God." Ah! but you must remember that it was not just Moses — Moses has attained and obtained now, for he was with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration — but it was the people for ever afterwards who had to learn this lesson: you cannot violate anything that the Lord has said without forfeiting and losing something.

Then we remember David bringing the ark up to Jerusalem and making a new cart on which to carry it. But there was a disaster on the way. The whole thing, about which they seemed to be

having such a good time and feeling that they were being prospered and blessed of the Lord, turned into that threshing-floor calamity. Uzzah died before the Lord, and David was angry with Him that day. He turned the ark aside and went and sulked, nursing his grievance with the Lord. But he got over that, and we do get over these things! We have those bad times with the Lord, but when we get over them He is able to show us the meaning of what He has done. David went back to the Word of the Lord and found the Lord's instructions about the carrying of the ark. He had not said: "Thou shalt make a new cart." That was not in the Word at all, indeed, it was another heathen idea. Then David saw and said: "Oh, it is written that the Levites shall carry the ark." The tragedy of that day, with the all good intentions, was because the Word of God was overlooked and missed, but the Lord never overlooks His Word.

There may be many secret tragedies in our lives, many arrests in our spiritual progress, not because our motives were not good, but the best motives may just miss the particular thought of God, and He does not substitute a good motive for something that He has laid down as law.

This all sounds very terrible, but we must take it further, and this is where our hearts are really going to be touched. The answer to these failures was not just a sort of legal, mechanical way of observing some statement in the Bible. The issue was very much bigger than that! If you will look at every such instance in the Old Testament, the big and the small, you will see that it was always a matter of the Lord's presence. Do you remember Ai? What had the Lord said about the principles of spiritual progress? You know what He had said! The people came to Ai, and you know what Achan did. He violated the Word of God, and the whole of Israel was arrested in their progress, brought to a standstill, and there was a scene of tragedy. But what was the real tragedy? The manifest presence of the Lord had departed! Is not the manifest presence of the Lord everything? Oh, we do not want anything greater than that! Surely there is no heart here which is interested in anything in this life and in this world apart from the presence of the Lord! If only we know that the Lord is with us, what a lot of difference that makes! There may be a lot of victories, a lot of strength, yes,

there may be conflicts, as there were with Joshua afterwards, there may be many problems and many difficulties in life, but if only we are assured that the Lord is with us, that is everything, is it not? I tell you that is my battleground all the way along. The devil is so cruel, using the very discipline of God meant to bring us into His greater fullness, using those trials as accusations against God, and making us feel that because of this situation and circumstance, this trial, this difficulty, this thing that is so hard, the Lord is not with us. Don't you listen to that lie! You will be absolutely worsted, ruled out of all the conflict and the possession if you take on that lie of the devil.

The presence of the Lord is the battleground. What can we do without His presence? How can we get on without it? What would our meetings be but for His presence? If only we are able to say after our prayer-meetings: "The *Lord* was with us. He was there and we knew His presence." That is life, and that is strength.

Now all that in the Bible, as you see, hung upon this Word of God. He is with us according to His Word, on the basis of His Word and He is only with us as His Word is in our hearts. So the apostle says: "Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16), and that is the presence of the Lord. He stood back at Ai and in the incident in David's life because of the defaulting over His Word. And it is always like that.

The trustee of the Word

The Holy Spirit! You see, He is present as a jealous Trustee of the Word, will and purpose of God. I thank God for that! You are probably thinking: "This is rather oppressive, rather heavy, exacting, demanding and rather hard!" Oh, yes, that is true and right, *but* the Holy Spirit ...! For what has He come? Why is He here? Why is He in us? He is, as I have said, the jealous custodian of the Word of God. He is very watchful. He is referred to as the "seven Spirits of God" (Revelation 3:1), which means complete spiritual knowledge, discernment and perception. If I may put it in this way, the Holy Spirit is here in trust with the will of God, in trust with the purpose of God, and, therefore, in trust with the Word of God, for these things all go together. The

known presence of the Holy Spirit, and the working of the energy of the Holy Spirit are all in this connection — to bring us, by way of the Word of God, to the end to which we have been called. The Word of God is the ground of the Holy Spirit's activity. You see that illustrated here in the Old Testament. The Spirit of God is in charge. He is the Captain of the hosts of the Lord. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit has come to dwell within in order to keep us on the line of the Word of God, and if we are sensitive to Him, without perhaps knowing the particular Scripture that applies, we shall know that something is not right. We are just out of adjustment with the Lord. There is something that does not say: "That is right and good and proper." There is a sort of pause in us. The Holy Spirit knows why that is, and if we will seek the Lord about it and turn to His Word, He will just put His finger on something; and we say: "Why, that has been there all the time, but here my situation just contradicts it." So we are tested by the Word as to the heart, and the Holy Spirit has come for that. It is the ground for His working.

Let me say to young Christians, out of a long experience, that, although you may not understand a great deal of the Bible, and you may not seem to enjoy it, *read* it! Even if it is labour, read it, work at it, get down to it. You know, you have a tape recorder inside you! We have a lot of tapes in the office of messages spread over many years. Sometimes one is asked for and we look it out, and just occasionally I want to hear a bit of it. Then I say: "Did I say that? Oh, yes, it is coming back to me now from somewhere far away. Yes, I did say it." Have you tried to remember something, someone's name, some person or some particular thing, but it has gone? "What *was* that person's name? When was it that *that* happened? Where was it? Oh, I give it up!" Do you? If you understand anything about psychology, you won't give it up. When it happens with me my folk say: "He has gone away!" I cannot let go of that thing until I have remembered it! I am not looking anywhere for it, but I set my mind to recover it, and then the point comes where I feel utterly defeated. But I have learned something, and I let go. Later on, the thing just comes floating into my mind. Where has it come from? My tape recorder, speaking back after perhaps many years. Have you had that experience?

The Word of God is like that. I am so glad that in my early christian life I set myself to a systematic study of the Bible, book by book. I did not understand it all, indeed, there are many things today that I do not understand, but in those days I could often have closed the book because it did not seem to mean anything. But I worked at it: I analysed the books without spiritual understanding, but I worked — and am I not glad today! If I have any spiritual ministry today it is the Holy Spirit working upon what is there. The Word is there, and the Spirit works upon it. In times of need it becomes more than the Word — it becomes the life.

Young Christians, do not give up the Bible because it is difficult. Work at it, and the time will come when you will say: “Thank God for that hard labour over the Bible!” One of the greatest, if not the greatest, Bible expositors of this last century said to me once: “Sometimes it is such a weariness in my work with the Bible that I almost wish there was no Bible there!” Well, he laboured at it, but the fruit of his ministry is all over the world.

The Spirit works upon the Word. Give Him His ground. It is the ground of spiritual progress by the Holy Spirit. There may be an unconscious control of the Word in the sense that you may not know exactly what a Scripture is, but you know there is something that has got hold of you. That is the Spirit working. The thing is written inside you by the Spirit. The new covenant is written upon the heart.

That is the beginning; but what does this mean after all? It may still seem objective to you, just things said, but spiritual progress in the will of God unto the full purpose of God in our calling means that demands will not be made without a very meticulous observance of what is in the Bible.

Why this word today? Oh, it is born out of a tremendous amount of exercise over recent years! Why the weakness of Christianity today? Why the weakness of so many Christians? Why the slowness of their spiritual progress? Why the failure of so many? I put my finger upon a large number of things that are here in the Word of God, as clearly to be seen as anything can be, and I look at those Christians and find that in their behaviour, in their appearance, in their conduct and way of going on,

in their relationships, there is just as clear and definite a contradiction of what is here in the Bible as anything could be. The Bible has something to say about anything that you can think of. If I mentioned some of the things that the Bible speaks of, you would be surprised: "The Bible says something about *that*?" Yes, it does! What is the meaning of the tragedy of so many marriages? That is a practical point! Then you go back and ask: "Why did the marriage take place at all? On what ground? A fascination? An infatuation? An emotion? An impulse? A desire to be married anyhow?" It is a tragedy, because that marriage was not based upon a real spiritual relatedness. The first thing was not given its place, because there were other interests. The Word says precisely: "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Are you going to make spiritual progress if you violate that? No! There will certainly be tragedy sooner or later. I take that as an example, but I could mention many other things that I am seeing in Christianity today.

I am trying to be faithful with you young Christians, because I am deeply concerned for you that you do not miss God's best, God's fullest, and so I say that that depends upon your having the Word of God in you, so that the Holy Spirit can touch something and say: "Now, what about this?" I want to be serious about this matter, because it is a pressing issue in Christianity today. The Christianity that is being produced now is a terrible caricature of Christ. Young Christians, having God's fullest and best depends upon your being serious about the Word of God.

There is the other side, of course, and what a blessed thing it is to feel that there is no impediment, no restraint with the Lord, that there is a clear way, and that the presence of the Lord is very real! Heaven is opened! I know of nothing more blessed in all life than those times when there is no cloud between the Lord and myself, and His presence is so real and so wonderful. I wish it were always like that! We sing the hymn:

"These were but seasons, beautiful and rare;
Abide with me, and they shall ever be."

That is the wrong way of putting it! It should be:

"Let me abide with Thee, and they shall ever be."

Deviations bring a cloud, but there is nothing more precious in all human history than this joy of the Lord, this peace of God, this sense that the Lord is for you, not against you. You have days, hours, weeks of spiritual ecstasy, and so it is worth it to be obedient and let the Lord's Word rule in your heart, as the Scripture says.

When the Lord Jesus was dealing with the devil in the wilderness, He was dealing with an evil person, but He was dealing with very much more than that — He was dealing with the whole issue of life and death. The devil was trying to get Him, coerce Him, tempt Him, constrain Him, compel Him to take a way which was out of the will of God and would mean premature death, a death which would be death and not victory. The Lord

Jesus was dealing with this whole issue of life and death, so underline and encircle the word: "It is *written*: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Put that in the positive way, ruling out the negative clause: "Man shall *live* by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God" — and that is God's thought.

Suffer this personal word: I was very near to despair a little while ago, especially in the realm of ministry. I went to the Lord, and He turned me to a Scripture which hit me like a sledgehammer: "Preach the word, be instant in season (that is very easy!), out of season (when everything says: 'This is not the time'), but preach to reprove, rebuke, exhort" — and here we are!

If you have had too much reproof, too much rebuke, I exhort you: Give the Word its place. The Holy Spirit will do the rest and you will go on the way with unimpeded progress.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LAW OF RENUNCIATION

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5-11).

“Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:8,9).

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb. 11:24-26).

In this message we shall be occupied with the realization of the Lord’s full will, unto which He has called us. We have already considered that great law of realization and fulfilment, the law of the government of the Word of God. We were able only just to touch the very fringe of that matter, and I can only trust

that it at least introduced you to a new consideration, and that, because of that emphasis, you will have a much closer and more devoted regard for the Word of God in every matter of your life. All those who have been of service to the Lord to others have been people of the Word, and not just of the letter of the Word, but of heart relationship with the Word of God. All who have in any way fulfilled the function of spiritual leadership, like Joshua, have, as we saw, been based so strongly and utterly upon the Word of God. It has been like that all the way through, but the greatest Servant of all, the Lord Jesus, was meticulously careful that in everything He moved according to the Word. The Scriptures had such a place in His whole life, conduct, teaching and work, that He became known as “the Word of God”. The Word is not only something written in a book. It has to become personal, personified in life, in character, and in every way if we are going to be of use to others, to be able to fulfil any responsibility at all like those men in the beginning of the church in Jerusalem and in Antioch, who were men who waited on God for His Word. They did not organize the church, nor did they decide upon programmes, plans and schemes. They never introduced anything until they had waited upon the Lord for His Word about it, asking: “Is this according to what is revealed?” That is the only way of the growth of the church and its building up.

Well, as you see, that opens a very large door, but we are not going any further with that matter. I just re-emphasize that a binding law of spiritual progress in the individual life, in the church life, local and universal, is the absolute government of the Word of God, to the law and to the testimony. If it is not according thereto, then there will be a hidden peril in it.

So we go on now to another law of this progress in the will of God unto its ultimate realization. We must remember that we are called unto this. It is inherent in our calling, and not something extra to the christian life, nor something optional in the christian life. It is fundamental, intrinsic, in the christian life. So is what we are going to say now about another law of the will and purpose of God in our calling, and it is what is presented to us in the Scriptures which we selected for this purpose out of many others and what I am going to call “the law of renuncia-

tion”.

The great renunciation

In Philippians 2 the Lord Jesus is presented to us in terms of the great renunciation. He was equal with God, but, as the margin says, He regarded that not as something to be grasped, or held on to, tenaciously gripped, but He “emptied himself”. He made the great renunciation in heaven.

The apostle Paul has caught that mind, which he exhorts Christians to have. He has seen the point! It came to him in the great encounter with the Lord at the beginning of his christian life. He saw, and then all the other things, however great they were — and they were many and they were great, as he tells us in that Letter to the Philippians — lost their grip on him, because something else had a grip on him, and he says that he made the great renunciation, perhaps not in the same dimension as the Lord Jesus, but for him it was everything, as it was for the Lord. Our everything may not be as great as was the Lord’s everything, but if it is everything, well, that is full and final. Paul says that he counted all these things, this catalogue of advantages which were his by birth, by upbringing, by training and by acquirement, as refuse. He renounced them all. And by the great renunciation of his Master and of himself the church has benefited through all these generations — and that is the point we have to come to before long.

Then we read of Moses, though we could have mentioned many others in that chapter 11 of Hebrews. We picked out Moses, who renounced all that he had in Egypt, the learning of the Egyptians, the court of Pharaoh, and all the advantages that were there. He made the great renunciation. Why? Again, because of the people of God.

The distortion of good into evil

That is the point, but before we come to its application, let me remind you that one of the clear marks and traces of the devil and his handiwork is the distortion of good into evil, of good things made into bad things. Satan *creates* nothing, for he is not

a creator, but he attempts to turn what has been made for good into bad. Hence you have a whole list of paradoxes in the Bible, and it is fascinating to follow them through, but I am not going to do so. I will just give you a hint. There is a whole list of paradoxes, of seeming contradictions, and they are in this realm of good things in divine intention turned into bad things.

Take the matter of ambition. Ambition indeed is the parent of many evils. Look at what ambition in the world leads to! There are so many ambitious men and women who, to realize their ambition, will tread upon all principles and will ride roughshod over all sensibilities. Ambition is a driving force to get, to be, to master, to dominate, to rule, and have we not in our lifetime seen something of that? My, these ambitious people whose names we could mention, who have thrown the world into the most distressing and awful state! Literally multitudes have been murdered for one man's ambition! We need not dwell upon it, but that is what ambition can be, and it has come into the church of God. Men, as Peter calls it, "lording it" over God's heritage, wanting to be something in the church, and to have power. They are just fulfilling some secret ambition, and perhaps do not mean it or realize it, but others do.

Well, here is something that is evil, *but* God created ambition! It is a divine thing. Our translations do not help us too much in this, but Paul said: "We make it *our ambition* ... to be well-pleasing unto Him" (2 Cor. 5:9 — R.V. margin). Paul, you have redeemed a bad word! You have salvaged something that has gone astray, that the devil has captured and turned to his own use, for it was ambition in Satan before his fall that led to that fall, and he, like a serpent, has injected that poison into human nature. Surely we should keep that word "ambition" out of the sacred language? No! It is something divine.

We could go on with a whole lot of paradoxes and contradictions like that. Paul gave us a list in one place: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10). Those are paradoxes, are they not?

Here, in this very chapter, Philippians 2, and in this very consideration of the great renunciation, we are in the presence of one of these things which have been distorted. Satan has taken

hold of something that God created and put into man and into His universe. What is it? The desire to acquire, to possess, to have. It is not wrong in itself to have, to acquire, to possess. Do you not have many battles over this very matter, whether you ought to have this, and whether it is right to possess that? In your very nature there are the traces of this divine thing, this acquisitiveness. Yes, God put that in. The Bible is full of it. We were looking at Israel earlier, and what a lot the Lord said to them about “having”! “I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey, and this is for you to *have*. I mean you to have it, to be a wealthy people. It is all for you. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon I have given to you.”

Over against that there is the great renunciation. Is that a contradiction? Renunciation is a law of having — the Lord Jesus let go, and He was given. He renounced, and was endowed with all the fulness of heaven.

Satan, then, uses this divine thing, twists something which is of God and is quite right in its own nature, and gives it this distortion to make it an evil thing, so that in this world now we have this terrible assertiveness, this wanting to get control, to possess, to have.

What is it for?

The answer to that question is the answer to the paradox. What do you want it for? And, you see, it is just there that the enemy has done his work by introducing the selfhood power, this drawing to self, having for self, holding for self, prizing it for self. So when we read: "He emptied *himself*", there is the whole story of redemption in the emptying of self, and of the wonderful issue in this universe along the line of the redemption — what man is going to have by God's gift and what we may have now by His gift in a spiritual way. Every blessing of the spirit in the heavenlies in Christ and the fulness into which we are called in the will of God comes along the line of the conversion of self, this turning round from self to God.

Now please do not let that principle work wrongly! This is where Peter slipped up, because he was not converted at the time. I know I am going to be challenged on this, for I have been, but there is a real sense in which Peter was not converted until the day of Pentecost. We will not argue that out, and you can say what you like about it, but when the Lord came with the basin of water and the towel to Peter in order to wash his feet, Peter said: "Thou shalt never wash my feet!" Then the Lord said: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8). "Oh, well", said Peter, "I want the part." Do you see the point? In a very few hours after that it was proved that it was really Peter who was in view, who wanted all that he could get, even of divine things. And when I say that you will get a great fulness if only you will learn the lesson of renunciation, be careful as to your ambition for fulness! *Who is it for? What is it for?* Is it for self, or is it for the Lord?

God's vindication in the creation of man

The principle lying behind Philippians 2 is just this: The Lord Jesus let go of all that He had of heavenly glory and equality with God, not for Himself, for it was His already and there was nothing whatever that He need do to enhance His own position and rights, but for the vindication of God in the creation of man. God created man and took a tremendous responsibility in

doing so. Have you not often felt bad about this? Oh, some of your natures are better than mine, but sometimes I have been tempted to think: "Was God justified in creating man, collectively as he is today?" I think of the history of man, and, really, it hardly bears thinking about! But God did it. He took the risk and the responsibility of making you and making me. I have to turn that back on the Lord sometimes and say: "Lord, You made me! You gave me a being! It was by Your law that I came into being! It was Your responsibility!" That is helpful sometimes, but we will leave it.

God had got to be vindicated in His creative responsibility, and, therefore, He had to save this man that He had made. Further, He had to be glorified in this man, and there is no salvation and no glorification while man is a selfish creature. Selfishness spoils everything and robs of all glory everywhere. Therefore that deep thing had to be touched and dealt with, not theoretically, not doctrinally, not theologically, but actually, and there is no way of dealing with anything *actually* except by taking it and destroying it in your own person and work, and being the opposite yourself by a mighty, deep work of God. So the motive that led the Lord Jesus to the great renunciation, the letting go, was the vindication of God, the justification of creation and the making possible of man coming to that glory in fellowship with the Father in heaven for ever. It was outward, first for His Father's vindication, and secondly for man's redemption from that twist that the devil had brought in and by which so much mischief had been made. It was your salvation and mine from some *thing* that the devil had planted in the race which was a contradiction to what God meant. All that was outward, and not for the Lord Jesus Himself.

Now read His life again. All that is included in this description in Philippians 2: "He emptied Himself ... He humbled Himself ... He took the form of a bonds slave ... He was found in fashion as a man ... He became obedient unto death" — and the most shameful and ignominious form of death that the world has ever known! It has always been known that crucifixion is the worst form of death possible. But He went right down to that! That is letting go of self and all self-interest, is it not? That is renunciation! And all that was for the Father first, and was why

He was always speaking on this earth of “My Father ... My Father”. It was for the vindication of the Father, and for the redemption of man unto glory, the transformation and transfiguration of humanity.

Our renunciation

Dear friends, you and I are in the way of this. Have you not noticed that the Lord’s dealings with us when He gets us in hand, when He really does get a purchase upon us, are along this line? Again and again in the course of our christian experience we come up against a situation where it is: “Are we going to hold on or let go?” Are we going to let go? Can we let go? Can we really renounce? We are stuck until that is settled! We just cannot get past it. It may be an incident in our life, or it may be what we might call a small thing in comparison with other things, but there it is. “Must I let go? Shall I keep hold? Shall I get this bone between my teeth and worry it to death, and not let it go?” I must repeat: there is no way on until that thing is settled.

Have you not, on the other hand, experienced what it means when at last, having sought the grace of God, you let go and say to Him: “All right, Lord, my hands are off. I am resigning.” Be careful about becoming resigned to your fate! That is not the will of God. There must not be a negative or passive attitude, but a positive one: “Lord, if this is what You want, You have it, and I believe You have a purpose in bringing me to this position of letting go, of renouncing.” When we get there something breaks in, and all that we had been wanting we get! It is strange that it works like that, but what about Abraham and Isaac? Could Abraham not have held on? Could he not have argued with God? Could he not have supported his tenacity about Isaac by reminding the Lord of what He had said? Oh, yes, he could have built up a tremendous argument against offering Isaac, but he came to the point of the great renunciation. He let go to God, and what did he get? He not only got Isaac back, but he got a nation! “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). It was from inward to outward.

You see the range, the tremendous potential of renuncia-

tion? We have picked Moses out from all those mentioned in Hebrews 11, and he could have argued with the Lord on the ground of sovereignty: “Well, Lord, Your sovereignty ordered that when all the babes were being slaughtered I was spared, and that girl of Pharaoh’s came along that day. It was in Your sovereignty that I was rescued and taken right *into* the palace and brought up in Pharaoh’s house, educated according to the wisdom of the Egyptians. Your sovereignty was in this!” But the point was — he left it all, and it was a big “all”. He renounced it all. Why? Because he had become converted, not in the New Testament sense, perhaps, but converted. He turned round, inward, to people. His race, the people of God, were, as we know, on his heart: “... preferring rather to endure ill-treatment along with the people of God” (Weymouth) — and there you have his motive: the people of God. “What *I* may lose does not matter so long as the people of God get the benefit and the blessing.”

Do you see the point? Christ was repeating Himself in these men’s lives on the one principle of renunciation; and because He, the Son of God, made the great renunciation, “*wherefore*” — and what a “wherefore”! — “God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on the earth” — and here is a peculiarity — “and things under the earth”. You know, things like that are said quite often in the Bible, but the third dimension, “things under the earth”, is left out on other occasions when the heavens and the earth are mentioned. I will leave that for you to think about! But in *this* case the underworld is also going to bow to Him! His renunciation means that the full dimensions of the universe are affected. What a range is affected by the ability to let go unto God!

I think I hardly need say more than that. To let go is one of the most difficult things that you and I have to learn! The Lord Jesus was “meek and lowly in heart”, and meekness is just selflessness, the outward aspect of life. Not having things for ourselves, but thinking how much others can gain if we have to lose them, and if by *our* loss the Father can gain what He ought to have and the people whom He has created may be benefited.

The law of enlargement

That is the law of enlargement. You noticed that I stopped short in the reading from Hebrews 11 about Moses at a certain point, because I am always afraid of this wretched self-interest of ours! It is always there, and ready to pounce upon anything. I did not read: "He looked unto the recompense of reward." The Lord has promised enlargement along the line of renunciation and loss, but we should not be motivated by reward, should we? No servant of the Lord should be motivated by what he is going to get out of his service. "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants." Nevertheless, we can put a right and proper emphasis upon it because of where we started. Are you following the train of thought? It is God's will for you, for me, for mankind, to be enlarged with all His fulness, to have *all* that He can give, but not selfishly, not for our own use, but for His glory, His vindication; and if you and I get to glory and He is able to give us then of His fulness, endow us with heavenly riches, I am quite sure that we will have found in the discipline of renunciation the right ground upon which to be rewarded. You see, anyone who has really been through this, has been right in that deep and desperate reality of facing the loss of some *thing*, some possession, something which meant very much to them, indeed, it might be everything to them, might have made or marred their lives, for they have been faced with the question of willingness to let go unto the Lord. It has meant devastation to selfhood, to ambition, but when that devastation has taken place and we come out on the other side, it is all right. There is no battle now, for it is done, and then the Lord has His ground for rewarding, for giving. It is safe for Him to do it.

I wonder how many of you, especially you servants of the Lord, whoever you are, have sometimes said to the Lord: "Lord, can You trust me with this? Can You trust me with that blessing? Can you really trust me to do this for You? I know my own heart. I know its pride, its acquisitiveness, its love of place, position, influence, and so on, and I am afraid that if You do bless, I may, quite subtly, take some gratification to myself. Can You trust me?"

The Lord is working to get us to the place, dear friends, where He can trust us with eternal, heavenly responsibility, and He knows when that deep, evil thing in our nature has been dealt with by the discipline of renunciation. It is very true to spiritual life, is it not?

There are so many tensions! Are we not suffering in this life from nervous tensions and strains? Yes! But what is many a nervous break-down and a lot of this wrong kind of intensity that does us so much harm, nervously and physically, due to? Not getting what we want! We are not having what we have set our heart upon! God is not giving it to us, or doing it for us, and so we get into this state of tension, strain, in life. Life becomes a strain, and even the christian life becomes a terrible strain. If you do not know anything about that you are a very fortunate person, but it is true for us all. We meet people everywhere who are under strain. You can see it in their faces. And what is the matter? They have not learnt to let go to God. We know, by experiences that we have had, that when we have come to the place where we let go to the Lord (and I am very particular about saying "letting go to the Lord!"), a wonderful calm comes, wonderful rest and wonderful peace. The battle is over and the strain has gone. That is very true.

The great renunciation made by the Lord Jesus was that He identified Himself with fallen man. Temptation has no meaning at all if there is not something to work upon, and so when the devil came to Him in the wilderness and offered Him the kingdoms of the world, it was no temptation if He had no heart for the kingdoms of the world and could say: "You can have them. I am not interested in them. The kingdoms of the world do not matter to me at all." There would be no temptation, would there? But if the kingdoms of this world were the very object for which He had come, there is a temptation, and a subtle one, appealing to the soul life. The Son of Man became identified with man, knowing quite well the temptations of man and man's natural ambition. He was tempted in *all* points as we are, sin apart, but He conquered. How? Not by saying: "I am not a bit interested in that. That is no temptation to Me!" But by saying: "I am going to have the kingdoms of this world, but not at your hands, Satan! Not by your gift, and not along your line. I am going to the

cross, and there I will destroy you and get the kingdoms on a proper ground.” So He came in the likeness of man, knowing man’s temptations, without the sinful nature, yet with a human soul which can have ambition for itself or for God. In that temptation, then, it was the Father and every word that the Father had spoken which came first. The battleground was: “Not for Me, but for the Father and for others.”

I wonder if you have followed me? I think we are touching things that are very real in the spiritual life! This whole matter of the Lord’s identification with us was in order to save us, and to save us from our selfhood, our self-towardness, by conversion, turning Godward. The life of a Christian, then, is simply the life which is for God. We are tested on that so often, and when we get through we come to rest, to peace, to quietness. The battle is over — until the next time! But that is the way we grow. The next time will be more severe, I am sorry to say, but when you go into it you have learnt something. You do not go into the more severe without the knowledge of what it means, and you are able to say: “Oh, well, I had something like this before, and I have learned how to get through by the grace of God. This is a bit more difficult, but it is the same principle. I am not going to fight for my own way, nor for my own interests. I am not going to exercise this bulldog disposition of mine to get hold of this and not let go, but I am going to be ready to put it on the altar for God.” The solution comes that way. It is the law of renunciation in progress toward divine fulness.

The Lord give us understanding and help from His Word!