

Apostolic Realities: The Principalities and Powers

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Table of Contents:

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Table of Contents:

Introduction

The Fall

The Cosmic Setting

The Clash of Two Wisdoms

The Cosmic Struggle

The World as System

The Theocratic Context

The Final Defeat

The Power of the Cross

The Meaning of the Cross

The Provision of God in Community

The Manifold Wisdom of God

The Overcoming of the Saints

The Davidic Kingdom

The School of Obedience

Introduction

The theme of the principalities and the powers of the air is foundational to all true seeing. The remarkable thing, though, is that it has to do with something totally invisible. There is a whole realm of invisible, angelic 'spirit-entities' who have a profound influence over the conduct and course of individuals and nations. This topic is both difficult and complex in every way. It is difficult because it is unfamiliar to us and complex because it is strenuously opposed by the same powers of darkness.

It is extraordinary how naive, ignorant and indifferent the church is toward the powers of darkness, despite the fact that this theme is absolutely foundational to the whole calling of the church! It is a perspective that pertains to the whole of reality and of what God is about. The church has characteristically majored in the minors and has ignored this major theme. All of our activity, therefore, is condemned to a certain kind of futility and fruitlessness. We dissipate our energy away and walk on a horizontal level and in an earthly way. Paul reminds us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:12)

This struggle or wrestling is something that is to be entered into by the corporate activity of believers together in Christ. It is '*our struggle*.' Who are these principalities and powers and the world forces of this darkness in the heavenly places? There is a whole realm of mystery here. The heavenlies that are referred to are not the ones that describe God's dwelling place. There is a certain order of beings in the very atmosphere who brood over the earth, namely, the rulers or powers of the air. They are the rulers of this present world darkness. They preside in a kind of layer over the earth, and yet influence the conduct of men and the things that take place in the earth.

In this verse there are five references to the word, '*against*.' We need to know that there is a war on, and that it has been on for thousands of years. It is a cosmic conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of God. If we think that the subject of demons is only the issue of personal deliverance, then we have completely missed the greater importance. These principalities and powers would like for us to be totally caught up at that level of individual demon deliverance as if that represents the whole issue. I am not invalidating deliverance for individuals, but it has fixed the understanding of the church at that level and robbed it of the greater and truer understanding of the conflict, namely, the contention for the actual dominion or possession of creation and the nations. It may well be that the stratagem of these powers is to get us to be occupied at the level of personal deliverance rather than to be occupied with combat in the cosmic sense. There is a final defeat that needs to be inflicted upon them which can only come by virtue of the church being the church.

If we want to understand the faith and the church, then we must understand it in the context of the conflict with the principalities and powers, or we simply do not understand it at all. If the church has not recognized the presence over their community of this invisible realm of spirit reality and has not addressed that realm and broken its influence over the community where we seek to labor, then they labor in vain. There is an episode in Daniel's life where he prayed, yet it took three weeks for him to receive an answer. When the angel of the Lord came to Daniel, he told him that from the moment he, Daniel, opened his mouth he was heard, but that the prince of Persia had contended and delayed his coming. So we are not talking about something imaginary, but something very real. Though it is an invisible realm, it has very practical consequences in the earth and with men.

As mentioned, this requires the church to be the church. If the church is only an institution where people come to attend services and sit in a kind of audience of isolated individuals, then it is not equipped for this struggle. This struggle requires the church to be the church in the sense that God intended it not what we have made it. Unless the church is a "we", then it cannot engage in this struggle, and that is why the principalities and powers will do anything to divide the church and divide individuals. They want to keep the church from becoming the corporate expression of the Life of God that can wrestle. We ourselves need to understand that and give ourselves to seeing that the church comes to this kind of reality. It is contrary to our own flesh because it requires time. It will mean the loss of privacy and the opening of ourselves to things that might be embarrassing. We prefer the church in its present configuration. We like to be anonymous and see someone else 'do it,' and yet say our "Amen" and "Hallelujah." We do not want to be required of. If we are going to be the church that brings glory to His name and defeats to the principalities and powers, then we ourselves must struggle against our own flesh and against our own unwillingness.

This is an apostolic view of the church as God intended it from the beginning. '*Apostolic*' is a certain view of reality, a certain mind-set, a perception of things, particularly of the things that are not seen and are invisible. It is a view of the church set in a cosmic context that sees a struggle that has gone on since the beginning of time. There was a rebellion in heaven and one third of the angelic host followed their prince and rebelled against God. That rebellion continues until this day. All things were created by God. Even these principalities and powers are an angelic creation, a 'spirit order' that was given initially by God for His own purposes. They have rebelled, however, against their Creator and have therefore become a fallen angelic order.

The Fall

We have not sufficiently understood the meaning of the Fall. It was not only Adam and Eve, but very creation itself that was affected by the Fall. The Fall was the most significant tragedy, the greatest collapse and the greatest catastrophe in the history of creation and of man. For that Fall brought the entire creation into corruption, including the angelic realm. These fallen angels, under the leadership of Satan, still maintain their governmental places. They were designed and created in the realm over the earth to aid and abet the redemptive work of God in the earth by bringing a certain kind of order through their influence. It was to be a benign influence in accordance with the purposes of God, that men would have an atmosphere hospitable to finding God, to knowing Him and to coming into His salvation. Though they were intended as a benign influence in the aiding of God in His purposes, they have, in their rebellion against the purposes of their Creator, now taken unto themselves their own purposes. Their ruler Satan seeks to be deified and to turn the loyalties and attention of men unto himself and to establish his own values contrary to God's, and thus turn men away from God. They have taken their governmental place and used it for themselves to become the gods of this world.

We can see it, for example, in race and in nation. God created races and nations, but not to become idolatries as things in themselves. This was clearly revealed in the Nazi time when the nation Germany became elevated above God. There were principalities and powers playing upon nationality to bring the worship and attention of men to themselves. The very German theologians, who would not consider this subject, had to experience these powers in the paganism, the violence and the death that characterized Nazi Germany. When those powers broke through, they turned the loyalties of men to themselves, in the name of race and nation. They established a new order that was a perverse, antichrist distortion.

Someone has wisely said that Germany lost World War II, but the same powers of darkness that precipitated it remain unchallenged still. The Nazi regime was defeated militarily, but the spirit powers, who expressed themselves through that nation to the virtual destruction of the civilized world, prevail still. The same spirits hover over that nation (and all nations) waiting for the conditions again by which they can come and manifest themselves, even to the turning of a nation to the most satanic purposes. We would be foolish and naive to continue in a willful ignorance of these realities.

We have no idea of the influence of the principalities and powers. Nazism took hold, not in some primitive nation, but in the most eminent and prominent civilization of all nations. What is more, it took as little as ten years. They went 'too far' and revealed themselves. They were not satisfied merely to exert their influence invisibly, but took captive the whole organ of state. If we fail to understand what the Nazi phenomenon means, we will continue in an ignorance that for us will be tragic, because that is a

preview of last days' antichrist reality. The things that have been veiled and concealed are being unveiled and revealed in open antagonism against God. We are coming to the final showdown between the principalities and powers, who will be seeking complete domination in the final contest at the end of the age, as to who is going to prevail over this cosmos.

God has created this governmental realm to sustain creation, but the powers' function today in opposition to what was Divinely and originally assigned them. They behave as though they were the ultimate ground and reason for being. They gave to themselves a power beyond God's intention, namely, to be seen as something ultimate. And they have taken the things that God intended as ultimate and made them to be irrelevant, like for example, eternity. They have turned the whole value system the wrong way up. When the apostles came into the world, they turned the world upside-down. They brought back the original and Divine perspective for creation that had been lost, because the whole of creation and nations had come under this demonic order. They were reversing the true values for which God gave the creation.

You say, "Just how influential are these spirit powers?" They were sufficiently influential to crucify Christ:

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:6-8)

Paul is not speaking here of Pontius Pilate, or even the Sanhedrin, but the rulers of this age. They are the principalities and powers of the air, who are invisible and super-terrestrial (beyond the earth), and who operate through worldly and earthly authorities that are ignorant of their influence. They expressed their rule through Pontius Pilate and through the Sanhedrin. In other words, they expressed themselves through the very best of religious and civil government. Roman law and authority was considered to be the epitome of civilized law. Much of present day legal jurisprudence is derived from Roman law. The Roman law and Jewish religion, that is to say, the 'best' of both worlds, conspired together to crucify the Lord of glory. But they themselves were inspired by the rulers of this age. If the powers had understood the wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But they acted out of their own wisdom, and it is a wisdom that employs force, intimidation and threat of death.

The powers are characteristically cynical and unbelieving, profoundly egotistical and vain. Though God says that they will meet defeat, they do not believe it about themselves. They act with a presumption and an arrogance contrary to what God says already is their fate and their destiny.

But you (Satan) said in your heart, *“I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”* (Isaiah 14:13-14)

And God answers,

Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit. (Isaiah 14:15)

That presumption and that arrogance are at the heart of the character of the powers of darkness. The whole fallen angelic realm has the character of Satan himself and will suffer the eternal fate with Satan in the Lake of Fire. They know, but they do not know, so to speak, because had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But it was a hidden wisdom. It was the Lord’s intention. Jesus was slain from the foundations of the world. The Lord already in His marvelous wisdom foresaw and ordained that His Son would come and die, but it was a hidden wisdom that the powers could not see, though they are cunning. We are told to be aware of the wiles of the devil. He is cunning, crafty and very clever. He was once the anointed cherub and angel of light. He has a remarkable brilliance, but it will yet be his undoing, because his character contradicts his gift. That is also the undoing of any of us when our character is not in keeping with our gifting or our calling.

The Cosmic Setting

Even the word 'cosmic' is alien to the consciousness of the church. We do not think in cosmic terms. We think first in personal terms, then local, then national, and maybe with some regard to the world. Cosmic, however, is beyond all of these categories, yet includes them all. It is a cosmic view and I do not even know how to define the word cosmic. It is more than just interplanetary. It is the total setting of the redemptive work of God in creation as described in Ephesians 3:8-12:

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

This is so important in the sight of God that it was not, in His opinion, too extravagant to create all things that this could be performed. We need to understand that. This one thing will revolutionize our entire perspective about God. God has purposes unto Himself that have absolutely nothing to do with the benefits we receive as being the church, or that will even be experienced in the world. There is nothing here about what will happen that will benefit the world. It is solely and exclusively something that satisfies the heart of God. Moreover, it is so important, that He created all things in order that now this thing might be performed through the church.

In other words, the whole of creation in God's sight was to make possible the church. This is turning everything upside-down. The world thinks that it was created for itself. It thinks that it can have its great cities, its commerce, its trade, its culture and all of the things that men celebrate. The world sees the church as a 'Sunday thing' that society is willing to allow to exist, as long as it does not bother mankind and the things that are important to them. This is contrary to what God says. The church itself does not see this, but rather sees the church as established to provide men with certain blessings by meeting their needs. That is a grotesque distortion and is not the purpose for which God has established the church. Church is not something that panders to men. It is not something institutional that has been established to requite the interests of men by establishing programs and services. The church at large, even in its best forms, has regrettably come to that pitiful condition exactly for the absence of the knowledge of the eternal purpose of God for the church. In fact, until we identify with the eternal purpose of God and look to the fulfilling of it, we never will meet the needs of men. Once we see this, then we begin to realize that our jobs and careers are all secondary, the merest provisions from God, in order to keep body and soul together.

Why is the church so itchy and always wanting to find something to do? Why must it always have a program? It needs to justify its existence precisely because it does not see its existence in any other terms but in responding and meeting the things that are immediate and about them. It has not seen what would have given it its security and foundation in God, namely, the taking up of the eternal purpose. It would have freed it from the necessity and the itch to do and to perform.

I cannot say enough to register this upon our spirits. If this does not find a place in our hearts and our understanding, then we are crippled in our service for God as well as our knowledge of God. We need to understand the cosmic context of the entire faith itself. We need to understand that there is a drama of a moral and cosmic kind that has had its inception from the beginning and that is moving toward its conclusion. The final thing is to be fulfilled by the church itself.

Since the church does not float in the air, but rather has its being on the earth, God created the earth in order that through the church a certain demonstration could be made. In other words, our whole view of creation has got to be related to our whole view of redemption. God did not create all things in order that we could enjoy the benefits of the earth, although it has been given to be enjoyed. His purpose is that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be demonstrated to the principalities and the powers of the air.

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the eternal purpose of God for creation and for the church. The church that chooses to be ignorant of the eternal purpose of God and does not give itself to that purpose as the first and foremost purpose for its being, is, by that selfsame thing, not the church. The church that is indifferent to the eternal purpose of God, let it be however impressive in every other way, is not the church in any apostolic and prophetic sense, which is to say, in any authentic sense. In order to be the church that is the church in truth, we must embrace the eternal purpose of God, even though we do not see any practical consequence for doing so. It does not in any way serve our purposes. It does not aid mankind. It does not seem to alleviate any present ill in the world. It is altogether a mystery of a demonstration to the principalities and powers of the air. The church that is willing to do this demonstrates thereby the manifold wisdom of God. That is the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of this world is predicated upon a self-interest and practicality that says, "What is the benefit for me if I do this? What is in it for me?" But the wisdom of God is altogether sacrificial. It does not rest on the benefit that one receives. It rests on the benefit that God receives. There is no benefit for us, but rather the likelihood of embracing suffering in order that He receives His fulfillment. That is so contrary in every point and particular to the ruling mentality of this world. The wisdom of this world says,

“Take care of number one. See to your own self-interest. Be concerned for your own security. You have only got this one life.”

There is such a power of self-interest, even in spiritual things, that needs to be broken. The principal thing that God gives to break the orbit of self-centeredness is the subject of the eternal purposes of God. We are out of whack and warped until eternity has come into our hearts and into our consideration for His sake. We will be doomed to a spiritual egotism and a viewing of things in a way that only affects us. That power can only be broken by embracing a purpose greater than us and other than us namely, the eternal purpose of God. And what do the powers of darkness say? “That is nonsense. You cannot do that. That is irrational and contradictory. Nature itself tells you that self-interest and survival are the very principles of life. It is a self-evident truth. You got it in the Declaration of Independence with its pursuit of happiness as being a self-evident truth and an inalienable right: your happiness, now, in this life; that is what it is about.” That is the wisdom of this world. God is waiting, however, for another wisdom to be demonstrated, and everything in the flesh, the world and the devil conspires against it.

There is an eternal purpose that has to do with God’s own satisfaction and nothing to do with our own. God says that a people who will willingly embrace a purpose unto themselves that has not to do with their own benefit, and make it their first purpose for being, is the wisdom of God. For that was the wisdom demonstrated at the Cross! It was the giving up for another of anything that pertains to one’s own life and satisfaction. In other words, the ability to lay down one’s life and not to consider that one’s life is dear to oneself is the wisdom of God. It is a wisdom predicated on weakness and foolishness. One wisdom lives for itself, its own preservation and its own advantages, while God’s wisdom lives for another. It is selfless. It is the wisdom of the Son of God, who never initiated anything in Himself and for Himself, but lived entirely for the gratification of His Father.

The principalities and powers make men respond to their own self-interest. This can be just as prevalent in the ministerial world. Ministers attend Bible School so that they can be credentialed, thereby establishing their ministry. And then they can go from youth leader to associate pastor to one day becoming the senior pastor and so on. It has the underlying and often unconscious presupposition, “What is in it for me?” As long as we ourselves are affected and ruled by self-interest, we have nothing to say to the principalities and powers of the air. The question then is how can we be free from this enormous power of self-interest that seems to be built right into human nature itself? God broke that power at the Cross.

“Come down and we will believe you,” the crowd shouted at Jesus. But He would not. If He had come down, thereby seeking His self-interest and preservation of His life, He would have contradicted the very wisdom of God Himself. Staying on the Cross unto death is an exhibition of another kind of wisdom. Your reason for living is not for

yourself, but for another, namely, God and His glory. It takes a power to be released from self-interest and to live for the glory of God, and that power is in the Cross itself.

The Clash of Two Wisdoms

We need to understand that there are two wisdoms in collision. Even the word '*wisdom*' is slightly confusing here, because we think of wisdom in terms of cleverness and the application of knowledge. A better definition for wisdom would be, 'the moral values of God.' It is what God is in Himself, and therefore it is what the church must demonstrate in itself exactly who and what God is in Himself. This is what Jesus did in His earthly walk. Everything He did was for the purpose of the Father, without regard to Himself, even though it resulted in His own suffering and death. God is waiting for the corporate church to make exactly the same demonstration so that the age might conclude. When we begin to take God and His Word that seriously and realize that this must be fulfilled through the church, then we should also realize that God is calling us to more than the casual conglomeration of saints meeting on Sunday. This requires an earnest, daily relationship and a growing up together.

The moment we as the church say "yes" to this, we become marked in the sight of the principalities and powers, and they will test us in it. We will open ourselves to a new kind of opposition, if not persecution. And it may well be that the believers who intuit this, keep themselves safely from the issue, not wanting to stir up the powers of darkness against them. God allows that opposition, however, because it deepens the quality and the character of the church that overcomes it. This is the cosmic context of the church in the world.

We can 'speak' about fighting spiritual battles or 'doing' spiritual warfare, but when we do not understand the framework, then even that can be false. Even when we think that we are defeating them, they are laughing at us. The demonic statement in Acts, "*Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are you?*" is a haunting indictment that reverberates to this very day. Someone has said, "Do not be concerned about how men view you. You will be far better off to know how the powers of darkness view you. If you are seen by them as one to be feared, you are in a much better place than if men were paying you honor." The powers fear anyone who takes the Word of God, the Lordship of God and His purposes seriously.

We will know how successful we are as the church in proportion to the degree that they recognize our authenticity. It is preposterous to believe that shouting and 'taking cities for Christ's sake' is going to affect anything, as if the issue is how loud we can shout or the use of the correct terminology. The issue is the integrity, the quality and the authenticity of the life together. The powers of the air will be only too glad to allow you to get clever verbally and conceptually. They are only frightened when it becomes real. When they see the authenticity of the crucified life and character, which is to say, the very resurrection Life of God Himself in His own nature, then they flee in terror. They know whom to regard.

If the church itself lives by the wisdom of the world, then it has no effectual opposition to those powers. They are required to recognize only apostolic authenticity, that is to say, they need to see the reality of heaven and the wisdom of God as being the effectual foundation of God's people. This is a fundamental shift of a whole view of life itself, of reality and of value. It is no small thing to come into this. We need, therefore, to burrow deeply into this mystery,

... in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church ... (Eph. 2:10a)

Paul spoke that two thousand years ago, but that now is still reverberating. That same demonstration to the principalities and powers in heavenly places needs yet to be made. It seems to be altogether unrelated to practical things in the world and in time, and that is what the devil would have you to believe, namely, that the things that are eternal are irrelevant now. Exactly the opposite is true. To be eternal-minded is to be relevant in time. God does not put them in separate categories. That is the world's game: 'secular' and 'spiritual', 'time' and 'eternity'. God wants this dimension brought into our present consideration. To embrace the eternal purposes of God in time will change everything now and make us more significant and relevant now.

The Cosmic Struggle

This cosmic struggle involves a mastery for the control and dominion of the whole cosmos. It is a moral struggle for the mastery of the cosmos by two kinds of moral orders: the righteousness, holiness and humility of God versus another kind of wisdom that is diabolically opposed to it in every point and particular. It is the wisdom of God verses the wisdom of Satan.

There is a competition or a striving, a conflict, between who is going to prevail in creation and what wisdom or value system or way of perceiving reality itself is going to prevail. We know that the whole world lies in the power of the wicked one, who is also the father of lies. We need also to realize the degree to which these powers have been successful in deceiving mankind about truth, about reality and about the purposes of life itself. They are enslaving mankind over things that are immediate and visibly before them, but completely shutting out any view of the things that pertain to eternity. The whole world is steeped in a fundamental lie, and even the church itself is unaware of this and subscribes to the lies and the values of a world system, which in the '*Last Days*' will become very prominent as an Antichrist system.

The powers of the air are enslaving and tyrannical. They want to dominate God's creation and mankind. The first mandate to Adam was to take dominion over God's creation. God's rule and God's authority over what He created is very differently expressed than if Satan has his rule. One is domination, which we can even exercise as husbands or perform it as ministers in the church. The other is dominion, which has a very different character and a very different rule. The former expresses the distinctive genius of the character of Satan and the latter the character of God. Both are in collision for the triumphant possession or rule over this creation. That is the cosmic struggle.

The World as System

Scofield defines the word '*world*' as the present world system:

In the sense of the present world system, the ethically bad sense of the word refers to the order or arrangement under which Satan has organized the world of unbelieving mankind upon his cosmic principles of force, greed, selfishness, ambition and pleasure.

It is a system that is antithetical to God in every point and particular. The word 'system' itself suggests something that man out of his own wisdom and mentality has made. Even in the religious world, we are continually tempted to become a system, to systematize something and to bring it under human arrangement.

The world's system is rooted in power, force, threat, intimidation, ambition, lust. That is what moves the world. That is why people work. That is why they go to college. Anyone

who has gone to college knows that it is a whole system by which your life is drained in order to obtain a credential that fits you for a professional employment of a higher compensation. It is a credentializing system, and the principalities and the powers are in the entire system. Only someone who has been in it, and whose spiritual eye has been opened, can see it. The same thing is true in the world of culture, the world of war, the world of government and the world of religion. Wherever there are systems, wherever men are seeking to promote their interests based on greed, power, ambition, seduction and force, it is precisely there that the powers of the air have their influence and have taken those men captive.

Institutions are not just objective organizations summoned by men to provide human need. They have a life of their own, a purpose of their own and a reason for being, that needs to be perpetuated. If you begin to challenge its assumptions and the premises by which it has its being, then you begin to touch the power that exists invisibly behind them. If one touches those vested interests in such a way as to threaten their continuation and authority over men, then you will be persecuted.

Wherever you see an addiction, a craze or something that sweeps nations, for example, certain lines of children's toys where the child must have it, then you know that there are powers operating. Rock and roll, punk rock culture, music and sport can be added to the list. What has happened with sports is unbelievable. It is no longer just a pleasant pastime. It is a powerful, dominating influence for which men will kill their rivals and their opponents if the game does not go their way or the referee makes a wrong call. Hockey is not hockey unless there is a brutal violence on the ice rink.

That system can only be exposed by those who are living completely free of it, that is to say, who are not living under its influence and are not threatened by it. They do not need to have their security established, either physically or socially, by obtaining it in the system. To be out of the system is to be a pilgrim and a sojourner and a stranger in the earth. It is a very painful feeling, because we want the security of approval from those who have authority, prestige, influence and power.

The world as system will, in the last analysis and in order to preserve its interests, resort to violence. On the other hand, the wisdom of God will, in the last analysis, give itself over to being the victim of violence. It will suffer violence against itself, like death at the Cross, rather than to preserve itself by acting in violence or in force. We have got to see a whole world as a system that is enslaving mankind, sending its sons off to wars, killing its children in the womb because of a lust thing that is encouraged through films, etc., and the whole culture of self-indulgence and gratification, and which gives you the convenience of removing the evidence of it. The whole system is predicated on lust, pleasure, ambition and satisfaction, and your whole life is spent in keeping your head above water in the system. The system makes sure that your time and your attention

are completely distracted from God, and that you are giving yourself to the gods of this world, even as Christians.

In fact, how would we describe present day Christianity? Is it willing to be radically other than this world? Or does it want to find a place of acceptance and respect in the world and in its system, and yet be Christian also in a Sunday manner of speaking? That is the kind of Christianity that we believe will persecute the remnant people of God in the last days because of the 'fanatical' absoluteness of their faith that sees and is opposed to the world and its systems. These forces are working now. Everything is coming into place for this final and colossal struggle, and it is not so much the world we need to fear as those who will kill us and claim they are doing God a service. There is something about the religious system that is most threatened by people who take the eternal perspective of God. That is what crucified Christ and made martyrs of the apostles.

In fact, there is no place where the principalities and powers have a more powerful influence than in religious institutions. Climbing up the ladder of religious success, becoming an elder, all the honors and esteem, give open door to the principalities and powers to come in and to find lodging. It so ironic that in the very structures of Christian religion, the principalities and powers have such an enormous place.

From the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast established strength, because of Thine adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease. (Psalm 8:2)

How does God do this? The 'enemy' celebrates pomp, prestige, fame and all of the kinds of things that men admire, and when that comes into our religion, we are finished. Certain men like to wear cellular telephones on their belt. This is not a small thing. We are in a cosmic conflict. It is a step in the wrong direction. It gives an air of prestige, because right away one knows that he has the finances to afford that, and he must be important or else he would not need it. If I know anything about God, His most significant work will be performed through men whom no-one knows. Paul said this about himself, "*Unknown, but well known.*" Unknown to men, but well known to God. The powers of the air also know those who have authority and who have kept themselves from the spirit of the world. They see that those who wear cellular phones in their belt are exhibiting prestige or have ambition, and therefore those men are of no consequence whatsoever to those powers. They share the same wisdom as the powers. God has chosen the foolish and the weak thing. We need to live without the need to possess and to have, and to seek prestige and to be recognized. The guileless and the childlike manifest the wisdom that defeats the powers. The Christianity that becomes prestigious, dignified, acceptable and respectable is apostasy.

The Theocratic Context

The whole struggle is not only for whose values and view of reality is going to prevail, but for who is going to run the show. The underlying, great issue of all is the issue of government, and there is very little comprehension in the church that this is even an issue at all. God is going to establish His theocratic rule (theocracy is the government of God) over creation. If we do not understand that the basic striving and competition is for which system will in fact rule over creation, then we do not understand the context in which the whole drama is being played out.

When we come to talk about Israel, we will see that Israel is not just a subject or an issue in itself, but what makes Israel profoundly important is that it is the key to the establishment of the theocratic rule of God. Ruling and reigning is the principal struggle over creation and Israel is set right in the midst of it. Israel as a nation presently has no consciousness of these things, but the church must be conscious of it or it will not understand why God has got to be so ruthless in His dealings with that nation. He needs to prepare it for its own place in the rule of God, because the theocratic rule must take place with that nation and in its own land:

For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:3b)

This is not poetry, but literal, and the powers of darkness know it better than the church. We need to be clear as to what God's intention is, because it is over that that the principal issue of Israel is going to rage. The powers of darkness want to exterminate that nation whose survival and restoration to their God is the key to the bringing in of the theocratic rule of God.

The issue of the government of God is the foundational principle of the whole of the issue of the faith. The disciples said to Jesus,

"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6b).

It was not a small question, but rather the question. They saw it only in a narrow, nationalistic sense, not recognizing the universal significance of that Kingdom. The time for the restoration of that Kingdom was not for that time. However, as we shall see, the church is God's instrument in bringing Israel into that restored place that releases the Lord and His coming as King and the bringing forth of that government.

We need to begin to think in governmental terms. The word 'government' itself has been polluted and corrupted by men. Human government stinks. Human government is shot through with selfish ambition, with conniving, with scheming, with self-aggrandizement, with padding one's pockets, with privilege, with opportunity. But for that reason we must not 'throw the baby out with the bath water.' We need to restore the word to its pristine and original meaning. The government of God is more than bureaucracy. It has to do

with order, but it has also to do with values, justice, righteousness, equity, peace, mercy, compassion, love. The world governments know nothing of these things. They are predicated on power, advantage and ambition, but the government of God is life-giving. It is sanity and health for all mankind. We need to understand the church in the context of these things or else we will think that the church is just a place where our needs are met and services are conducted. That kind of mentality will not prepare us for anything. It does not move us toward anything, and therefore we do not even understand our own identity as the church in the nations.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel shall be saved... (Rom. 11:25-26a).

My interpretation of these verses is that when the full number needed to replace the fallen angelic order has been obtained from among all nations, then all Israel will be saved. They will then rule and reign in their place from the very same heavenly places, only this time not contrary to the purposes of God, but for the purposes of God. What a difference that will make. Right now, God is being opposed by the very angelic order that He Himself established, and part of the whole cosmic history of what the church is, is the finding and the preparing of a people from among all nations to replace the fallen angels in the heavenly realm. That is why we will need glorified bodies. That is why Jesus said to Nathaniel,

“You are impressed because I saw you sitting under the fig tree! I will show you a greater thing, namely, angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” (paraphrased).

In other words, messengers or glorified saints will be moving back and forth in concert with God and a restored Israel in the outworking of the millennial Kingdom and its theocratic rule, ministering the wisdom of God over the earth. If we can see that, would we not welcome the preparation now? Would you not have a totally different view of what your life means if we knew that it was a preparation for that? Would we not recognize that the foundational purpose for our being is the fitting for the eternal purpose of God?

The Final Defeat

Paul was extremely conscious of this whole invisible spirit-realm, and that we signify certain things in our conduct. For example, women keeping their head covered is a statement to those powers of a submittedness that is important. In fact, we need to be careful not to rail against that whole spirit dimension. The Scriptures read,

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." (Jude v. 9)

I think one of the dangerous things taking place now in the church is the kind of religious egotism that says, "We can put the devil in his place" and, "All we need to do is shout them down." Be careful. Why are we cautioned not to rail against them? It is a very important principle. Though they are a fallen angelic order, they were in the beginning given governmental position to administrate the purposes of God.

We read in Colossians 2:15 that Christ has disarmed the powers of the air:

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Jesus unseated them. He made a public display of them, but the final defeat must come through the church. He disarmed them, but He did not put them out of commission. The powers of darkness still exist and still play a tremendous role in intimidating, threatening and manipulating individuals and nations through fear and insecurity. They say, "If you do not have your place in the system, then what is your security? And how are you going to live? And what if you do not have this insurance? And what if you do not have this or that provision?"

They are disarmed and defeated, which is to say, they have no effectual legal power to continue. They can only victimize the ignorant, the spiritually blind and those who have not understood that these powers have been disarmed and broken at the Cross. Can you now understand why Paul wanted to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified? Something more is at stake than our atonement in the work of Jesus at the Cross. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, bringing back, as it were, the rebellious powers into submission.

If they had known this wisdom, they would not have crucified Christ. Every time the Cross is proclaimed in authenticity and power, their defeat is made more manifest. It is little wonder that we hear so little preaching of the Cross. Every true obedience is a reiteration of the Cross. The power of the Cross is revealed wherever there is an obedience unto suffering and wherever there is a trust in God, rather than a trust in yourself. Wherever the powers of the air see the Cross reiterated, in that place and in that moment they are defeated and set back. It is not only the Cross proclaimed, but the

Cross demonstrated. Every time the Cross is demonstrated, namely, the suffering of it, the death of it in that moment the power of it is released and the powers of the air are required to flee.

Jesus gave Himself without spot by the eternal Spirit of God. It was the kind of sacrifice that was only made possible, even for Him, by the operation of God's own Spirit, who is the eternal Spirit and who is the Spirit of sacrifice. Every time that that sacrifice is made by that Spirit, it is another demonstration of what was expressed at the Cross, which the principalities and powers of the air cannot abide. It is the demonstration of God Himself. It is what God is in Himself. He is by very nature self-sacrifice, and when He is exhibited, the powers of the air are finished, and when He is exhibited through His own Body, the church, then that is the final defeat.

Every time we defer immediate gratification, it is an act on earth that verifies and substantiates that there is a God in Heaven. How else is our 'peculiar' behavior to be understood? Our essential life and conduct has its determinant by an invisible God. Just that alone is contrary to the wisdom of this world. The wellspring of what explains us, and how we act and do, is entirely to be understood on the basis of a God who is unseen, and our conduct is what demonstrates Him, what He is. Otherwise our conduct has no explanation at all, and especially so when our conduct is contrary to our own self-interest, which is the fundamental principle of the wisdom of this world.

"You shall be witnesses unto Me" is not handing out tracts. It is demonstrating this that "I AM God, though invisible, and the truth of Me is exhibited by your obedience in this earth, particularly when it flies in the face of your self-interest and will more likely earn for you discomfort or suffering." That is a witness unto Him that the principalities and powers of the air cannot abide.

It is a response possible only in those who have determined not to hold their lives as dear to themselves. Who else would care that the eternal purposes of God are fulfilled, except those who love Him more than their own lives? Are we more jealous that God should receive His satisfaction than we are for our safety, our security and our pleasure? Are we free from intimidation, even the necessity to impress the saints? We need to lose the necessity to perform, which is the heart of utility. Wherever intimidation is, the powers of darkness are. It is their principal weapon. The way in which they still have influence is through intimidation, playing upon fear and insecurity and the need for acceptance, for fame, for recognition, for prestige and for success the very values which they themselves promote.

The Power of the Cross

There is a power in the Cross and there is a triumph that was won there. It needs to be made manifest in every place through the presence and the proclamation of a believing church, whose very presence is a statement to the principalities and powers that their final vanquishment and defeat is at hand. Where they see this faith, this understanding, this proclamation and the realization of this victory by those themselves who are no longer under fear, manipulation or threat, they are required to recoil, draw back and release their influence over men in that area. We labor in vain if we do not understand this! What is our evangelizing and our Christian programs, but sound and fury signifying nothing, if we have not first wrestled against the principalities and powers of the air and broken their uninterrupted sway over the very areas where we seek to bring the light of God.

So long as we are a people who are fearful for our security, who tremble over the issue of our own finances, who model ourselves after the world and use their techniques for obtaining funds, then we constitute no threat to these powers. Something needs not only to be proclaimed but also to be demonstrated in the very life of the church. We need ourselves to live free from the powers, free from fear, from anxiety, from seduction, from manipulation. How guilty we have been of that, from our own bedrooms to our religious platforms. We calculate things to produce a certain effect and to obtain a certain response. And so long as we are unconscious of this and are moving in the very wisdom of the powers themselves, then we constitute no witness against them. We need to display that we are not only free from fear for our own security, but that we are joyfully free!

If the chief weapon of the powers of darkness is to intimidate men through fear of death and the necessity to survive, then how are they to be defeated by the church? By a church that is not afraid of death. Paul could say, *“O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?”* Well, it is one thing for Paul to say it, but it is another thing for us to say it. Only the sense of our eternal future as being something palpable, tangible and real to us will save us from the fear of death. If eternity is only a category, if it is only a doctrine and not a deep-seated conviction and trust, then we will be afraid.

When Pontius Pilate said to Jesus, *“Do you not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify you?”* And he thought Jesus would just crumble at that statement and plead for His life. Yet Jesus did not even blink an eyelash and replied, *“You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given to you from above.”*

Jesus had an absolute confidence that nothing could terminate His life before the purposes of the Father were fulfilled. We need to have exactly that confidence. When Stephen was being interrogated by the doctors of the law, he did not know that that was

going to be his last confrontation. It would eventuate in his death, but when it came, even with its suddenness, there was no pleading. His face shone and radiated like an angel. It seemed such a tragic waste that his life should be cut short. The Lord took him abruptly, and there was never any sense of misgiving that there was some error being made. He saw rather the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father to receive him, because his earthly purposes were finished. We need to think like that. We need a whole alteration in our thinking. We are not to struggle to lengthen our days or perpetuate our days, but to serve the purposes for which our days are given. When they are concluded, we can look with rejoicing to the fact that we are released from our bodies that we might be present with the Lord. It is God who is the Sovereign Determiner of those things.

It is required of the church to bring the final and conclusive defeat at the end of the age that unseats those powers and removes them from the heavenlies. Israel's restoration and the deliverance of creation are the work of the church. It says that the Lord Himself is contained in the heavens waiting for the restoration of all things spoken of by the prophets since the world began. In another place it says that creation is travailing and groaning, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. The Lord Himself has imposed upon Himself a certain restriction that waits for something to happen outside of Himself and by another.

There are some very real issues before us with which we can no longer afford to play. The manifold wisdom of God that is waiting to be demonstrated beyond the earth and into the very cosmos itself is reserved for one instrument in God's eternal purpose: the church. You can understand that the church has to be more than an institution providing religious services. It is a people who live without fear, a people who are already in the realm of the eternal, who are joyfully freed from the power of mammon and who are walking in the light, righteousness and truth. It is freeing and liberating to be able to walk through supermarkets and malls, and you are not at all seduced. You can look at it, you can touch it, but you can walk through it. It does not have a power to captivate your soul. It does not fasten on your time, your energy and your thoughts because you have a more powerful value, that which is eternal, that touches the glory of God and that frees you from the power of this world.

The Meaning of the Cross

We need to have a view of the atonement in the light of a deeper understanding of the Cross and what was performed there. It is more than the issue of individual or personal sin and forgiveness. The prevailing view of the atonement held today is essentially that the whole work of the Cross was a substitution or a fulfilling of a satisfaction of God for sin by the sacrifice of Jesus. The atonement is understood only on a personal level to remove the guilt of sin, and that is essentially the whole of it. It has nothing to say about the power of sin, but only of sin as personal, individual failing, and that the atonement is, that Christ satisfied some requirement of the Father, thereby expiating the guilt of sin.

The work of the atonement, however, was much more than just the expiation, or the propitiation for the guilt of individual sin. The principal work of God at the Cross was destroying the works of the Devil and defeating the power of sin and death. It was a victory over sin itself as power, and over the principalities and powers of the air. That victory is permanent, enduring and eternal, and the church needs to live in the consciousness of that triumph. It was the triumph over Satan, evil and death, much more than the issue of personal sin as failing. Traditional Christianity has an inadequate view of sin and sees it from a moralistic or even humanistic view as a kind of failing rather than a power that resides in the human nature and in the principalities and the powers of the air.

If this is a time of restoration, then one of the things which needs to be restored is the significance of the Cross and what was actually performed there. It makes a profound difference how we view what took place there. It will affect how we view sin. If we see sin as only an individual, moralistic failure, a mistake, that can be paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus to remove the guilt of it, and then tomorrow you perform it again, then we have totally misunderstood the atonement. The triumph was that Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. I do not know to what degree we realize that our whole Christianity is very individualistic, very personal: "My salvation, my going to heaven," rather than the great issues of defeating the powers of the air that are competing in a cosmic rivalry with God over His own creation. And that it requires the corporate church in its full authority as an instrument to complete that victory at the end. To think of Jesus' work as a triumph brings a very different view with regard to our place in the purposes of God. But if we are thinking only personally and individually, then heaven for us is a place where you go and enjoy an eternal vacation. If we are thinking of the triumph of God, then the heavenlies are a place that we will come to occupy in a governmental capacity to rule and reign with Him in the establishment of His Theocratic Kingdom.

The view that sin is only a personal failing is trivializing sin. It is not a recognition of the radicalness of evil that required the very sacrifice of God in His Son to defeat it at the Cross. I wish I could go on to explain what an inadequate view of sin means in terms of opening the door for the ravages of evil. For example, the Jewish rejection of this Cross and its meaning and the disposition to push it away from our consciousness and to look upon the crucifixion of Jesus as only a kind of momentary, historical accident of no great significance, means that Judaism and world Jewry have lost the one and great opportunity given by God to recognize the nature of evil. In other words, the revelation of evil comes by seeing what it cost God to meet it and defeat it. The enormity and magnitude of what was wrought at the Cross in God being crucified is the most powerful provision given of God to glimpse the magnitude of the evil of sin itself as power.

The humanistic interpretation of the atonement has its ground in the failure to see the radical hostility of God to evil and His judgment upon sin. It does not recognize sin for the evil that it is, but concerns itself essentially with guilt, and that guilt can be relieved by the propitiation that Jesus provided in satisfying the need of the Father for a just retribution. I am trying to find words as simple as I know because this is so important. It makes God the Father look like a heavy-handed Old Testament deity who demands a certain kind of justice to make the thing right, and Jesus was that necessary 'sacrifice'. This interpretation does not see that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, but that Jesus the man, the perfect man and the ideal man, was the satisfaction that requited God the Father's need for justice. It appeased Him as the God of vengeance and judgment. Well, if that is your view of God, then there is going to be every temptation to be drawn to something that is much more sentimental and consoling.

Jesus allowed Himself to suffer the full brunt of the powers of evil and death and was raised from it by the power of the Father. There was a triumph over death and over evil by the wisdom of God in the humility, meekness, suffering and patience of the Lord. That is the meaning of the Cross. It is much more than just a God of vengeance being satisfied that an atonement was made, which is a very limited and inadequate view, and will negatively affect our entire view of God Himself. There are purposes in the atonement that go far beyond the benefit that comes to us as individuals.

It is not that we are absolved of individual responsibility for sin, but that we need to see that our sins are related to the power of sin. It was the defeat of the power of sin itself at the Cross, and therefore we no longer need to live in it, or yield our members to it. It is not just the release from guilt, but a new life being imparted and a new principle of life that comes with the resurrection from that death.

The Provision of God in Community

We cannot come to freedom from that influence by ourselves. There are so many hooks in us. We need the prayer; we need the support; we need the encouragement of those we are joined with. We need the encouragement of people with a like mind and heart to be a people who demonstrate the wisdom of God. I cannot see that we can be this people except 'in community.' The separation from the world is so painful and those powers are so pervasive and powerful. Only through the aid, the encouragement, the prayer, the wisdom, the counsel of others and the atmosphere that we generate together as the community of God's people, can we live like that and maintain that freedom without again being sucked back into the power of the world.

I do not believe community is an option. We should embrace community living as the logic of the faith. It is God's provision to resist and to overcome those powers. Sons and daughters of God are those who will overcome the world, the flesh and the Devil, and the enormous power that is increasing through the influence of these things. We are urged to exhort one another daily while it is yet today. Tomorrow is too late, let alone next Sunday. If we are not in daily attendance to one another in an atmosphere of encouragement and correction, reproof, prayer, counsel, then we will find ourselves being drawn away. The leaven of sin finds its way in, and we can be drawn back into the world.

It is in the intensity of life together and in that interrelationship that we can more easily recognize the issues of whether Mickey Mouse or Power Rangers are dangerous things that carry a certain spirit from which we need to separate ourselves. It is more than just merchandise that is being presented as harmless and even attractive and desirable for our children. After all, the last ones whom we want to deny are our children!! How do we act in this terrible tension of not wanting to deprive them from something they cannot see as evil, yet we recognize it? The issue of the Cross becomes an issue right under our roof in the kinds of acts that we are required to perform. But how do we even recognize something that seems to be innocent, and yet carries a spirit of darkness like these images I have described? How do we discern the things that are evil when they are depicted and set before us as being something not only innocent, but beneficial, pleasant and good to have and to enjoy? It is going to take an uncommon ability to see through the appearance of something and to recognize the inherent evil that is in it, and the strength of character to resist it and to keep it from your household, despite the fact that other kids and their friends have that very thing.

I think our ability to discern the things that are of the earth and of the Devil is our proximity to heaven. The more we are citizens of heaven, the more we will be sensitive to see the contradiction of the things that are of the world and of the earth. What will be the first accusation thrown at any believer who wants to move toward a heavenly-

mindfulness and looks with great suspicion on the things that are of the world and of the earth? "Intolerant, dogmatic, legalistic!" The issue of discernment is not some kind of magical ability, but relative to the authentic spirituality of an entire Body. We will be dull or we will be acute based on the quality of our corporate life, integrity and truth.

This is a calling for a church that is people together, whose corporate intercession makes the principalities and powers of the air 'part' over the place where they are. It is inevitable that such a church will be resisted and that the powers themselves will test it and resort even to oppression and persecution. The fact that the church at large has not been opposed up to now, is not a statement to our spirituality or maturity, but a scandal, and the evidence that we are not yet the church we ought to be! The true church has always been oppressed and persecuted by the powers. It is their final act of desperation against us, even as they were desperate against Jesus. They rubbed their hands in glee when they had Him totally in their power, but He went to His death as a lamb in silence, not resisting them, but yielding Himself to that terrible power of darkness. It was by that yielding that Jesus triumphed over them. It was a final showdown, a conflict between two wisdoms, two moral orders: violent force and power in vicious brutality against a Lamb, slain from before the foundation of the world, who did not so much as open His mouth. He suffered rather in meekness and humility. The worst that could be brought against Him revealed the best that was in Him. Utter malignancy met utter magnanimity. Satan was made an open and public display. He was ridiculed and despoiled by the very submitting of Jesus to the worst fury and vengeance, animosity and violence that the powers know. Yet the Lord did not react in kind. He did not shriek out. He did not plead for his life but prayed for them. Hell in all of its fury met Heaven in all of its humility and meekness and long-suffering, and Heaven triumphed. That triumph is complete, but the world does not know it because the church has not demonstrated it. Jesus bruised the head of the Serpent, but it is left to the church to finish him off by making an eternal demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God, not just in this age but in the ages to come.

In the early church, no-one thought that the thing they had was their own. We are talking about Jews here! That is not an insignificant detail. It is a profound statement of the depth of the sanctifying work of God that had broken men loose from their deep selfishness. They were brought to a configuration and a quality of relationship that required a new Greek word, '*Koinonea*.' There was no word known for it in the Hebrew lexicon. They had come to a place of relationship that was the particular distinctive of the church. It was a quality of life of which the world knew nothing. In a word, they were a demonstration on the earth of what God's mode of relationship is in heaven and the particular character by which He relates with Himself in His tripartite composition as the Godhead. It is a relationship of an unusual, self-giving quality by which the one exalts the other and defers to the other. The genius of the Godhead Himself had come to earth and was now being demonstrated by Jews, famous for their selfishness, for their

holding to themselves and for their contention. We need to recognize the genius of what the church was at the first. For the first expression is the pure, pristine and heavenly intention of God. A church which comes together merely for services as a conglomerate of individualities who protect their privacy, each one going his own way, is no threat to the powers of darkness at all. They are only required to recognize an authenticity that is a reflection of what is in the Godhead Himself.

This is not some esoteric subject. It has practical applications that will affect our daily character and posture in the world. If we see this, and if we consciously walk in the light of it, then we will become acute in our spiritual discernment, and we shall begin to sense the play of these powers in the civilizations in which we occupy. We will begin to recognize their influence through institutions of education, culture and religion. There is something that God is waiting for in an entire church. It is an authority to be expressed, a quality of praise that truly ascends up, a depth of intercession that is corporate and which will require those powers of the air to break and part, recoil, draw back and release.

The Power of True Praise

There is no deception more profound than that for which Charismatics and Pentecostals are most subject. We think, albeit unconsciously, that somehow the euphoric thing that we enjoy by our music and choruses really is the statement of our faith. We may enjoy it and we hope that God is being blessed also, but we need to be ruthlessly honest and gird ourselves with truth; and we need first of all to be truthful about our own condition. The true statement of our faith and condition of our lives is what we experience in fear or apprehension about death and about insecurity when we stand in a tremulous place where an authority is confronting us that expresses the rule of the principalities and powers. The issue is not whether our worship pleases us or facilitates the service, but whether it is in fact worship. True worship is the statement of the redemptive work of God that has been experienced in our lives authentically and corporately.

Loudness is power, and it is manipulative when the sound amplifiers are turned up. It is predicated on the notion that the powers will be defeated through militant or revved up so-called worship. The moment we begin to employ worship for purposes other than worship, then it no longer is worship. God knows when there is a worship that has no strings attached. True worship is simply the adoration and devotion that God deserves because He is God. But when we make of it a manipulation and a tool toward an end, even a religiously desired end, then it is no longer worship. We are on the enemy's ground and employing an expediency to obtain an end and still calling it worship. We are deceived if we think that a vigorous, banner-waving worship defeats the powers! God is yet the still small voice.

“Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you?” may well be asked of us. “Yes, we hear your praise and we hear your choruses, but there is something about them that is hollow. It is merely singing, and it is not, therefore, something that we are required as the rulers of darkness to acknowledge!” This is what the forces of darkness utter when they encounter a church operating in less than the fullness of its inheritance in Christ. There is a praise and worship that is mere singing, but there is also a praise that wells up to Heaven that is more than the product of charismatic manipulation. It is a praise that is a spontaneous breaking forth of a celebration of the God who has saved us, not only out of fear, insecurity and anxiety, but who has brought us to a transcendent place of apostolic faith. That kind of praise devastates the powers of darkness.

Our call as the church to resist the Devil is not dependent upon what we do, but what we are. It is something in the character of the church. Our victory will be related to the quality and the continuous character of the fellowship itself. So long as there is any surrender or condescension to the wisdom of those powers, for example, fear, intimidation, threat, concern for one’s life and security, then the powers have a place of penetration. When they see a people who are resolute in their faith and know that their security does not come from the world or from their employer or from the State, but from God, then the powers are without any weapon. There is nothing that can be attacked.

Paul and Silas’ imprisonment in Acts 16 is a wonderful demonstration of the wisdom of God. At midnight they were praying and singing praises unto God. They believed that their suffering was the very consequence of their obedience, and that even though only one woman was affected by their ministry, they were in the place of obedience to the heavenly vision. It did not matter whether they would lose their lives or not. That was not the issue. They had such a deep faith in the sovereignty of God and the privilege of sharing in His sufferings that they rejoiced, and it was expressed in praise. When you can praise God in the midst of adversity and suffering, you have the most powerful release from the powers of darkness. They cannot stand it. They cannot bear to hear it, and they flee because it is the overwhelming evidence of the reality of the invisible God. It contradicts their wisdom which says that when you are suffering, you are to be mourning and pouting and feeling sorry for yourself and blaming God and accusing this man or that. But when you can praise God in the midst of your sufferings, you have ruined them. You have taken their last weapon. They have nothing they can use anymore to threaten or to intimidate. You have broken through. You are on heavenly ground. They are absolutely helpless to adversely affect you. They cannot bear to see it and they flee.

The one thing that the powers of darkness are required to acknowledge is authenticity the thing that is real. I am an enemy therefore to what seems to be real in worship and praise that puts such emphasis on musical ability, on instruments, on loudspeakers, on electronic technology, on song and on worship leaders. One of my greatest battles as a

prophetic person is with worship leaders. Oftentimes, it happens that I have a speaking engagement and by the time the worship is over, I am completely depleted and drained. I get up and it is a pathetic beep next to what I knew the Lord was wanting. The worship, so-called, that should have enhanced the word actually robbed the word. Worship leaders often have such an attitude of "I will show you what is really important" and go on and on, chorus after chorus. By the time I get up to speak, the atmosphere and the spirit have been so depleted that the word is blunted and lost. There is so much emphasis on worship that almost makes the success of the church depends upon it. "Did you enjoy the worship?" instead of it being the spontaneous expression of the redemptive work of God in the life of the believers personally and corporately.

Jesus endured all of His suffering for the joy that was set before Him in the anticipation of what would be the consequence of His suffering for eternity. That is what we need to see. This is the wisdom of God, because rejoicing in suffering is a contradiction. It is contrary to reason. It is contrary to everything that we think natural to man. What is natural to man is survival, "Take care of number one." But the wisdom that can rejoice in suffering is another wisdom and it is that wisdom which defeats the powers. It is the greater wisdom, but it is not enough just to speak it. It has got to be made manifest, to be demonstrated by a church whose inner life is itself her proclamation of God's manifold wisdom. Whether she speaks it or not, the very inner life itself is that thing. It becomes that through trial, through testing, through the Lord allowing oppression, heaviness of spirit all of the kinds of things against which we have to struggle and work out in our relationships. It is becoming one as He is one in all of the differences, all of the personalities, all of the things that come up that take the guts out of you, where you want to run and find the first Charismatic and Evangelical fellowship you can, just to be relieved from the tension of all of these demands. It is in those tensions, however, that God forms His character.

The Manifold Wisdom of God

What is the manifold wisdom of God that is to be demonstrated by the church? I have already hinted at it. It is the very antithesis of the wisdom of the rulers of darkness who celebrate force, violence, brutality and power. God celebrates weakness, foolishness and humility. God has chosen the foolish and the weak things to confound the things that are mighty and wise. Are we majoring in foolishness? Are we willing to suffer the humiliation of weakness? Or are we reflecting more the wisdom of the powers themselves, and therefore constitute no threat to them at all? If we have any intentions of becoming an apostolic presence upon the earth, we will not only incite against ourselves the persecution of these powers, but it will be of an unspeakably vehement and cruel kind. It has been so historically, where men are not merely put to death, they have been flayed alive, sawn asunder and burnt at the stake. There is a viciousness, a cruelty and a diabolical hatred that fumes in mankind against God and wants to make those who are His, surrender and give up to their terms. But instead it gets another response, namely, those who love their enemies and who pray for their persecutors and say in their dying breath, *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”*

When Stephen sighed his last breath with those words, the eternal power of that statement broke something in the powers of the air overhead that released a certain angry Jew (Saul) who experienced a *‘prick’* against his spirit to which he finally had to surrender on the road to Damascus. Something happens when meekness and humility meet utter viciousness. It is a demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God that these powers are obliged to recognize. For nothing else can impress them than the very nature of God and the holiness of His character under supreme duress and pressure. What is more, only suffering and extremity reveal it.

Is that not what happened on the Cross? Jesus did not writhe and groan to preserve His protoplasmic life. He yielded up the ghost. He uttered the words, *“Father, forgive them,”* but they were heard by a certain Gentile man, a Roman centurion. He was a professional brute, a man schooled in murder and who had seen many squirm and die on the Cross and had spat at them in disdain and contempt, for they were only men clutching their life. But when he saw this God-man die magnificently under extreme duress and pain, words broke forth out of his mouth even beyond his consciousness, *“Truly, this is the Son of God!”* He had no Biblical background whatsoever, but was compelled to make a certain recognition of the true identity of that One who was on the Cross, by what was exhibited in His ultimate suffering unto death. And the fact of the matter is, it would not have been revealed except at the Cross and except in a suffering unto death. However brilliant Jesus was as the Son of Man and the Son of God in what He spoke and the miracles that He performed, it required this as a final and ultimate demonstration of the testimony of who He was and is. It constituted salvation for a man

who would have otherwise eternally perished as a murderer himself, unless the acknowledgment came out of him that this indeed was the Son of God.

As Jesus walked, so also are we to walk in this world. God is waiting for one final demonstration that shall penetrate to the very heart of the cosmos itself, a demonstration through the church in the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God. Verbally and doctrinally we have agreed with the wisdom of God, namely, to serve Him and to love Him, but in the condition of our life and the way in which we conduct ourselves in the office, in the home, in bed or by whatever area of our life, we more or less consistently subscribe to another wisdom and another way. Manipulation, teasing, seduction, flattery and all of the kinds of things that seek to bend the will of another are wrong. We are subscribing to the wisdom of the powers of this world; we are bowing and serving their gods and we are doing according to their works.

How we shall react under extreme duress and persecution is the issue that is before us now. Our little impatient moods, our critical spirits and our irritation with one another are already evidence of how little prepared we are for this final confrontation. The very things that we have complained about in the church, namely, the trials and the irritations that come to us from other saints, are exactly the provision of God for the shaping of His godly character in us. God is wanting to move us to that ultimate place of response, that when the ultimate persecution comes, we shall stand graciously and exhibit the wisdom of God. We shall demonstrate the triumph of the Cross, and by the eternal Spirit we shall offer ourselves up as Jesus did in that final moment. The eternal Spirit was offering up God Himself, so that in the ultimate moment in His trial and suffering, the demonstration that was being made to the powers, that made of them an open spectacle and spoil, was the demonstration of God being all in all and bringing to the core of the cosmos His quintessential Self.

When that same demonstration shall come from us, the triumph will be complete and the powers demolished. This is the eternal purpose of God for the church. The phrase *'to be crucified with Christ'* is not for us an option or a luxury, but the very basis for our overcoming. For once we have experienced that death and risen to newness of life, then of what shall we be afraid? This is a call for maturity, for a church to come into its fullness, according to the eternal purpose of God, which He has intended for us, and for which He has created all things. There is a purpose for our being beyond ourselves and beyond the earth and that affects the ages to come. It is something that pertains to the whole moral order of the cosmos itself in the purposes of God that has been reserved for the church. May we see our calling and rise up to meet it and receive every difficulty, trial and experience that comes into our life as coming from God's hand. This will give us a new view toward suffering and a much more realistic anticipation of our future persecution not something for which we should mourn, but something in which we rejoice at our privilege and high calling, eternally in Him.

The Overcoming of the Saints

It takes an episode out of the life of David to show the whole conflict of wisdoms, even though that language was probably not even familiar to David. It is unlikely that he was aware of the significance of his act, but what he did and how he acted in a particular 'crisis moment', affected the whole subsequent character of the kingdom. The coming Kingdom has a particular character that God is not ashamed to call 'Davidic', the kingdom of David. I believe that that character takes its note from one episode in the life of David before he became king, and probably was critical in establishing his kingship, and it will be critical for our establishment as well.

Saul's relentless pursuit of David's life, as recorded in 1 Samuel 24, is not only historical, but typical, as it represents two antibodies symbolized and summed up in both David and Saul. The conflict between them is a picture of an ages-long enmity between what these men represented in themselves. Saul stands for something visible and external, prestigious and impressive, both religious and political. Saul looked every bit the king. He had all of the externalities and the outward credentials. He was an expediency that God allowed Israel because they wanted a human king to rule over them, though God Himself was their King.

We all know what kind of misrule came through Saul and how he failed to be obedient to God. When God told him to destroy the Amalekites, their infants, the suckling, the camel, sheep, oxen, etc., he did not do it. He was partial in his obedience and saved the best of the sheep and oxen for a sacrifice unto the Lord. He could not bring himself to slay the Amalekite, King Agag. It was Samuel who wept all through the night at Saul's disobedience—for partial obedience is disobedience—and who himself took a sword and hacked Agag to pieces. We need to further note that the same Saul, who could not bring himself to a complete obedience to God to slay the historic enemies of God, in only a chapter or two later, destroys the whole city of Nob, a priestly community—men, women, infants and suckling, camel, sheep, oxen and ass. There was not a living thing that breathed when Saul exterminated an entire priestly community because they had helped David in his flight.

David, on the other hand, is the insignificant, weak stripling, the guy that drools in his beard and scribbles on the door and feigns madness, who finds himself in a cave and is joined by the poor and the depressed and the down-and-outers. There is something so very rich in what these two men represent, and the one is absolutely and utterly hostile to the other. That is also a picture of the Last Days—an institutional Church, a religious system, be it nominal or evangelical, opposing with vehemence and bitterness the Davidic people of God, the remnant people.

The kingly person that men tend to celebrate cannot tolerate the life of the seemingly insignificant one who sees himself as but a flea. It is a timeless, classic contest until the

end, and those who are anointed, regardless of their external unimpressiveness, will be harried and pursued by the inexplicably vexed, who cannot abide their very existence. Somehow those humble ones are not fit to live in their sight. And the offense cannot even be identified, for what brings the offended to a boil is the very foolishness of what the other is, unselfconsciously in God. What is it about David that so infuriated Saul? Why should a helpless and insignificant young man so antagonize a man of power and religious and political authority? Whatever that something is, it is going to be the very ingredients of the Last Days.

That very weakness, that very God-dependency, in contrast to those who have in themselves expertise and ability, is the very thing that antagonizes. To be weak, to be foolish and to be dependent upon God is exactly what infuriates a people who are religious, but who establish their religious proficiency on the basis of their own ability and what they have raised up and what they can do.

Through the centuries, the great Church bodies, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, could equally not abide the presence in their midst of those who were concerned only to live in that same foolish trust in God. What kind of threat could they have conceivably constituted for those great monoliths that they could not be permitted to live? They were persecuted; they were pursued; they were tied back-to-back and drowned in rivers and lakes; they were burned at the stake and ignominiously dumped in dungeons to rot. There was a ventilating of spite against them, because in their weakness and in their inoffensiveness, they represented something that threatened the powers of darkness.

I do not believe we have really comprehended what the true nature of overcoming is. Daniel speaks of the *'horn'* that shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and who *'was waging war with the saints and overpowering them.'* (Daniel 7:21b) The Book of Revelation compounds the mystery yet more by adding: *'And it was given to him (the Beast) to make war with the saints and to overcome them...'* (Rev. 13:7a) How mind-boggling to consider that God allows a devastation to come to the church by the enemy of our souls so as to overcome us.

We are never going to be victorious in some macho way by taking authority and shouting down the enemy or taking cities 'for Christ', when the Scriptures seem to indicate another kind of scenario. God actually allows the believing remnant church to be overcome. *'And it was given to him (the Beast) to make war with the saints and to overcome them'* is a final statement of the condition of the church in the Last Days. Daniel says the same thing. It seems like a contradiction. How is that a victory? In both the Old Testament book of apocalypse, Daniel, and in the New Testament book of apocalypse, John's Revelation, the saints are overcome. They are defeated and vanquished. God allows that, but where is the victory?

We have perhaps imagined that *'not loving our life even unto death'* means that we bravely summon a final courage to withstand all harassment and somehow make it right to the end. But what if the overcoming is in the dying? It is not the issue of dying. It is the issue of how we die. Why are we allowed to be overcome? What demonstration is made in the wisdom of God in being overcome that finally defeats the powers and compels their being ejected out of heavenly places? It is something that takes place not in the victory as we thought it to be in the human sense, but something that we demonstrate in being overcome. We overcome in being overcome, and unless we understand that, and anticipate that, and prepare for that and experience it even now in some measure, then we will not demonstrate it when it is required.

The Davidic Kingdom

There came a critical moment in David's life, a remarkable moment and a radical moment that reveals everything. Something was performed in the character of God that distinguished the wisdom of God from the wisdom of the powers of darkness. The powers of darkness will do anything to get their way. They will seduce, they will intimidate and they will threaten. They have no scruples. They will do anything that is immoral, amoral and vile. God's ends, however, must and can only be obtained by God's means, and His means must be consistent with His ends. They must be in the same character and kind. We cannot 'take the Kingdom' or 'establish' it in any way that is different or other than in keeping with the character of God Himself. If the church begins to use manipulation in altar calls by playing on emotions, or getting people to come forward by some kind of psychological manipulation, then it is not in keeping with the character of the Kingdom. We have to be very careful not only about our ends, but about our means, or else we contradict all that God is about.

A moment will come, completely unsuspecting and un contemplated. It will come with suddenness. There is no time then to prepare ourselves. What is revealed then is what in fact we really are. What we are, having been formed at the hand of God, then comes to bear, and this is the moment that came to David. He was being pursued by Saul and hid himself in a cave with his men, and Saul came into that very cave to relieve himself. David's men said to him,

"Hey, this is that moment of which God spoke, that your enemy would come into your own hand, that you might do with him whatever you think good to do." (paraphrased).

His men expected of course that David would kill his persecutor and thereby get rid of the nuisance. It was a critical moment and David was free in that moment to do what he would choose to do, and we also are going to have such moments if not daily. Is there any greater freedom than to be a son or daughter of the living God? For all of the talk about freedom to those who are in bondage, to be free in Christ is to be free indeed. What we are and what we choose to do when we are free to choose what we will, and what we choose to think when we are free to think what we will, is in fact what we are. It is what we do out of our freedom that is our testimony to the powers of darkness.

What David did intuitively by cutting the corner of Saul's robe and not taking the life of Saul, without any awareness of the significance of that act eternally, is what we will be required to perform in the eternal purposes of God. Our doing, therefore, must also be Davidic in its character as well as in its deed. This is the manifold wisdom of God, for which demonstration to the principalities and the powers God waits. Not to see our life in such a context is simply not to see, and nullifies us as being the church as well as being the key to and agent of Israel's final restoration. In other words, God is waiting for

the demonstration of His manifold wisdom, and that the same church that demonstrates it, is also the key and the very agent of Israel's final restoration.

This wisdom was reflected in the conduct of David in the supreme moment that came to him in his flight from Saul. He cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly, and it came about afterward that his conscience bothered him for doing that act. If you want a glimpse into the heart of David and the character of David, it is here. David was sensitive in his conscience and the very cutting of Saul's robe bothered him. What kind of a man is this? I do not know whether we can even understand it. We are products of another age that defaces public buildings, defiles the streets with its litter and desecrates life with its profanity. If you travel in Europe, you see the graffiti everywhere on buildings. It is a horror, a demonic and vile thing, that shows a complete absence of respect for property. When you begin with an absence of respect for property, it is not long before you will be brought to an absence of respect for life. What a contrast with David, whose conscience troubled him just to touch the robe of this king, and that he could say,

"Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed." (1 Samuel 24:6b)

David is talking about an apostate and backslidden king, who is soon to suffer his own destruction. This is the man who calls on witches, who calls up the spirits of dead men and who performed his own sacrifice rather than wait for Samuel. Everything about Saul is contemptible, and yet David respects him, not because of his conduct, but because of his office. David respects the Lord, whose anointing once came upon that man. It is a respect for authority. It does not matter how Saul failed. The anointing is so precious that even when the meaning has been forfeited for which it has been given, a respect for the office and the person is a respect and honoring of the God who conferred it.

Has the church given to Israel, though Israel is backslidden and apostate, the measure of respect for what its place once was in God? Church history has rather shown the opposite. She has exhibited to Israel contempt and disdain because she had not this attitude toward a people who had once enjoyed the anointing of God. We have been guilty of demonstrating a 'spirit of requirement'. We do not know what unconditional love and unconditional acceptance is. In other words, unless you prove yourself and demonstrate something, you are not worthy to receive our acceptance, let alone our affection. We do not know what honoring or respect means, and have subscribed more than we know to another kind of wisdom that demands conditions.

And David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way. (1 Samuel 24:7)

And what was his way? The way of a murderer; the way of an implacable man bent on the destruction of that which he sees as a threat to his kingdom. To allow Saul to go

was to invite one's own death. This needs to sink into our understanding. It was more than just a bit of graciousness on David's part. To allow Saul to get up and to go, was for David to sign his own death warrant. It is clear though that Saul's tears were 'crocodile tears.'

"You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me; while I have dealt wickedly with you. And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day." (vs. 17b-19)

It is only a matter of time before those tears will dry and he will be back at it, pursuing and hunting David, until he has got his life. For David to allow that man to go was to put his own life on the line. Is true righteousness really righteousness if it does not cost us anything and does not in fact involve a threat to our life? The garments that clothe the saints of the Last Days are made up by their righteous deeds. David's act was a righteous deed in letting his persecutor go, because it came at the cost of his own life. He could rightly count himself as a dead man. It would only be a matter of time before Saul would succeed in killing him unless God Himself would be his Deliverer. This is the manifold wisdom of God. It is not some abstract thing, but an absolute confidence in God, that unless God preserves us, we simply will not be preserved. It requires that we do nothing to maintain our own life, and we should not condescend to any expediency to do it.

How many of us are condescending to expediencies right now that have so much less to do than the issue of our survival? Just the issue of our sex life involves us in expediencies and techniques and things to arouse. The way in which we manipulate one another, or our children, or wives with their husbands, or husbands with wives, or pastors with congregations, shows that we are quite free to condescend to 'stretching forth our arm'. That is a symbolic statement that employs an expediency to obtain our end. David's faith, however, was to let God judge and vindicate. He would not stretch forth his arm. The fact that he cut Saul's robe was killing him in itself, but he would not touch God's anointed. We need to remember also that David was a man of war. He was no pacifist and could be ruthless when he had to, but here he would not stretch forth his arm to save his own life.

We must not miss this statement that David makes:

After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? (vs. 14)

David is not playing on words here. The fact that he is a man of war, and still refuses to stretch forth his hand to kill when he has someone defenseless at his beck, is all the more a profound statement of the revelation of God and of His Kingdom. I do not think

David demonstrated a self-effacing, false humility. This is a man who really thinks that he is a dead dog and a flea. Only if you think that will you be willing to let your life out, that if God does not preserve it, so let it be. There is nothing that important about me that I should hold my life as dear unto myself. It is not for myself, but for Him. If He is more glorified by my death than by my living, so be it. For what am I, after all, without Him, but a dead dog and a flea; a piece of dust. Our basic error is our error concerning ourselves. We think that we have a right to preserve the creaturely thing we are. We are dead men who have been brought back from the dead through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no longer to live for ourselves, but unto Him. That is what it says in Romans 6, but that is not what is said by our living! By our living we are more like Saul than like David. We do the thing that is expedient. We pursue our own interests. We will rise against the thing that threatens us.

Our attitude toward religious bodies, even defunct governments, will be critical in manifesting the wisdom of God. If the enemy can bring us onto his ground, where we would rail against something or complain, or be contemptuous or critical in an ungodly way, then they have won the game. Our conduct, our attitude, our spirit and what we allow in our hearts, is critical.

While Jesus was hanging on the Cross, He was railed at with the jeers and the taunts by the very people for whom He came and died, *"Come down and we will believe you!"* If anything is calculated to vex a man, it is that the people for whom you are a sacrifice do not even recognize that nor appreciate it. Furthermore, they are tormenting you verbally in your anguish and in your suffering and in your death. But Jesus replied not a word, not a syllable. It was not because He was biting His lips that He held back, but it simply was not in Him to be expressed. The crisis revealed what was in Him, and what was in Him was the character of God in patient forbearance, in suffering, in mercy and in forgiveness. The Son revealed the Father.

David's deference to Saul is contrary to the wisdom of this age, the wisdom by which the world lives its life. When nothing else will work, men will stretch forth their hands in violence and justify it in order to obtain their ends. You can know the true faith, because it will never resort to violence in the last analysis to obtain its ends. That religion that purports to be of God and requires violence to obtain its ends is by its very demonstration necessarily false. We have to be careful about violence ourselves, not only in deed, but in speech.

David even calls Saul his father,

"Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand!" (vs. 11a)

David is not trying to ingratiate himself with his enemy. He really believed in his heart that Saul was his father. He had a son's respect for an older man as a father, though the man was anything but a father. He failed in every category, but from David's spiritual

view, from the heavenly view, Saul was his father. Can you see the Lord looking down over the brim of Heaven with His angelic escorts to see what David would do in that moment when he was free to do what he thinks is right in his own sight? The whole future of the Kingdom of God was hanging on that moment, and more than that, a descendent from David's own loins would one day be the Messiah of all mankind. If David was cut off, then that line would be cut off and the whole Messianic succession destroyed. Many of us will compromise at just that point, "Well, I am willing to give my life, but my ministry...! Don't you know what is resting on my ministry? If I do not continue in my ministry, the nations will perish because I am God's man of faith and power for the world!"

Now David could have said, "Okay, if it is just my life, then let Saul take it. But listen, I am called to be the king of Israel and out of my very loins will come a descendant who will be the King forever and the salvation of all mankind. When I see the intention of God for my life, then it has got to be preserved." David, however, would not say that, for he knew that if God could not preserve what pertains to Him, then he himself would not do it by stretching out his hand. What David did in that moment had eternal ramifications and the powers of the air knew it in the moment of that act.

How many of us see divorce as violence? It is a tearing of a relationship asunder, and we justify doing it in the name of preserving 'our' ministries, because the wisdom by which we are moved is self-preservation. To exalt our ministry is only disguising the fact that it is really our self that is implicated in that ministry. We are hiding behind it. Likewise, if our wife is an irritant, or counterproductive, or opposes us, then we think that we can justify the violence of divorce. How few have faulted us for so doing, and with what scant interruption do we continue 'our important service' with a new and more attractive spouse! Few remember that there was once another wife, and we go on as ever, just as popular, and the moment passes and people forget. The ministry becomes everything. The issue of the eternal purpose of God demonstrated through the church suffers a setback because we have condescended to the wisdom of the world in what was expedient for our satisfaction, which David would not allow himself, even though it was his life and what would issue from his life at stake. God must be trusted for that fulfillment and not the stretching forth of one's own hand in expediency.

This is the demonstration of the Davidic kingdom that is meek. It is the willingness to allow one's life to be expended rather than to do what in fact Jesus could have done in calling down legions of angels. Like David, He had all power in His hand to do away with His tormentors. Like David, however, He could not save Himself because He was the King of another Kingdom. He simply could not, because it was contrary to His nature to save Himself.

The School of Obedience

When Jesus overturned the moneychangers' tables, that act of violence was more against property than against men. He overturned the tables, but He did not overturn men. It was an act of meekness, though it was violent in its character. It was an obedience to God, probably even contrary to the very disposition of Jesus Himself. It came in the moment of God's own choosing to validate the Messianic claim of Jesus in His jealousy for the Father's house. Meekness is not walking on eggshells. If God requires you to roar like a lion or to act in that kind of vehemence in the moment of His choosing, then not to do that would be arrogant. To submit is to be meek, all the more if it is contrary to your own disposition.

David calls out to the astonished Saul,

"May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge on you; but my hand shall not be against you." (vs. 13)

The confidence that David is exhibiting is more than bravado. It is predicated on such a knowledge of God and such a trust in His sovereignty, that even if He should allow him to be Saul's victim, then so be it. It is an ultimate faith that will allow our persecutors to be free to come back and to do us in. If God is not able to defend us and our life will be taken, then so be it. It must be the sovereignty of God.

That is what Stephen believed when he gave his life. He had finished his earthly course and there was no resentment on his part toward God. His martyrdom had repercussions that Stephen knew nothing about, namely, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. There was something in Stephen's death that haunted him. Saul (Paul) had never seen a man die more gloriously, more so than he knew how to live. He could not escape the witness exhibited in the magnanimity and graciousness of Stephen's death. Mere religion cannot produce that witness. It took a demonstration of the character of God in a Stephen, a man who was so below Saul's own prestigious status as the prize student of the Rabbi Gamaliel, and when God reveals His character in the weak and in the undistinguished to a man of such prestige, then that is a devastating revelation of God.

The powers of darkness had such a hold on Paul that they could make a murderer out of his religious intensity. I do not think that Paul could have been broken and would have been converted, except that there was before him a demonstration of something that could loose the principalities and powers of the air. It was the supreme triumph of the wisdom of God.

It is also the mystery of the church toward the Jew, because in the sight of Jews, Gentiles leave something to be desired. We Jews see ourselves as so much more superior ethically, morally, intellectually and culturally but if we see in a Gentile face and in his or her character the demonstration of our God, whom we do not know, and from

whom we have been alienated, then down we come on our faces. It is the very same principle. God did not think that the sacrifice of Stephen was too extravagant to affect the salvation of Saul and to make him the chief apostle of the church. The church must again be a Stephen, martyr-people as a final demonstration to a Jewish Saul-like nation that cannot be saved or converted on any ground less than this demonstration. The issue is not whether you are beheaded or that you are actually made a martyr. The issue is whether you have lived as a martyr and were willing for a martyr's death, whether or not your life was required. Some will be sawn asunder, some will be decapitated, but some will remain, though barely surviving persecution and others may not be touched at all. That which distinguishes those who rise at the first resurrection is the heart attitude of martyrdom - those whose life is not dear unto themselves.

What precipitated the fury of those people in Stephen's martyrdom, that they put their fingers in their ears and gnashed upon him with their teeth, and could not be satisfied until they had stoned the life out of him? What did he say? He had given them a long history of Israel, and then he came to a final climax,

"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." (Acts 7:51)

We need to remember that he is talking to the eminent leaders of the religious world. As they gnashed upon him, Stephen said,

"Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56b)

When they heard that, Stephen was finished. But why? Because it was the statement of someone in the presence of God and the place of authority that once and for all meant the end to the false authority that his persecutors had established in their own religious institutions or fellowships. The powers of the air resident in them rose to such a fury. They were the ones who sent Jesus to His crucifixion. In ventilating their characteristic wisdom of power unto death upon Him, Jesus was elevated through resurrection and ascension. That is the nexus of the same fury ventilated against Stephen in making that announcement. They ventilated their final spite and venom against this one whose face shone like an angel, and who made that announcement to them.

Even Saul had to acknowledge to David,

"You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you." (vs. 17b)

David's act revealed a greater wisdom a righteousness greater than the Pharisees. It is not the righteousness of impeccably maintained principles, but that of the forfeiture of one's life, and that alone releases or demonstrates the very nature of God. The nature of God is the wisdom of God. We must understand that it was not the keeping of

principles that David exhibited, but rather he exhibited the willingness to forfeit his life, and that is what reveals God's glory.

Both God and creation are groaning and travailing, waiting for the manifestation of such sons. This age will end by a church of the same character by what is revealed in extremity as was demonstrated by Jesus, Stephen and David. We may have a right to contend as sufferers of injustice and oppression, but there is a wisdom and a greater power revealed in not contending. It is an ultimate expression of trust in God. In this way, the false wisdom is revealed as false and its captives are set free. For by so doing, the ultimate validity of eternity that alone frees men from the intimidating tyranny of fear for this life is established. This is a liberating freedom. Wherever there is on earth in this present world a congregation freed from false wisdom of the principalities and powers, consistently and unselfconsciously displayed, there the kingdom of David is also revealed.

Amen.