

The Approach to God

Studies in the Tabernacle

David Gooding



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Revision 1, July 2018.

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This text has been edited from a transcript of a series of seminars given by David Gooding at Aughrim Gospel Hall, Castledawson, Co. Londonderry, N. Ireland in February 2010.

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Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast

BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: exo.070/bh

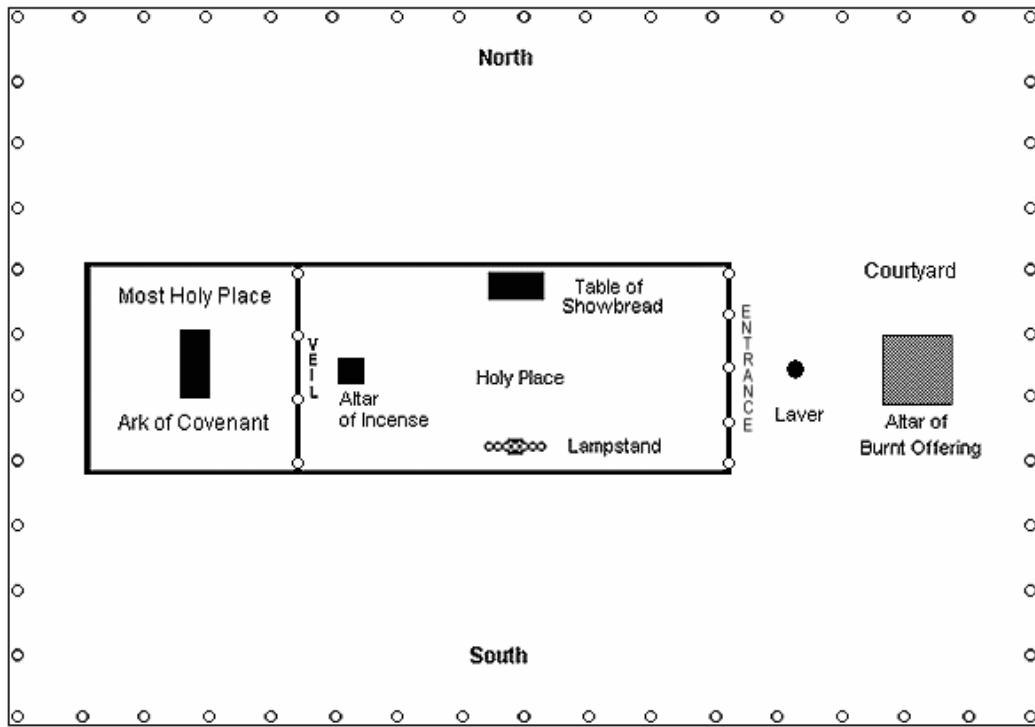


Diagram of the Tabernacle

The Altar

Cleansing by Blood

Moses built the original tabernacle at God's command some three thousand years ago. God gave him the prototype when Moses was with the Lord on the mountaintop. He was charged, 'See that you make them after the . . .'—it's a little difficult to be precise about the Greek and Hebrew here. It means a model, an architect's model, or something of the kind that God showed Moses on the mount and he was to make everything according to that model.

Some scholars have suggested that the tabernacle, as described in the book of Exodus and elsewhere in the Old Testament, never really existed. Sometimes children are taught this in their schools, in rather old-fashioned books on the topic. They tell us that if the tabernacle had been built like this it would have collapsed in no time, particularly when the curtains were fully spread over the top and the dust of the desert would settle in the middle. It would force the sides in and the whole thing would collapse. Therefore, it never did really exist and it was only a scheme thought up by whoever wrote Exodus.

That is a very old fashioned view, because we know from the remains in Egypt that one thousand years or more before Moses lived the pharaohs used portable pavilions, made in a similar fashion to this model of the tabernacle. Moses got his directions from God, but he was born and brought up in Egypt. Therefore, when it came to practical things, it is quite scientific, let alone anything else, to accept that the tabernacle described in the Old Testament was an actual historical reality. For those of you who want to study the Old Testament academically or at school, the book that I would strongly recommend to you is *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* by Professor K. A. Kitchen,¹ who was for many years professor of Egyptology in the University of Liverpool.

As I say, the building that we are about to consider in these two weeks was built over three thousand years ago, which raises the question in many people's minds, 'Why on earth should we bother to study that, if it is an ancient thing from so long ago?' The New Testament, as we shall many times observe, tells us that this tabernacle was designed by God to be, among other things, 'a shadow of the good things to come' (Heb 10:1). Those good things to come were of course the good things brought to us by our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son. The thoughtful amongst us will perhaps say, 'Why should we bother our heads about the shadows, when we now have the reality?' That's a very good question and I hope to answer it in the course of the talks.

¹ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

First of all, there is the obvious question: How do we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Then: What evidence is there for the story of the redemption he has provided by his death at Calvary and his resurrection and ascension into heaven? How do we know it's true? Among the evidence is this shadow, because you can then read the New Testament and compare what it says about our blessed Lord with the shadow and see if he fits. Where he and his ministry fit the shadow, here is evidence that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. God prepared in advance for his coming into our world by this elaborate shadow.

Let's take an analogy. If you found yourself in Red Square in Moscow and you were determined to see and photograph St. Basil's or St. Mark's Cathedral, or one of the particular churches that there are in that square; and suppose you arrived in the late evening and there were no guides about, nor anybody to tell you which was which. What you could do is to get out your guidebook, for you'd scarcely go there without one, and thumb it over until you come across a photograph that says underneath, 'St. Mark's' or 'St. Basil's Cathedral'. Now you would know at once that the thing on that bit of paper with some colours on it isn't actually St. Mark's Cathedral—it's a shadow of it. In the days when people used cameras of the older sort, they let the sun shine on the object, the rays came on a film and it made a shadow. So what you have in your guidebook is a shadow of what you are going to see. That would be very helpful. Among the many church spires that you will see from standing in Red Square, it will help you to recognise which is the cathedral that you are particularly interested in.

For us who live in this Christian age the tabernacle helps us by being a shadow to see and identify; and thus enjoy not only our Lord himself and the work he has done, but those glorious parts of salvation that are described in the New Testament and illustrated in the Old.

There's another thing that the shadow can do. If you were standing in Red Square in Moscow with your guidebook and you had found the cathedral that you wanted to photograph, then the guidebook would tell you, 'Look down to the right', for instance, 'you'll find Lenin's tomb.' You mightn't have remembered that and so you would have failed to look for Lenin's tomb, but the book told you to look for it. I suspect we shall come across that kind of situation with the study of the tabernacle.

Two types of cleansing

To start we shall concentrate on the first major vessel that stood in the court. It offered cleansing by blood from the guilt of sin. When eventually we come to the second major object in the court we shall find that it too offered cleansing, this time not by blood but by water. You might well say, 'Why should there be need of two types of cleansing?' Then the tabernacle will 'poke you in the ribs' and say, 'Wouldn't you be wise to ask whether the Christian gospel talks of two kinds of cleansing?' Well, yes, of course it does! You know the famous verse, 'The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). Perhaps you're saying to yourself, 'I'm happy to rest my soul for all eternity on that. I was a guilty sinner but Jesus died for me, his precious blood has bought my redemption and cleansed me from the guilt of my sin.'

So you don't need any other cleansing? I think you do, because the tabernacle is prompting us to think that the New Testament talks about both kinds of cleansing. 'The

blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.’ But then it is written in Ephesians 5:25–26 that ‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing [not of blood] of water.’ So the old institution of the tabernacle, in offering two types of cleansing, points us to the New Testament that likewise talks of two kinds of cleansing. It will start us thinking why we need two types of cleansing. If the blood of Christ has cleansed us from all sin, why should we need in addition this cleansing by water, whatever it is?

What made this tabernacle unique?

It’s good to be made to think! There were thousands of temples and shrines and high places around in the world when this tabernacle was first made—why should we study this one? One short answer is because this tabernacle, when it was made, was unique in all the Middle East (as far as we know, in the world). The other temples and shrines would have in them, or in front of them, an image of the god or goddess to which they were dedicated. In this tabernacle there was no image of the god whose earthly dwelling place it was and that was no accident. The ark, which is a vessel that we shall come across in the most holy place, was an elaborate and much adorned chest. In it were the two tables of the law and they proclaimed, ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath’ [for the purposes of bowing down to it] (Exod 20:4). God was imageless and in this Israel was unique.

From the time of Abraham onward many of the nations in that part of the world had long since lost their grip on the reality of the one true God. When men lose faith in the God of heaven they don’t start believing in nothing—that’s virtually impossible. I don’t know if you’ve tried to believe in nothing, it’s very difficult. It’s difficult for the obvious reason that we as human beings realise that we exist, but we didn’t make ourselves. We were born of our parents, but they didn’t make themselves. It raises the whole question of where we human beings come from and the Bible declares that we are created by God.

The ancient polytheist didn’t like that and, having lost his grip on the reality of the one true unseen God, he substituted his ideas and deified the forces of nature. What does that mean? Well, they started to worship the sun up in the sky, the sun god, and offer sacrifices to him, or the moon god, or the storm god, or the god of fertility, or the goddess of love. They turned those physical powers in the universe, the mere emotional powers of the human heart, and they deified them. Abraham, the first Hebrew, was raised up by God to be a protest to that kind of thing and to be a witness to the one true God. Then those tablets of the law that were housed inside the ark in the tabernacle stated that the authority behind the moral law is almighty God himself. That is very important.

Nowadays in many schools ethics is taught as a topic. Ethics is not a description of what people normally do, it is a prescription for what people ought to do. But if a schoolteacher or a parent is going to say to a teenager, ‘You shouldn’t do that, you should do this,’ the teenager is liable to reply, ‘Who said so?’

What is the authority behind ethics? The tabernacle made it very clear. *The Ten Commandments* explicitly say that God is the authority behind the moral and the spiritual law. That’s vastly important because, if I read aright the hearts of many of my fellow men and

women, the reason why they find atheism attractive is because if there's no God then there's not going to be a final judgment after death. The Bible says, 'It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement' (Heb 9:27). The atheists say, 'That's a lot of nonsense; it's all imagination, there is no God.' Why do they want that to be so?

Professor Richard Dawkins, a famous atheist, had it plastered on the London buses, 'There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life'—which is a somewhat comical concept. Why would he find the existence of God a worry? Why did he get into his head that if there's a God you couldn't enjoy yourself? Funny that, isn't it? But it's innate in the human heart because we are aware that we have often broken the moral law. If the authority for the moral law is God Almighty, then the moral law is almightily significant, and moral behaviour, or the breaking of the moral law, has consequences far beyond our little lifetime because after death we must meet God, who laid down the moral law, and there will be a final judgment. These are therefore important things.

A shadow of the good things to come

The title given to this series of lectures is *The Approach to God*. God was pleased to presence himself in the original tabernacle, in the centre of Israel as a nation, and God marked out for them the way to approach him in those far off days. First you came in the gate and there you would find the large altar called the bronze altar of sacrifice, where the animals were killed and their blood was shed. Then, coming straight in towards the presence of God, you would find the laver and that offered cleansing by water. If you entered then by the door, through the linen curtain, and followed the direct road in, you would come to the golden altar of incense. On the right hand side there was a table, called the table of shewbread, or the table of the bread of presence; and on the left there was a delightful piece of furniture called the lampstand. It was made to look like an almond tree, with roots at the bottom, six branches coming out of the side of the central trunk, with the almond motif put into the branches. The lamps themselves were made like almonds.

But these pieces stood on the sides. The immediate road in was first the big bronze altar, then the laver, the golden altar of incense, and then the veil. Inside the veil was the symbolic throne of God, a chest made of wood overlaid with gold. On top was a kind of lid, made from a solid piece of pure gold—no wood in that; cherubim from each end, made of one piece with that slab of gold, and they raised their wings shadowing the mercy seat. That was the symbolic throne of God. God said he would come and sit enthroned, so to speak, above the cherubim. So the direct road into God's presence was marked out by these special sacred vessels and finally into the very presence of God himself.

Not only was it marked by the vessels as a signpost might mark a road, the next thing we have to observe is that each of those vessels represented an experience. An experience of God—a personal entering into the provision that God had made whereby mortal men and women, sinful as we all are, could find the way to God through the provision that he had made. We are to use the rest of this lecture considering that first provision God made for Israel.

So, I'm going to read to you a passage of Scripture. 'For . . . the law has but a shadow of the good things to come' (Heb 10:1). That is the second purpose and significance that the

tabernacle had. In Hebrews 8:5 we have a description of the tabernacle; it is said to be 'a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.' So the tabernacle had two functions. It served as a copy and shadow of heavenly things—heavenly realities, eternal realities. In addition to serving Israel as a copy and shadow of heavenly things it also served for centuries as a shadow of the good things that were about to come through the advent of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ to our world.

When I was a boy, Queen Victoria was dead—just about, it's a long time ago! The schoolteachers had our good at heart, as all schoolteachers do. When they came to teach us arithmetic we started off with coloured bricks: a blue brick, a pink brick and a red brick. Gradually they got it across to our infant minds that there was one brick and two bricks and three bricks, $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$. I don't use bricks nowadays when I'm counting up my bills! They got the thing across by solid objects, whereas of course arithmetic is an abstract science—there's the wisdom of the schoolteacher.

God is like that. In the days of Israel's spiritual childhood God had the great eternal realities brought down to them in solid objects that they could see and handle and begin to get the spiritual ideas that lay behind them. Then God used those objects and that experience to lead Jews and others—Gentiles as well—through Christ to the great spiritual realities. They were shadows of the good things to come.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. (Heb 10:1-3)

God was dealing with Israel in the sacrifices of animals and they had constantly to repeat the sacrifice. So the writer says that they came diligently, many of them, convicted of their sins before God and seeking his forgiveness. They brought the prescribed animal sacrifice, laid their hand on its head and confessed their sinfulness. They killed the lamb or bullock, or whatever it was, and then the priest took it, dismembered it and put some of its parts or all of them on the altar. While they did it they felt happy about it and the priest maybe quoted to them the part of God's word that said they would be forgiven. But next year they felt the burden of sinfulness again and had to bring another sacrifice. That's what the Bible means when it says, 'those animal sacrifices could not make them perfect according to the conscience' (Heb 9:9). In those sacrifices there is the remembrance of sins every year, particularly on the great Day of Atonement. So those sacrifices were done away with.

Why did God invent them in the first place? Because, as the verse says, 'they were shadows of the good things to come,' they were illustrations of what Christ would do when he came. But why has God done away with them now? Because they could not give the worshipper complete forgiveness. Can Christ give us complete forgiveness? Yes! If you have to ask a question about that, do give heed to what the New Testament is saying and what the tabernacle will teach us.

That is the most glorious thing that Christ can do. When we come to Christ as sinful human beings, confess our sins to him and take him as our personal Saviour, he not only

forgives us for the time being, but God will guarantee, in the terms that we are about to read, that he'll never rake up our sins again in front of our face and impose the penalty on us. He has supplied his dear Son as Saviour to die for those sins and he has put away the guilt of all who trust him, permanently and forever. That is a wonderful thing when one grasps it. It is Number One on the road into the presence of God. Let me stress it again, if we would come and find access in this life into the presence of God—what the New Testament calls 'access by faith into this grace in which we stand' (Rom 5:2), then of course we come by Christ. And the first thing that God will expect us to do is to confess our sinfulness—that we could not save ourselves, nor pay the price of sin ourselves. But then to thank God that he has provided the sacrifice for our sins. That is the basis of God's complete forgiveness, both for now and forever.

That is so wonderful a thing that it's worth even studying the tabernacle to be reminded of it. Or, if we've never seen it before, to illustrate what the gospel is saying and how we can have peace with God both now and forever; a sense of acceptance with God, peace with him and a certainty of welcome in the home of his heaven.

So the writer is pointing out the enormous superiority of the sacrifice of Christ: 'For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Heb 10:4). We can all see a reason behind that, can't we? Why is it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins? Well, there's one thing about animals—they don't go to bed with a bad conscience! It is the glory of a human being and yet the tremendous burden, that we humans have a conscience. The Bible says that inside us all we know there's a God, even if we say we don't believe in him. We're conscious that we have broken the moral law. If God stands behind it, and one day we must meet God, how can we be sure that he will accept us?

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book."' When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (vv. 4–10)

We are told that in the Garden of Gethsemane Christ prayed to his Father. According to the Gospel by Mark (14:36), he said, 'Abba, Father', using the Aramaic word *abba*. Translated into English it means 'father', as a child would use of its father. 'Abba, Father . . . remove this cup from me . . .' In other words, he appealed to God by the very love of the Father for his Son. He added another plea, 'All things are within your power. Not only do you love me, but you have the power—remove this cup from me.'

Many a brave soldier, even today maybe, must lay down his life for his country. Why did Christ pray this earnest prayer? Because it was not merely a matter of dying, it was that he had to die for my sin. 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin' (2 Cor 5:21). The very thought of it made Christ sweat great drops, like drops of blood, falling to the ground.

The fearfulness, the awfulness of having to pay the price of the world's sin, brought forth from him that plea. But each time he said, 'Yet not what I will, but what you will' (Mark 14:36). When in fulfilment he hung upon a cross and 'the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa 53:6), then that will of God was perfectly done. And for all who in true repentance receive Christ as Saviour, 'by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Heb 10:10).

Then the paragraph ends with a lovely thought. It points to the contrast between Christ and those ancient Jewish priests. They had to stand daily at that altar offering sacrifices of animals and things, which in the end could not take away sins. 'And every [Jewish] priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins' (v. 11). You hear the drudgery of it, don't you, as I read it? They were only symbols, pointing forward to the great sacrifice of Christ, 'But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God' (v. 12). And we shout our individual *hallelujahs*. He has offered one sacrifice for sin forever and sat down. I point out and emphasise here that our Lord does not sit in heaven today offering his sacrifice. He offered the sacrifice at Calvary and having offered it he rose from the grave, ascended to heaven and sat down. He doesn't have to offer it again because, under its terms, all who believe have complete forgiveness.

How can we prove it? 'The Holy Spirit,' says the writer, 'bears witness of this very fact' (v. 15). The new covenant, which God promised to make with Israel, said, 'I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds.' Then it adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more' (vv. 16–17). Let's get hold of it; it will serve us well as we progress towards the presence of God in this tabernacle. The great assurance from God through the Holy Spirit, for all who trust the Saviour, is that God has said he will not remember their sins any more.

Now we must be careful to note what that doesn't mean. Some people hold it to be that, when God says he'll not remember our sins any more, God will forget our sins. Perhaps that is what you believe and if it is I'm loath to disturb your emotion. But let me tell you what I think it means. When we hear the choirs of heaven singing, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' (Rev 5:12), shall we nudge our fellow-citizen in heaven and say, 'Why was he slain?' Will you need to be told? I think you won't need to be told, will you? You will know precisely why he was slain; it was for your sins, among other things, and for mine. I say it reverently, as the choirs of heaven sing 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,' God won't find himself saying, 'Why was he slain?' Won't God know for all eternity why?

Then what does it mean? To bring a sin to remembrance is using Old Testament language. In a royal court there were various offices. There was a man in charge of the palace, a man in charge of the army, another in charge of the treasury and there was one who was called a recorder, or a remembrancer. He kept the books of people's deeds; good deeds and bad deeds. If a king like Ahasuerus couldn't sleep at night and he called for the remembrancer, the recorder, he had to come and open the book and start reading. He read how Joe Bloggs had done something wicked and J. B. Smith had done something even more

wicked, and so forth and so on. The emperor would say, 'Has he received suitable punishment?' 'No, your majesty.' 'Well then, get about it!' That's what it is to remember. It is to rake up the record of sins and when the record is read to punish those sins.

The gospel is so wonderful that it defies human language to describe it. That is precisely what God has promised never to do; he will never rake up their sins and iniquities against them any more and punish them for it. Why not? Because the punishment was borne by Christ! And because that is so, 'Where you've got forgiveness like that,' says the Old Testament (and the New Testament likewise), 'there is no longer any offering for sin' (v. 18).

Let me end with a little analogy. Here's a young couple—at least they were young when it all started. Mr and Mrs Smith are newly married and they've bought a house. They couldn't pay cash so they got a mortgage. They thought they could afford it, but as the days went by and the date came for paying the monthly mortgage it was a bit of a strain. When it was paid they felt marvellous relief. But as the next month came and then another one they had to keep paying the mortgage. They were paying it like that for thirty-five years. What a strain, constantly having to pay, but the time came when they paid the last monthly mortgage and the whole thing was paid off. Marvellous! As the next month comes to its end, Mrs Smith says to her husband, 'Now, don't you think, just to make sure, we ought to go and pay another instalment?' I don't think Mrs Smith would say anything so silly, do you? It's been paid—there's nothing more to be paid.

That is the glorious fact for all who trust Christ; you don't have to offer anything to get forgiveness. If you should ever come across somebody who feels it's necessary to join in offering God something to get forgiveness, you may be sure that he or she has not 'a conscience yet made perfect,' to use the term that the Bible uses. Once we see that Christ's death for us paid the penalty completely and there's nothing more for us to pay, we can have God's assurance, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more' (10:17).

Marvellous, isn't it? I trust we've all been by the cross of Christ, standing at that 'altar', and have had the experience of knowing that God has forgiven and accepted us and our pathway to him and to his heaven is clear, open and wide.

The Laver

Cleansing by Water

In our first session we observed that when God ordered Moses to make him a dwelling place amongst his people, God mapped out the road by which his people could come and approach him.

It was marked out by certain sacred vessels. There was first of all the very large bronze altar at which sacrifices were offered and the blood of animals shed so that God might forgive his people. The testimony of the Old Testament is that, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Regarding the great ceremonies on the Day of Atonement, God said, 'I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life' —by reason of the life that is thereby laid down (Lev 17:11).

Then, in the second place, comes this bronze laver that was filled with water.

If we follow the road right in we come, thirdly, to the golden altar of incense that stood immediately in front of the veil and thus immediately in front of the throne of God.

There were two other vessels in the first compartment; the one on the right hand being the table of the bread of presence and the one on the left hand being the golden lampstand. But as far as the road in towards the presence of God is concerned, these are standing on each side.

The main road is, first that altar, then the laver, then the golden altar of incense and behind the veil is the symbolic throne of God, the ark with its so-called mercy seat, its propitiatory—a slab of solid gold laid on top of the chest that formed God's throne and from the sides of the propitiatory the cherubim with their wings outstretched.

Two vessels that provided cleansing

So we noticed again in our first session that these two vessels in the court had something in common. They both provided cleansing. The altar provided cleansing by blood, the laver provided cleansing by water. And in our first session we noticed, therefore, the significance of that cleansing by blood: it pointed forward. In the words of Scripture, these were 'but a shadow of the good things to come.' That is, they were a shadow of the glorious blessings that would come with the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. These animal sacrifices were but symbols pointing forward to the great reality that was the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. Why did God go to that trouble?

I had five brothers and sisters and when we were children our parents gave us a toy sweet shop. Perhaps their hope was that it would keep us quiet on a wet Saturday afternoon!

Of course the girls were in charge of the shop and they dispensed the sweets. Then we were given toy money—it wasn't real money. So we had to come to the girls and order the sweets and pay the toy money. Even when I was an infant I knew the sweets weren't genuine; they tasted horrible if you tried to eat them. And I knew the money wasn't real money. But you see my parents were a little bit crafty, weren't they? They were teaching these infants, right from the earliest time onwards, that even sweets cost money, which served us in good stead when we grew up a little bit further and we had to deal with real sweets and real money.

In his mercy to the people of Israel in their spiritual infancy, God taught them the cost of sin. The shedding of the blood of animals was like the toy money; it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should put away sin. Animals know nothing of a bad conscience; it's we human beings that sometimes go to bed with a bad conscience. That is the glory and the burden of being human. So in the days of their spiritual infancy God was teaching his people the cost of sin, and in parable how the cost might be paid for.

It was fulfilled of course in the coming of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who with his assembled apostles around him chose to be remembered for all time in the form of bread and wine. And of the wine he said, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' (Mark 14:24). Thus we remember our Lord primarily as the one who gave his body and his blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Now we come to *the laver* and it provided cleansing by water. We can ask ourselves therefore, at the beginning of our study, why did there have to be two types of cleansing—cleansing by blood and cleansing by water? Our next immediate step of course is to ask ourselves whether the Christian gospel offers us two kinds of cleansing. Does it speak of cleansing by blood and then of cleansing by water? The answer is, yes it does indeed.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb 9:11–14)

We notice at once how, in the language of the New Testament, the blood of Christ is said to cleanse our conscience. That is its function. Where the conscience still functions, when we sin against God our conscience registers guilt. But sometimes the conscience doesn't work. I have an alarm clock and very often it goes off too early in the morning. I reach out my hand and punch it. That stops it! But if you do that too often it no longer functions. If we try to suppress our consciences, then the danger is they will stop functioning. How can we remove the guilt of sin? Not by pretending that sin does not matter. God has a provision for cleansing our conscience from guilt and that is the precious blood of Christ.

That works simply in this fashion. When we sin and our conscience registers guilt, we realise that if that guilt is not cleared we must one day face the penalty of the sin that has incurred that guilt. That can worry us, but the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience from guilt: 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor 15:3). He bore the guilt of our sin as though it were his own—'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,' says the New Testament (2 Cor 5:21). The penalty having been paid, for those who trust Christ there is no more penalty to pay. Thank God for the wonder of it! To put it in New Testament language, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1).

So then, through the blood of Christ we have cleansing of the conscience from guilt. Why do we need any further cleansing? The cleansing by water that the New Testament speaks of is to be found, for instance, in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Paul is in process of urging Christian husbands to love their wives and the standard he holds up to them is the standard of Christ's love for the church:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25–27)

So here we have it explicitly said that for us there is God's provision of cleansing by water. But this time it is not for cleansing the conscience from the guilt of sin; it is for cleansing our personalities from what the Bible here calls 'spots and wrinkles and any such things,' which I want to suggest are defects in our personalities and characters. There's a difference between guilt and wrinkles and carbuncles.

You see, here's a good man and he's just bought a new car. He now has two cars. Being a gentleman he goes to work in the old one and his wife is given the new one. She goes down town, and you know what cars are—they have a mind of their own! It bashes into some other car and bumps the side of the new car very badly. So she comes home and cooks him a very good dinner. Then, when she thinks the time is right, she spills the beans!

She says, 'You know, I was down town this afternoon.'

'You were?'

'Yes, and I saw my friend Phyllis and while I was talking to her a stationary car in front reversed somehow and hit the side of our new car!'

Her husband says, 'You're not telling me you've bashed up the new car?'

At first he's irate, but he sees the tears are coming and she needs mercy. He relents and says, 'Never mind, you weren't hurt, were you?'

'No.'

'Well now, it's only a bit of iron and I'll pay the bill, dear.'

What a nice chap he is! He forgives her the guilt of having bashed the car up.

Some months later he's at breakfast and reading the paper, but happens to look over the top of it and sees his wife.

He says, 'My dear, what is that on your cheek? It looks to be inflamed somewhat. Is it a nasty carbuncle or something?'

Then what does he say?

‘Well never mind, I forgive you’?

Of course not: you don’t forgive carbuncles! What does he do then?

He says, ‘I must get you to a consultant right away, to remove this unsightly blotch upon your beautiful face!’

Two different things: he forgives the guilt of having bashed the car up. He doesn’t forgive the wrinkle and the carbuncle, but in his love and devotion he seeks to get the medical advice that will remove the blotches and blemishes.

There are two sides to our salvation. There’s the blood of Christ that removes the guilt from our hearts and consciences. There are these other things—and we don’t necessarily need to look in a mirror to see them—these blots and wrinkles and blemishes, defects in our personalities and characters. We are too selfish, too critical, liable to lose our temper all too quickly; without compassion, without fellow feeling, enjoying a bit of gossip. All those unpleasant and sometimes ugly things that stem out of our imperfect personalities and characters. Blots and blemishes. As people say, ‘He’s a very nice man, but . . . ’! Does it matter? If the guilt of our sin has been put away and we’re guaranteed that there’s no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, do these defects in our personalities and character matter? Of course they do.

We are told in these heart-moving verses that Christ, in his sheer love for his bride—the church of Christian people—gave himself for the cleansing away of these spots and blemishes and wrinkles, so that eventually he may present the church to himself, an all glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

What has the washing by water got to do with it? Let’s do a little research and first of all read the Old Testament Scriptures about the laver and see what its position was and what its use was.

You shall set the altar of burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and place the basin [laver] between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. (Exod 40:6–7)

It stood between the door and the altar. That will become important when we now think of its usages. In Exodus 29:4 we have the instructions for the induction of the priests. ‘You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.’ That is, to bathe them all over. Why at that position? Because that’s where the laver with its water stood. It had its use therefore, for the bathing all over of the priests at their induction. We may call that the once-and-for-all bathing in water.

The LORD said to Moses, ‘You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.’ (Exod 30:17–21)

So now we have noticed two things about that laver and its water. For the priests there was a once-for-all bathing all over at the laver on the occasion of their induction. That never needed to be repeated ceremonially. But over against that once-and-for-all bathing there was a constant rinsing of hands and feet whenever they drew near to minister to the Lord, or whenever they came to the altar to offer sacrifice to the Lord. Their hands and feet had to be washed constantly. That too was ‘a shadow of the good things to come.’

I’m now going to quote you directly from the New Testament, from a lesson that our Lord Jesus taught his apostles in the upper room just before he went to die for them on the cross at Calvary.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it round his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped round him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ Jesus answered him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’ (John 13:3–11)

The thing that might immediately strike us as we read that passage is that it recalls what happened at the laver. There was the once-and-for-all washing all over in water, followed thereafter by a constant rinsing of hands and feet whenever they came to minister to God. Here is our Lord using the very same metaphor. He talks about a bathing-all-over that need not be repeated. But then he talks about a constant washing of the feet that does need to be repeated.

So what does that all mean? I’m grateful for Peter because he made his mistakes. I could very well have made the same mistakes myself. When the Lord came to rinse his disciples’ feet, Peter objected. Good old Peter! I could wish all the others had objected too. To think of the Lord washing his feet—that was the job of a slave to do.

‘You’ll never wash my feet,’ says he.

Said our Lord, ‘If I don’t wash you, you have no part with me.’

That sounds very solemn. We shall have to think what it means in a moment. Then Peter, being Peter—he could never do things by halves—he went to the other extreme.

‘Well Lord, if that’s so, not just my feet but all over!’

I like his enthusiasm. How could you not be enthusiastic in the presence of Christ and in the presence of his great salvation?

So Peter says, ‘Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head’ (v. 9).

‘Slow down, Peter,’ our Lord says—“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet” (v. 10).

The commentators of the Bible help us here. They point out the customs that were in those times. If a rich man down the street invited you to evening dinner, you had a bath

before you went of course; not to offend either him or the fellow guests. Then, having bathed and put your decent suit on, you walked down the street to the rich man's house. In the course of walking down the path in your sandals, the sand would collect around your feet and irritate your toes. When therefore you arrived at the door of the rich man's house you would find a slave there. His task, appointed by the master, was to rinse your feet. Not to bathe you all over again, but to rinse your feet. It is that kind of metaphor that our Lord is talking about, and pointing out the wonderful fact that this washing by water has two functions in a believer's life. There is the bathing-all-over that never needs to be repeated; then there is the constant rinsing and washing of the feet that needs to be constantly repeated.

Perhaps you're saying, 'We wish our lecturer would talk in plain, straightforward language. What on earth is this bathing-all-over that never needs to be repeated?' Well, I'm going to cite you an actual case.

Paul the apostle is writing to Titus who was working in Crete and he's telling Titus what happened when he got converted. He and Paul had both evangelised in Crete and Paul had left Titus behind to appoint elders in each of the churches they had founded. The Christians in Crete at that time were difficult characters. One of their own poets had said, 'Cretans are always liars' (1:12). They would promise to take a Sunday School class for you; promise most faithfully and then not turn up. How do you run a church like that? They're 'always liars, evil beasts'—they would tear your character to pieces by their gossip. What else were they? Gluttonous: 'slow bellies,' says the Authorised Version. That is, they took everything they could get and gave nothing. Difficult characters, weren't they? I hasten to add that Christians in Crete nowadays are not like that, or not all like that. I had some very dear friends in Crete and they were marvellous believers. This was first generation, converted from paganism.

What about these defects in their characters? What practical provision has the Lord made for dealing with these personality defects, both in the Cretans and of course in us? Let's read what Paul says to Titus:

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy towards all people. (3:1-2)

You might think that's a tall order for Cretans! I met a gentleman when I was in Crete, up in the mountains. His wife had got converted. In those days Cretan gentlemen wore a funny kind of trousers, the seat of which hung down almost to the ground—I can't explain the tailor style! They had a big sash around their waist and in the middle was a *machera*, a dagger. And they knew how to use it! When his wife got converted he vowed to kill her. Mercifully he was taken ill before he got the chance and was taken down to Heraklion and the believers there visited him in the hospital and were kind to him. He subsequently came to faith in Christ and I saw him now tamed and in his right mind. How did it happen? What is God's answer?

Paul says to Titus. 'For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another' (3:3). He is telling Titus, 'Don't act as if you were superior, Titus. We preachers ourselves had our defects.' What did God do with them? 'But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done

by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.’ He saved us through *the blood of Christ*? It doesn’t say so here, because Paul is not dealing with the guilt of sin, he’s dealing with personality defects. Now let us listen particularly well—‘but according to his own mercy he saved us—*through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour’ (vv. 4–6).

God has made provision, not merely for the cleansing of our guilt by the blood of Christ; he’s made provision for dealing with our personality defects. How? This is something to praise God for. Not by saying, ‘You’re saved, you’re forgiven and you’re ready for heaven. Now try your hardest to improve.’ No, no!

‘Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit’ (v. 5). New life—nothing short of it! That once-and-for-all washing performed by the Holy Spirit, ‘whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour’ (v. 6). Did you notice the metaphor, ‘he *poured out* on us’? This is the great work of regeneration performed for a repentant believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; the bestowal of God’s Holy Spirit, the work of regeneration.

The necessity of the new birth

I’m not preaching you anything new, I trust, nor subversive; for you will all remember now what our Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus. ‘Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (John 3:3). Nicodemus didn’t understand it. ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ (v. 4). It didn’t make sense to him. Our Lord asked him, ‘Are you the teacher in Israel, *the* Rabbi concerned with teaching Israel and you don’t know these things?’ (v. 10). ‘Except a man be born of water and the spirit’ (v. 5)—how should Nicodemus have known about that? Well, he was a Rabbi and knew his Old Testament like the back of his hand. Then why hadn’t he taken notice of those great chapters in Ezekiel where God prophesies the restoration of the nation of Israel?

In chapter 37 he likens them to bones of men and women that are long since dead, cast out on the earth. How should they be revived? According to that prophecy the first thing is that God was going to sprinkle water upon them to cleanse them. Obviously that is a metaphor—it’s nothing to do with Christian baptism. God was going to sprinkle water, metaphorically, on these hosts of dead bones and clean them. That still left them dead. There was something more to be done, not just cleansing them. Then the prophet is told to prophesy to the wind, to the Spirit—to the *ruach*, which in Hebrew can mean a wind, or the Spirit of God. It was not enough to cleanse dead, unclean bones; they needed new life and God summoned the Holy Spirit to come and give these dead people new life.

That is the wonder of the miracle of the gospel. Cleansed from the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ, but not now ‘do your best to live a holy life’—not to start with at any rate. It is the wonderful gift of God, being born again, regenerated by water and the Spirit. Nicodemus should have known it, for that’s what God said through Ezekiel. Now he’s being taught it face to face with our Lord.

Let’s use an illustration. Say I’ve got a dear friend and unfortunately he’s dead. He died some years ago, but I valued him and I think I’d like to see him living again! So I get permission and dig up and exhume his bones. Just bones, they’re all mixed up with the dirt in

which he was buried and the old worms have got at him. I say to myself, 'He shouldn't look like that! I'll wash him, clean his old bones.' So I wash the bones. Is that enough? No, of course not! If you want new life I can tell you how to get it. Leave him down there, take an acorn and put it in his grave. When it grows up out of the very grave itself, there is new life where there was nothing but death before.

That is a clumsy parable of what Christ does for us. By his Spirit he brings us to see the uncleanness of our sins and our ways and brings us to repentance over it. But thank God he doesn't leave us there. The wonder is that Christ gives us his Holy Spirit to produce new life within us, life of the children of God. That is a once-and-for-all experience and thousands of preachers have preached on it, so you won't mind if I spend a half a minute preaching on it myself!

Have we been regenerated, born again and received the Spirit of God? Have we that new life, of which the Saviour spoke, by forgiveness of sins? It is a free gift to everyone who repents and trusts the Saviour. Whether he or she knows it or not, God begins to plant in them the new life that they have in Christ and it never needs to be repeated. This is the bathing-all-over.

In applying his parable for Peter and the rest, our Lord distinguished between the bathing all over that needs not to be repeated and the rinsing, the washing, of the feet. So in his enthusiasm when Peter eventually said, 'Lord, not my feet only but my hands and my head!' our Lord gently corrected him. 'You don't need that, Peter. Now you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you.' That, incidentally, is how we get God's Holy Spirit in the first place; we are 'born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God' (1 Pet 1:23). But then our Lord insisted that, in addition to the once-and-for-all bathing that needs not to be repeated, Peter like the rest of us would need the constant washing of his feet. Because, as the preachers put it, as we walk in this world we can't avoid having contact with it. Sometimes our minds and then our actions become dirtied and as believers we need to let the Lord do his work with us, to wash away the unpleasant, unclean things—the wrinkles, the carbuncles, the pimples and all the other weaknesses in our personalities.

That is a long-term business. We shall still need it until we get home to glory, but it's something that our Lord, in his sheer devotion to us, has promised to do. He loves the church and gave himself for her, that he might cleanse her by the washing of water through the word so that eventually he might present the church to himself, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. What a marvellous prospect it is; do let your mind dwell on it.

One of these days the Saviour, in all his rightful glory (and I nearly said pride), shall present the redeemed to his Father with exceeding joy. I wonder whether the Father will say to him, 'Where did you get this bunch of people from?' I can almost hear him saying, 'I got them from a place called Aughrim.' The vast multitude of the redeemed won't know where Aughrim was or is, but never mind! You will be part of the bride that Christ shall present to the Father without any spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Why is the constant rinsing, the washing of the feet, important? Well, as our Lord observed to Peter, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share. . . .' Now notice exactly the preposition he uses. He doesn't say, 'you have no share *in* me'. He says, 'you have no share

with me'. With him in what? In his work of evangelising the lost; in his work of tending the redeemed.

You know what young boys are like—they will play football on the road. They stand up against my laurel hedge that I have tended with great care over the years, and if the one that's supposed to be in goal doesn't catch the ball it goes right through my hedge, breaks the whole thing down and I boil inside! In that moment, suppose I saw their parents coming and I say to them, 'Look here! I'm tired of these brats of yours destroying my hedge!' I carry on a bit more like that and just as they're going away in disgust I say, 'O, we've got some special gospel meetings on at our church, would you like to come?' What do you suppose they would say? If as a businessman I've done a sharp deal with them, how can I sincerely invite them to hear the gospel? Would they even come?

Says Christ, 'If you don't let me begin to cope with those defects, then you will have no share with me in my work of seeking the lost and tending the redeemed (or it will be limited).' That's what is at stake.

To sum up these two vessels in the court, the first two vessels on the road into the presence of God both offer cleansing. The altar—cleansing by blood—the foreshadowing of the blood of Christ, which cleanses our conscience from the guilt of sin. The laver—standing first of all for the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit when we are born again and our bodies are 'bathed with pure water'—a bathing that never needs to be repeated. And then the constant use of his word by his gracious Spirit in our lives, as we take Christ seriously and seek to face our particular difficulties of behaviour, character and personality. We seek by his grace, not necessarily for some lightning cure overnight; but by the grace of the Holy Spirit to develop self-control and lose some of our wrinkles and spots and blemishes.

Lest you should think I have made all this up, I think you will accept the authority of what I'm about to read to you now.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places *by the blood of Jesus*, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with *our hearts sprinkled* clean from an evil conscience and *our bodies washed with pure water*. (Heb 10:19–22)

It is the same word as our Lord used in John chapter 13; the cleansing and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

This is no new doctrine. We have an ancient hymn that runs like this,

Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin *the double cure*,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.²

—that is, by the blood of Christ and by God's Holy Spirit.

² Augustus M. Toplady (1740–78), 'Rock of ages cleft for me'.

My time is gone, but I can't resist telling you a secret. Well, it's not so much of a secret, but I speak of something that goes quite beyond me! The laver was made of bronze—where did Moses get the bronze from to make it? The book of Exodus tells us he made it from the mirrors of the women who served at the tabernacle. They didn't have glass mirrors; theirs were made of bronze and beaten as best they could, but they were inclined to distort the face somewhat. The mirrors were important for the ladies, and for gentlemen too, particularly when they shave. Mirrors were expensive and the women surrendered this means of bodily beauty for spiritual sanctification. (That's not to say that Christian women or Christian men should look frumpy!)

God help us to get our proportions in life well balanced. In view of the Saviour's earnest expectation to present us without blemish, spot or wrinkle, with exceeding joy before the Father, let us see life in its true proportions and put the greatest emphasis on our progress in spiritual holiness.

The Golden Altar of Incense

There are many ways of looking at this tabernacle and it is quite impossible in the limit of a few lectures to cover them all. The overall title therefore that we have given to this particular set of lectures is *The Approach to God*. We've noticed that, when God ordered Moses to make this tabernacle so that he might dwell among his people, God marked out the approach towards his presence by having various sacred vessels stationed along that road.

There was in the first place the big bronze altar at which sacrifices were offered and the blood of animals was shed. After that, and before the door of the tabernacle, there was the laver, which was filled with water. When you came through the door there were two articles of furniture, one on the right hand side and the other on the left. For the moment we shall ignore them and come straight on the road that leads us in towards the presence of God. In front of us there is *the veil*. It is sometimes called the 'second veil' in Scripture, to distinguish it from the curtain that hung at the front. But in the Hebrew the language that describes that curtain is different from the term that is used to describe what we call nowadays *the veil* that hung there to hide the presence of God. This first part of the tabernacle, called in Scripture the 'first tabernacle', was the holy place. After that veil was the most holy place of the immediate presence of God. In there was God's symbolic throne, the ark, with the so-called mercy seat—the propitiatory—as a lid upon it, with the cherubim coming from both ends of that propitiatory.

We are to follow the road in once more. So far we have noticed that these sacred vessels were not merely road-markers. For those who took them seriously, each of them involved an experience of the actual provision that God had made for humans to come and approach his presence. In our first two studies we observed that the altar and the laver both offered cleansing. The altar offered cleansing by blood; the laver offered cleansing by water. And we have been busy these past two lectures in thinking what their application is for us, because the New Testament tells us that the ancient tabernacle had two functions. For Israelites living in those days it was '*a copy and shadow of the heavenly things*' (Heb 8:5). In the days of Israel's spiritual infancy it was God in his mercy bringing down the great eternal truths of heaven in symbols that they could begin to understand.

Then the New Testament says that, in addition to being a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, the tabernacle served another function. It was '*a shadow of the good things to come*' (Heb 10:1). For when God gave Moses the plan of this building, God of course had already in mind the great reality of which this was but a faint picture and parable. It was a

shadow of the good things that will be brought to us by the birth, the person and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

So, in these past two lectures, we have observed what in the Christian gospel corresponds to that altar, for the altar offered cleansing by blood. It is a faint picture, a foreshadowing of the cleansing that our blessed Lord offers to us—‘The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7). Then Scripture defines what is meant by that cleansing. ‘How much more will the blood of Christ . . . purify our conscience from dead works’ (Heb 9:14). It cleanses our conscience from the guilt of the sins that we have committed. Not as a sort of a washing; it is a legal concept. When we have sinned, our conscience registers our guilt and we know that we deserve the indignation of God against our sin. The blood of Christ can cleanse our conscience from the guilt of our sin by pointing us to our Lord’s death at Calvary. He died that we might be forgiven; his death was not just a martyr’s death, he died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6). He ‘bore our sins in his body on the tree’ (1 Pet 2:24); and suffered the wrath of a thrice-holy God for our sin. When we come to Christ, repenting of sin and receiving him as Saviour, God counts his death as paying for the guilt of our sin and our conscience finds relief and cleansing.

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.³

The blood cleanses therefore from the guilt of sin. But we noticed and we emphasised it to ourselves, that the laver offered cleansing by water. Originally the priests who served this tabernacle, when they were inducted, were brought to the door and bathed all over in the water supplied by the laver. That was a once-and-for-all bathing in water. Of course, they privately bathed in their bathrooms if they had any. Here we’re talking about ceremonial washings and bathing. At their induction they were bathed all over once-and-for-all. Whenever they came to minister in the holy place, or to attend those sacred vessels, then they had to rinse their hands and feet at the laver, so that was a constant application of the cleansing water.

We reminded ourselves again how that our Lord preached his apostles a lesson and illustrated it by a practical gesture in the Upper Room before he died (John 13). As they sat at meat he divested himself of his outer garments, girded himself with a towel, filled a basin with water and began to wash his apostles’ feet. When he came to Peter, Peter at first protested,

‘You’ll never wash my feet!’

But our Lord said, ‘Peter, if I don’t wash you, you have no share with me.’

Then Peter went to the other extreme and said, ‘If that be so, Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head and all over!’

³ Robert Lowry (1826–99), ‘What can wash away my stain?’

‘Now, calm down,’ said Christ. ‘He that has been bathed all over needs not except to rinse his feet, but is otherwise completely clean. And you are clean through the word that I have spoken to you.’

Thus did our Lord sum up what is to be the experience of every believer. There is the bathing-all-over in water—that is where we begin. ‘Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain . . .’ (Heb 10:19–20)—this is the basis of our welcome into the presence of God—‘Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water’ (v. 22). I would like to pose the question and ask you when it happened to you. I can’t do that publicly, of course. But I’d still like to ask the question: ‘When were you bathed all over?’

What is it talking about? It’s talking about what Paul mentions in his letter to Titus, ‘We were ugly in our personalities, but when the mercy of God appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us, *by the washing of regeneration*, and the renewal of the Holy Spirit’ (3:3–5). That’s the wonder of God’s great salvation. It not only deals with the guilt of sin, it deals also with the defects of our personalities. And its answer to them is, first and foremost, not by our striving to correct ourselves—not by works done in righteousness, which we ourselves have done—but by the washing of regeneration.

Perhaps you’d prefer the doctrine expressed in the words of John chapter 3. That might even be more usual to you, so let’s hear what our Lord said to Nicodemus. ‘Unless one is born of water and the Spirit . . .’ (v. 5). When Nicodemus protested that he couldn’t understand it, our Lord gently chided him: ‘Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?’ (v. 10). Where does the Old Testament talk about it? It’s in the prophecy of Ezekiel about the restoration of Israel. God said, ‘I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean’ (36:25). Then the prophet saw a valley of dry bones; the dry bones were filthy and, being cleansed, were still lifeless. Then the prophet in God’s name spoke to the wind—the Spirit, the *ruach*—and his mighty divine wind assembled the bones and put life into the bodies. Thus will Israel one day be restored and our Lord was citing it to Nicodemus.

All of us have to be not only pardoned for the guilt of our sin, we have to be ‘born again’, regenerated. It’s not an arduous task we have to attain to—it’s a glorious gift of the gospel! We can be given new life by the Saviour. Cleansing, new life, ‘born again’—that never-to-be-repeated experience at the beginning of our Christian life. As our Lord pointed out, thereafter we need constantly to ‘wash our feet’—a symbol, of course, of the fact that living in this Godless world we are defiled by it. Very often we allow our defects of personality to get the mastery of us. We speak unadvisedly and we show the un-pretty sides of our personalities. We need to be cleansed; I certainly constantly need it and all believers need it.

The Golden Altar of Incense

We continue now on that direct road of approach and come through the door to the little sacred vessel called the golden altar of incense.

So let us read now the Old Testament description of that altar:

You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and round its sides and its horns. And you shall make a moulding of gold round it. And you shall make two golden rings for it. Under its moulding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations. You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD. (Exod 30:1–10)

Let us notice just one or two things about the directions given here. On the four corners at the top there were horns, four horns projecting from the four corners. They are significant because in Hebrew emblemology they speak of the power of this altar. Once in the year, at the great festival of the atonement, Aaron was allowed to go into the immediate presence of God. As he retired from the most holy place and came back into the holy place, he had first to stop at the incense altar. He had to smear the four horns of the altar with the blood of atonement—the blood of propitiation. The combination, therefore, of the horns and the blood of the atonement on those horns will give us the secret of the power of this altar and the intercessions thereon.

When the God of heaven graciously deigned to presence himself in the *Shekinah* glory over the ark in the most holy place (being enthroned, as the Old Testament put it, above the cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark) he provided for ordinary men of flesh and blood to come and talk to him. As the high priest came to plead for the people, he could suggest to God that he should do this, or that, or the next thing. What a staggering exhibition of the grace of the Creator of the whole universe.

It remains true to this very present day. A little child can kneel at his or her bedside prayers and the God of heaven, the Creator of the whole universe, will bend his ear to listen to the suggestions and the pleas of a little child. The New Testament likewise, in using the symbolism of this altar, encourages believers to pray for bigger things than the child would know to ask for; we can come and make suggestions to the living God. You'd think our prayer meetings would be overcrowded, wouldn't you! When Israel prayed they had to offer incense so that their prayers came up within the incense. When we pray to God nowadays we

don't have to offer incense—or we shouldn't anyway. What is it that gives our prayers their value, their audience with the God of heaven? *We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*. That name never loses its fragrance or its power to move the very heart of God.

Our Lord's present ministry

So I want to concentrate on this symbol as a foreshadowing of the good things that have come by Christ; and I'm going to take it as a shadow of our Lord's present ministry of prayer. I'm aware that I shall overlook a lot of significant things in the course of Israel's history that were shadows of the good things to come.

First we have to think a little bit about history. In the regulations that we read in Exodus chapter 30, did you notice there was no reference to prayer at all? It was simply that Aaron had to come evening and morning to burn incense before the Lord. He had to do it especially when he cleansed the lamps in the morning and when he dressed them in the evening. The habit grew up in Israel to associate this altar with prayer, for this simple reason that the incense had to be burned morning and evening. Outside in the court, with the people around, the morning sacrifice had to be offered on the behalf of the nation every day without exception. It was the continual burnt offering, the *tamid*. And similarly in the evening the people would come in their throngs; they would pray of course, as well as sing their praises to God. So in Israel's mind the offering of the incense upon the altar came to be associated with the occupation of prayer.

John the Baptist's father was a priest. He'd been married for several years, but he and his wife were childless and now they were very old. Doubtless they had prayed many a time that God would give them a child but nothing had happened. Zechariah was on duty this particular morning and he had been chosen as the priest to come in and burn the incense on the altar. As he burned it, an angel of the Lord appeared and said to him, 'Your prayer has been heard' (Luke 1:13). Not only his prayer for the people in general, but his lifelong prayer that God would give them a son. Which tells us that God stores up our prayers, even those he doesn't immediately answer; so we have the right therefore, to take this incense altar as a foreshadowing of our Lord's priestly activity of interceding and praying for his people.

I propose now to examine a number of passages in the New Testament that talk about our Lord's intercession. Before we are finished we shall see quite clearly that it is part of our very salvation.

There is a very famous verse, 'Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb 7:25)—I should be a very unwise man if I thought that I could be completely saved without the intercession of Christ. *'He always lives to make intercession for us.'* Let us mark how important this matter is. Why does he need to do it? 'He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.' Prepare your hearts to start rejoicing, for these are most glorious things! Our Lord's intercession is an integral part of our salvation and is quoted in the New Testament as being part of the solid foundation. We may know ourselves accepted by God and shall never be rejected by him.

As Paul comes to the climax of his exposition of the gospel in Romans chapter 8 he says, 'What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?' (v. 31). If God Almighty is for us, who shall dare oppose him? Who then can be against us, when God is for us?

Then the logic of Calvary, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (v. 32). A question of logical proportions; if he gave the utmost in giving us his Son, how would it be logical for him not to give us all things in addition?

'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies' (v. 33). If God has given the sentence, *justified*, on everyone who believes in Jesus, who will have the impertinence or the power to contradict God and lay a charge, when it is God who justifies?

'Who is to condemn?' (v. 34). Suppose someone did have the boldness to contradict God and, in spite of God's justifying us, brought a charge against us and appeared to prove it. Then who would condemn us? The jury may convict a prisoner in the criminal courts of some grievous offence, but it's not left to the jury or the prosecution to set the sentence. That is for the judge to do. But suppose a charge was laid against us, 'Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us' (v. 34).

His enduring priesthood

Isn't it a glorious picture—if it is indeed picture language? We can almost hear the charge laid out, as our hymn says, 'I know them well, and thousands more.' It is easily proved against us, but who shall rise up and pronounce the condemnation? You say, 'That's God's thing to do.' But wait a minute! Our Lord has told us that 'the Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son' (John 5:22). Should you see the judge on the great white throne, it will be our blessed Lord. Who shall condemn those that have put their trust in Christ, when it is the judge himself who died for us? 'More than that, who was raised' (Rom 8:34). He constantly makes intercession for us. Who shall shout him down? It is an integral part of the certainty of our acceptance with God and the assurance of God's heaven at last.

But then Hebrews chapter 7 has things to add to this:

And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest for ever."' This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. (vv. 20–22)

What that involves is then explained to us; 'Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (v. 25). We notice the exact term. Elsewhere it is said that our Lord is the *mediator* of the new covenant, and thank God he is. But this place tells us he is the *surety*, not just the mediator. He is the surety, the guarantee—the *guarantor* in fact—of this new covenant.

Let me try and illustrate it to you. I'm no man of business, as you will see. But I've got my eye on a field and I can see possibilities in it, so I get myself down to the bank manager. I put my scheme before him and I say,

'Now there is this plot of land and I propose to buy it. Then I'm going to erect some very good, stylish upgrade apartments and you can get a lot of money for them. So I want you to lend me the money.'

He says, 'Yes, it may be a good scheme; we'll have to investigate that. You think it will cost about 10 million or so? Now what sort of *collateral* have you got?'

I reply, 'I don't quite know what you mean—what is this collateral thing?'

'Well, what resources have you got, so if your scheme went bust the bank could get hold of your resources and pay themselves back the money?'

'Well, I haven't got a lot. Of course I've got a decent wage.'

'Have you any relative that's got some money then?'

'Well my dad is quite rich.'

'Oh yes? What has he got?'

'Well, he has £2, 000 in the Post Office Savings Bank.'

'That's very good,' says the bank manager, 'but that won't do as collateral for your scheme!' What the bank manager is looking for is someone that can go surety for it, that if the thing collapses he can afford to pay.

God has a scheme. It's a scheme for getting the likes of me and ten million, million times more sinful humans and bringing them home to Glory and conforming them to the image of his dear Son. What a scheme it is! What happens if it goes wrong? Who is going to stand the cost of the covenant? Well this is the magnificent thing; our blessed Lord has not only mediated the covenant, he has become the surety of the covenant and is prepared to pay the expenses all the way through.

The trouble with my father was that, not only did he not have enough money to satisfy the bank manager—but he went and died! He's gone and all sorts of people claimed his riches.

Israel's priests, however well-intentioned they were, died and passed away (Heb 7:23). But *this one*—he has an enduring priesthood. He lives by the power of an endless life and he can afford to be the surety of the covenant that will bring us home to Glory, because he ever lives. And now we come to our subject again—'he always lives to make intercession for them' (v. 25). He is the guarantor that the gracious promises of the new covenant that God has made shall be fulfilled. O that I could hear him making intercession for me!

You say, 'Yes, that's all very well, but you seem to paint too rosy a picture. What if, as a believer, I'm tempted?' Well, God has the answer to that. Hebrews chapter 2 tells us that our great high priest who makes intercession for us was *tempted in all points as we are*, without sinning of course. He knows what it feels like to be tempted and has endured temptation more than us because he never gave in. 'He is able to help those who are being tempted' (v. 18), because he was tempted himself and God has appointed him to become a faithful and merciful high priest.

But when I'm tempted and sometimes I give in, what happens to my salvation then? First John 2:1 gives us the answer, 'My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.'—'Don't get me wrong,' says John, 'this is not a liberty to sin, to go on sinning and it doesn't matter; I'm writing these things so that you should not sin.'—'But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Some people make a distinction between the language of Hebrews that talks of Christ as *high priest* and the language here that talks of him as *advocate*, and deduce various things from it. We shall not do that tonight; we haven't the time and it amounts to the same thing anyway.

What happens if a believer sins? We have an advocate with the Father to plead our cause. As the high priest of Israel prayed for his people, so this advocate prays for us, if and when we sin—'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' Notice the significance of the term here; he doesn't need to pretend that we're better than we are. He can admit the sins we've done, as black as they may be, and admit them for what they are. He is 'Jesus Christ the righteous.' His advocacy is based on what?—'He is the *propitiation* for our sins' (v. 2).

Propitiation

Please notice that word; it's a highly technical word and I must stop and try to explain it. This is the word you would use of the sacrifices on the great Day of Atonement, recorded in Leviticus chapter 16. Once a year the nation came and they confessed their sins before God and sacrifices were offered. The high priest took the blood into the most holy place and sprinkled it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. Then, when he turned round, he came out through the veil, stopped for a moment at the incense altar and took the blood of propitiation and smeared it on the horns of the altar. You will remember the earlier suggestion, the horns tell us of the power of the altar. The horns smeared with blood tell us of the power of the intercession, based on propitiation.

What does *propitiation* mean? To put it simply, propitiation is that part of the work of Christ done at Calvary that answers to the indignation of God against our sin and satisfies it. God can then forgive and accept us; it is described vividly in Leviticus 16. The blood of propitiation was to cleanse the tabernacle that still remained amongst the people in all their uncleanness. Some people's behaviour sometimes disgusts even us. Extreme cases of sin amongst believers can disgust us, can it not? God was dwelling among the Israelites for three hundred and sixty-five days a year and the taint of their sin was defiling the tabernacle. It's a wonder God didn't say, 'I can't stick them.'

The Day of Atonement was to cleanse the tabernacle. 'If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father'—you'll notice it doesn't say, 'If anyone sins and then repents,' or, 'If anyone sins and then says "I'm sorry,"' or something. If anyone sins, immediately the advocate pleads before God that great sacrifice that holds back the indignation of God against our sin. What a magnificent salvation we have; holding back the wrath of God, giving us time to come to our senses and to repent. 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 2:1-2).

You say, 'But I have another problem. Life has gone very hard with me. I've tried to serve the Lord, just like other believers have. Some of them have very little trouble in life and I've

had trouble on trouble. I feel like Job sometimes! Why am I made to suffer so much?' Well, if you've never had thoughts like that, thank God for it. Some dear believers have, don't they?

I remember as a young man I was talking on the tabernacle, and after it a senior man came up to me to ask if he might say something. He said, 'Some years ago my wife took cancer and we both prayed that the Lord would heal her. He didn't; the cancer got worse, horribly worse, and together we prayed that the Lord would take her home. He didn't do that either and only after months of torment she passed away.' He said, 'David, I don't know where I am.'

Hard thoughts about God; Job had them, didn't he? God was merciful to him. If your heart ultimately beats loyal to God, you can say what you like to God. Jeremiah said, 'Lord, you've become like a deceitful brook to me' (Jer 15:18)—a wadi that when you go to get water it just isn't there. He had hard thoughts about God. What about that, then? Our Lord is on record as saying, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). Then he added, 'And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper. . . *the Spirit of truth*' (vv. 16–17). Why call him that in this context? This is the result of our Lord's intercession after his ascension to heaven. He prayed the Father and the Father sent forth the Holy Spirit, here called the Spirit of truth.

Let me tell you another little story—old men tell stories, don't they? I once knew a gracious servant of God called James Black in Madison in Scotland. He had a great heart for people; he used to visit borstals and children's homes and so on. He told me that at one stage he went to visit a home for children that had been beaten up and when he opened the door there was a nurse with a child, and the child screamed. The nurse said to James Black, 'Would you mind waiting outside for a moment while I pacify the child?' When the child was pacified he was allowed in and she showed him the child's body, all with grievous scorch wounds. The little child said to Mr Black, 'My father always beats me.' The man had heated a poker until it was red hot and beat the child with it. What do you imagine the child's concept of *father* would be? Would you come and tell him that God is *Father*? It would need some interpreting, wouldn't it?

'I will ask the Father, and he will send you the Spirit of truth.' A lovely result of our Lord's intercessions is that we have within us the Spirit of truth, whose gracious task is to expound to us how the Father really loves us. He helps us to believe it, even in the midst of temptation.

Peter's faith

Says somebody, 'What if I lose my faith?' Have you ever met people that you thought were real Christians and then they seemed to have lost their faith? Well we have the example of Peter. You will remember that at the Last Supper, according to Luke 22:31–32, our Lord said to Peter, 'Satan has asked of God that he may sift [*you twelve*] as wheat.' Sorting the real from the unreal. Then, fastening on Peter himself, our Lord said, 'Peter, I have prayed for you—*for you personally*—that *your faith* doesn't fail.' He didn't pray that his testimony wouldn't fail; that got blown sky high. He prayed that his faith wouldn't fail. But Peter thought he knew better than the Lord. 'O no, Lord; that's nonsense you're talking now. You don't really know who I am. I will go to prison and to death for you, Lord! What do you mean, I will deny you?

Of course I won't.' Peter didn't believe the Lord. Though he was a believer, like some of us he believed the Lord but he didn't believe some things. Our Lord replied, 'Yes, you will deny me before the cock crows.'

That night Peter went into the high priest's court and the maid saw him, and said, 'I suppose you're one of them too, aren't you?' He had a panic attack and denied it. Then the soldiers asked him, 'You're a Christian too, aren't you?' He denied it and, when he had denied three times, immediately the cock crowed. At that moment Peter believed Christ more than he'd ever done before in all his life. An hour or two before, when Christ said, 'You'll deny me,' he'd refused to believe Christ; now he had no option. The Lord had said, 'When you deny me thrice the cock will crow.' He denied him and now the cock was crowing. Christ had spoken the truth and Peter believed it now. He had no option, had he?

Our Lord had said something else, 'When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers' (v. 32). Had Christ really said that? So this wasn't the end then! He'd not made such a mess of it that Christ had given him up? This wasn't the end; there was a future for him. He went out and broke his heart of course, but he came through. We notice the principle, 'I prayed for you that your faith should not fail.' Peter's faith wobbled, very much so. If we'd been there what would we have thought? 'Well I thought he was a believer, but he's saying he isn't, so what do you make of that?'

Let me cite a practical example. I was in Peebles in Scotland some years ago for a weekend of conference meetings, and after it was all over on a Sunday evening my host took me out around the leafy suburbs. A very pleasant gentleman joined us. After a while he had to part ways with us. My host said, 'Let me tell you about him. That good man didn't get saved until he was in his mid-forties and he said to himself, "Look at the time I wasted. So, at least allow me to do something for the Lord, now that he's saved me." So he scratched his head and wondered what to do. Then he got hold of an idea. These were far off days and he had some records of hymn singing. He had a collection of them and enjoyed them enormously. He said, "I'll go round the houses and I'll knock the door and when they come I'll say, Look, I've got this collection of Christian hymns and I've so enjoyed them I wonder whether you'd like to borrow them.'" (I would never have got the idea in my head had I lived to 105!)

Said my host, 'You see that house over there?' It was a beautiful house standing in its own grounds. He said, 'That was the house he went to and knocked on the door. The man of the house came to the door. He said, "Excuse me sir. I've got these records of Christian hymns and I have so enjoyed them I wondered whether you'd care to borrow them." The man said, "You'd better come in." He took him into a room and called his wife. He said, "We would like to tell you we are believers. We believed in Christ years ago and for years we've gone astray from him. Last night in this very room my wife and I [they were now getting on in years] came back to the Lord. We knelt and said, "God, if you'll have us back give us some sign tomorrow that you've received us." That was a Saturday and now this was the Sunday evening. He said to the Christian man, "Nothing happened today and we were beginning to think that God was saying, 'No, I won't have you back,' when you came to the door.'"'

The mercies of God! 'I've prayed for you,' says Christ, 'that your faith may not fail.' I know there are some who make a profession of faith and are not genuine believers at

all—that's not my point tonight. I end here on Christ's intercession, 'I've prayed for you, that your faith doesn't fail.'

You say, 'Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ' (Rom 10:17). In my small experience, assailed by all kinds of unbelief in academic circles, more than once I have known the time when I've had no answers, and I've had to say to Christ, 'I can't maintain my faith. Will you please maintain it?' —'I have prayed for you,' he says, 'that your faith may not fail. And *when* you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'

The Lampstand

Walking in the Light

In these studies we have been concentrating on the approach to God—the road that God himself mapped out for his people when the tabernacle was first built. As we have now observed many times the stationing of certain sacred vessels marked the way in towards the presence of God.

First and foremost there was the large altar at which the sacrifices were offered and the blood shed: 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (Heb 9:22). It pointed us to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for us at Calvary. The New Testament tells us that the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience from dead works (v. 14). That is, it cleanses the conscience from guilt for the wrongdoings we have committed.

Then in the second place there was the laver, which was filled with water. When we studied the laver we observed that the priests came to it for two washings. There was at first their bathing-all-over, when they were first inducted and that ceremony did not need to be repeated. What was repeated was that every time a priest came to do service in the tabernacle or outside he had to wash his hands and feet in the water taken from that laver. As we thought of that we were reminded too of our blessed Lord and what he told us about the washing by water. He distinguished between the bathing-all-over that happens once and then the constant rinsing of the feet.

The once-and-for-all bathing, according to the Apostle Paul, is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Or as our Lord expressed it to Nicodemus, the teaching Rabbi of the Jewish faith, 'Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). The epistle to the Hebrews sums up those lessons and applies them to believers of this present day.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19–22)

When we moved on then, on the direct road of approach into the presence of God, we found another altar. It was a little altar made of wood and overlaid with gold, called the golden altar of incense. In Israel's history it eventually came to be associated with the prayers of the priests and the high priest on behalf of the people. That too reminded us of our blessed Lord, of whom it is written, 'Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb

7:25). And we brought that down to each individual believer by remembering what our Lord said to Peter. When Peter was about to go out and deny the Lord, our Lord said to him, 'You're going to deny me three times this night, but I have prayed for you.' For *you* singular, individually. 'I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail' (Luke 22:32). Everything else about Peter failed. His courage failed, his Christian testimony was ruined for the time being; but thank God his faith was not lost. 'I have prayed for you,' says Christ, 'that your faith may not fail.' And so, Scripture says, because of those intercessions of our Lord, 'He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.'

Eventually in these studies, God willing, we shall pass through the veil and come to the goal of this journey, into the immediate presence and throne room of God. But for the moment I want to turn aside from the main road to look at the two sacred vessels that stood in the first division of the tabernacle—called in some places 'the holy place', in others 'the first tabernacle'. Two sacred vessels that stood, one on the left hand side of the road and one on the right.

The lampstand and the table—vessels of presentation

The first one that we shall consider in detail this evening is the lampstand; though in some older versions it is called a candlestick. Let's be clear that the true translation is not a candlestick, but a lampstand. Opposite, on the other side, stood a table, known as the table of the bread of presence. Both these vessels were vessels of presentation. The function of the lampstand was to hold up the lamps. At the top of its central shaft was placed an oil lamp; and then on the top of each of the six branches that came out of the lampstand, likewise an oil lamp was placed. So it was there to hold up the light; *first and foremost to shine before the Lord*. That is an easily forgotten concept. Scripture charges us, as believers in Christ, to act as lights in the world and before the world. That is an exceedingly important duty, but in the tabernacle the prime duty for the lampstand was to hold up its seven lamps to shine before the Lord. Presently we shall have to consider what that means.

On the other side was the table holding twelve loaves of bread, which were to be placed there before the Lord regularly. They were first and foremost for his benefit. The Jews of those times did not think that almighty God came and ate the literal loaves on the table; it was obvious to everybody who went inside that he did no such thing. They didn't have to feed God in that sense, like people in pagan temples imagined they had to; but *the bread was there primarily for God's satisfaction*, as later we shall also see.

Two vessels of presentation therefore, and now we shall consider *the lampstand*. I have to trouble you by going through some of its technical terms, because in the message that we get from this lampstand a lot will depend on our correct understanding of some of those terms. So let's turn to Exodus.

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. And there

shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it. (25:31–32)

We can see that one of the lampstand's prominent features was that it was made to look like a tree. We shall eventually find it was symbolic of the tree of life; for it was not only made to look like a tree, it was made to look as if it was alive. It carried in its ornamentation various stages of the blooming, blossoming and fruit-bearing of an almond tree. It was in fact a tree of life. The shaft is, of course, the trunk of the tree and at the bottom is its base, but we're not told what shape the base was. I fancy that it was like an actual tree would be. There would be the beginnings of the protuberances according to the roots of the tree that came down into the soil to hold the tree and by which the tree was nurtured. So there was the trunk and its roots.

Sometimes you will hear this object described as a seven-branched lampstand. That is not quite exact. It wasn't seven-branched. *It had six branches.* There was the central stem, the trunk, which was not a branch. In some verses, when the text says 'the lampstand', it means *the central shaft*. Out of one side of the trunk there were three branches and out of the other side of the trunk there were another three branches. Each of those—the trunk and the six branches—had an oil lamp on top that gave the light.

The final thing we should notice is that the various stages in the development of an almond tree were built into the ornamentation of the lampstand. It wasn't just any tree; it was fashioned as an almond tree. There were buds and then the calyxes. Then there were the stamens and the eventual blossom, and then finally the fruit. The fruit is more like a plum and has a hard case. When it is dried it is split and inside is the actual almond nut. So the lamps on the top were said to be made like almonds.

We cannot be dogmatic, because some of these technical terms relate to the goldsmiths' work of those far distant centuries and we don't know very much in Hebrew about the technical terms related to plant and tree life. But we know that somehow these lamps resembled almonds. It may be that that refers to the shape of the lamps, bulbous at one end and with the wick-end a narrow point. Or some scholars suggest that the actual lamps were made in *repoussé* work, hammered on the reverse side in the actual metal of the lamp. But we know that it was made to look like a living tree with various stages of growth and development and it was meant to represent an almond tree. It was a tree in which was life; it was made to look as though it were alive and it carried the light.

What was the significance of this particular sacred vessel?

So now we come to the more important part of our study, when we must ask what it may have meant to the original Israelites who first used it. I can imagine a priest going in for the first time, all fingers and thumbs, not knowing if he could carry it off very well. When he got inside there were cherubim on the veil in front of him, done in the woven work of the blue, purple and scarlet and fine twined linen—cherubim all over it! If he looked up to the roof there were cherubim, if he looked at the sides there were cherubim. All around him, cherubim!

If he knew Genesis he would remember that the first reference to the cherubim was at the fall, when Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden and cherubim were put there at the

gate to guard the way of the tree of life. Beguiled by the serpent, Eve and then Adam had broken the commandment of God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan, misrepresenting God and his word, attracted Eve to the tree.

He said, 'Look at this tree of the knowledge of good and evil; you'll see how desirable it is to the eyes. Can't you see its aesthetic beauty; how attractive it is? It's good for food, it will satisfy your stomach,' (that's physical satisfaction.) 'It's most desirable to make you wise,' (that's intellectual satisfaction.) 'That is life,' said Satan to the woman—'aesthetic, physical and intellectual satisfaction!'

'That may be so,' said Eve, 'but God has said that we mustn't eat of it, and the day we eat we shall surely die.'

'That's nonsense,' said the serpent, 'nobody believes that these days. That's old-fashioned stuff! The reason why God stops you eating it is because he knows that in the day you eat it you'll be as God and he wants to keep you down. God doesn't want you to get up on his level. Of course you won't die.'

And she took of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and gave to her husband. It was a foolish attempt to be independent of God when it comes to the whole question of life, morality, aesthetics and intellectual satisfaction. In that moment the fall occurred.

It is important to remember what happened at the fall. Sin entered our world when, beguiled by the serpent, Adam and Eve attempted to be independent of God when it comes to life, moral judgment, intellectual satisfaction and even physical satisfaction. God exiled them from the garden, lest in that fallen state the couple should again stretch out their hands and take and eat of the tree of life. If they were to have constant access to it, they would have lived forever in that fallen state. God in his mercy turned them out of the garden and put cherubim at the gate to guard the way to the tree of life.

I suspect the new priest would have heard that story many times. When he drew aside the curtain that hung at the door and entered, the first thing he would see would be cherubim galore. And then, to his astonishment, the tree of life! An almond tree, with all the stages of growth and life in it, from the bud to the flower to the fruit. It was surely enough to make the hair stand up on the nape of his neck! It is a magnificent message, even for Israel in that far off day.

What the symbols represented

Granted, they were only symbols. The blood of beasts on the altar couldn't put away sin nor make the conscience perfect, but it stood for the blood of Christ. Old Testament believers owed their forgiveness and their acceptance with God to what that symbol spoke of, namely the coming of our blessed Lord to shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. That washing at the laver was only an external symbol, but it pointed forward to the coming of God's Holy Spirit. Now the priest, having gone through those ceremonies, comes inside. It was an early beginning of coming back to God and the cherubim represented the tree of life.

Now we leave what it meant to them at that day and come to think of this particular sacred vessel as a picture of our Lord. As the Hebrew letter tells us, these things were 'a shadow of the good things to come' (10:1). That is, those good things that would come with

the incarnation of the Son of God: his person, his life, his death for our sins, his resurrection and ascension to heaven, and eventually his second coming. So we have authority for feeling that this particular part, like the rest of the tabernacle, was 'a shadow of the good things to come,' a foreshadowing of Christ. And what in particular about Christ did it foreshadow? This was a tree; it looked as if it was alive—buds, branches, blossoms, fruit—and yet it was the thing that carried the light. Seven lamps, one on the central trunk and six on the branches. It reminds me of what John's Gospel says,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (1:1–4)

It's like a tree; symbolically saying that in it was life, all the stages of life, yet it carried the light! What a superb representation in prophecy of the coming of our Lord. For 'in him was life, and the life was the light of men.'

To understand what John is saying, we must of course read this verse in its context. What life is John talking about? 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made' (v. 3). It's talking about the creation of our vast universe and stating simply but emphatically that everything was made through him and by him. Nor is there anything in the vast universe that wasn't made through him. Where did he get the life from, because, as well as stars and galaxies and rocks and mountains and oceans, this planet is marked by life? It remains still the only one that, as far as we know, has life in it. Where did he get the life from to make it? He didn't get it from anywhere! 'In him was life'—*he is the source of all created life*. 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.' The existence of life in this universe still remains a light to human beings, if they will listen.

Imagine you are walking with a friend one dark night down a nice country road and suddenly a beam of light comes through the hedge across your path. If you said to your friend, 'Where does that light come from?' and your friend replied, 'It doesn't come from anywhere,' what would you do? Advise him to see a psychiatrist or something! To say light doesn't come from anywhere is a little bit contrary to all experience, isn't it?

If we want to know what the purpose of life is and its significance—even created life, and in particular human life—then we must trace that life to its source. *In him was life*: all things were made by him and through him; and, as the Bible says, ultimately for him. Ultimately each of us exists through Christ and for Christ, whether we know it or not. This tells us the basic significance of life, what life is for and where it is leading us.

Atheists do not accept that. They prefer to believe there is no God and one of the arguments they use is this: there is so much evil in the world and disasters such as major earthquakes, how could you believe in the existence of Almighty God the Creator? They choose not to believe there is a God. If you ask them, 'How did it start?' they might cite you the Big Bang. Then if you ask them, 'What was it that went *bang*?' they cannot tell you. Even Professor Richard Dawkins has publicly admitted that they don't know how it all began. But there are implications of the atheist view. One is that, if there is no God-Creator, there is no such thing as evil. Someone will say then, 'How did you arrive at that startling conclusion?'

Professor Dawkins points out that in a world governed simply by DNA and genes, some people are going to *get lucky* and some people are going to get hurt. There is no rhyme or reason in it; genes (DNA) don't care. It just is so much stuff and if that is true of the whole universe there is no such thing as evil.

Suppose you are walking along the Coast Road of Antrim with all its delights, and when you come to the big cliffs a rock falls off the cliff and hits you on the head. Now I assure you, it's no good saying, 'You evil rock!' It doesn't know what evil is, it's just a bit of stuff. It just *is*. If there is no God-Creator and matter is all there is, then ultimately there is no such thing as evil.

If we want guidance on life and its significance we must come back to what Scripture says: 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.' It adds, 'The light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it' (John 1:5). It has not been able to smother it over, and alas often doesn't understand it.

So the lampstand was a tree, with the roots as its base. If I may borrow the term for our blessed Lord without offending you, his *roots* go back into eternity. He is the eternal Son of God: God of very God. But there's more to it than that. This lampstand, made solely of gold, which many people think points to the deity of Christ, has six branches coming out of the side of it. What shall that tell us? What about these branches coming out of the side? Well this same paragraph in John's first chapter has the answer to it:

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (vv. 10–13)

The difference between being a creature of God and a child of God

We must notice the different categories that are now being introduced here. There is creation, 'All things were made through him' (v. 3). All of us through our parents and our foreparents were made by God, the Son of God. Then he came into the world and the people among whom he was born, the Jews, the Israelites—who in one sense were his own special people—instead of receiving him, largely rejected him (v. 10). 'But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to *become* children of God' (v. 12).

We notice that to be a child of God requires that somebody should become a child. We're not born *children* of God; we are born *creatures* of God. God in a fatherly fashion looks after all his creatures; he loves them all. But in the strict terminology there is a difference between a creature of God and a child of God. All men and women are his creatures but not all are his children. For a creature to be a child of God, he or she has to become one. The verses are going to tell us how to become a child of God.

Let's use an illustration. Here is a computer buff, he knows all about computers and many other such devices that in my youth were never known to man! But he's an expert and to show how expert he is he makes a computer. It shows the man's genius in the devices he has put into this computer. If you worked it, you would immediately see that it's a computer,

not manufactured by Apple or any of those inferior makes, but by this good man! Then he marries a beautiful young lady and fathers a child. Tell me, what is the difference between the computer and the child? The computer is a very sophisticated thing, the few-and-a-half pounds of this child of his can be disgusting—doing bad things at both ends!—yet the little child is more significant. However sophisticated the computer, it doesn't possess the engineer's life; he just made it. *The baby has its father's life* and will grow up to know him in a way the computer never will.

We are all God's creatures. He made us and the divine genius in making a human being is everywhere evident. But let Scripture tell us that there is an opportunity to become more than a creature—to become a child of God. These children of God were 'born,' (or begotten) 'not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God' (John 1:13). By a spiritual process, these people that receive Christ—put their faith in him and believe on his name—God produces this miracle in them. He generates (or regenerates) them; he *begets* them as children of God and they have the very life of God within them. That is a stupendous wonder and it is God's holy gospel. The very mention of the thing exhorts us surely to ask ourselves, 'Have I become a child of God, begotten of God, born from above?' Or do those very words make no sense to us at all?

Let this tree of life that carried the light remind us of this superb opportunity to proceed from being creatures of God to becoming children of God, sharers in the very life and nature of God. How is it done, more precisely? 'But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God' (v. 12).

Abiding and bearing fruit

Then let us look a little bit more closely at the branches, to say something obvious that scarcely needs saying. The ornamental motif in the central trunk of the tree was almonds—buds, calyxes, flowers and almonds. What do you suppose the motif was in the branches? If they came out of the tree, surely the same motif would be in the branches? It was almonds of course, like the central stem—buds, flowers and almonds. But therein lies a very interesting illustration.

Our Lord used it later on in the Gospel of John to explain to his disciples the secret of their fruit-bearing lives. He changes the tree from being an almond tree to another kind of tree, but the principle is the same. He said, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser' (John 15:1). 'You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing' (v. 5). The same analogy is applicable to the lampstand. The central shaft of an almond tree, with its fruit, blossoms and buds; and the branches coming out of the tree trunk have the same fruit, almonds, flowers and buds. It's a simple lesson, but in practice vitally important. As believers in Christ, let us hear Christ again: 'Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.'

Finally, let us notice once more that the motif was that of an almond tree. That was very significant, because in the Middle East the almond tree is the first tree to come out in blossom after the deadness of the winter. It becomes exceedingly significant for us, of course. Our Lord, *the Word*, was with God and was God—he was our Creator. 'All things were made

through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men' (John 1:3–4). 'The Word became flesh' (v. 14). He became human, died for us at Calvary, rose again from the dead and sent forth his Holy Spirit to regenerate us. He is risen from the dead in the power of an endless life.

Peter puts it this way, talking to his fellow believers: 'He [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1:3). Death is not the end of everything and some believers who are still alive when the Lord returns will never physically die. When the Lord comes, those that have passed away but are true believers will be raised bodily from the grave and caught up together with the living believers to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:16–17).

But listen to the implication that Paul makes of it at the end of his great chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, supplying us with the evidence that the resurrection of Christ really took place and that his coming again is certain. He ends it with a practical exhortation:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain. (v. 58)

That gives us wonderful hope! Not only is there a heaven beyond because of the living God, and believers will come to the Father's house on high because of the merits and power of the Saviour; but even while we live we have this living hope. 'You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God' (1 Pet 1:23). Because we have the living hope already, then it befits us to show it by 'always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain' (1 Cor 15:58).

The purpose of the lamps

With that, we come to the purpose of the lamps. There are seven of them, one on the central trunk and the other six on the branches. We are told that these were oil lamps and they had to have pure olive oil. That is, olive oil that has been strained to take away all bits and pieces of matter from it, because if it wasn't strained and you tried to burn it, it would cause a bad smelling smoke. So it had to be pure olive oil and the lamps were filled with it. There was a wick in each lamp, which was lit on certain occasions. The wick faced inwards across the body of the holy place, *the first purpose of the lamps being to shine before the Lord.*

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly. Outside the veil of the testimony, in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall arrange it from evening to morning before the LORD regularly. It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. He shall arrange the lamps on the lampstand of pure gold before the LORD regularly.' (Lev 24:1–4)

This was a vessel of presentation and its prime purpose was to hold up the lamps to shine before the Lord continually. Therefore, Aaron and Moses were told to tell the people to bring pure olive oil, beaten fine, to serve the lamps, so they should burn regularly before the Lord. You say, 'Surely the oil represents the Holy Spirit and God gives us the Holy Spirit as a gift?

We don't have to *contribute* the Holy Spirit.' Well thank the Lord for that! Yes, the Holy Spirit is a gift and is given to all believers, but we could *neglect* the Holy Spirit. We could *grieve* the Holy Spirit.

Allow me to be exceedingly and indefensibly personal when I ask, how is each one of us getting on in this business of 'shining before the Lord'? Does he find our heart and soul and spirit positively shining in his presence, or does the light sometimes grow dim? As churches we are meant to be lampstands; do our lamps burn brightly before the Lord and before people? We need a lot of treatment, don't we?

In Exodus 30:7-8 we are told of Aaron's ministry. He was to come in the morning, take the lamp that had been burning and dress it for the next evening. Now I am old enough to remember oil lamps in the home. It was a messy job, when father or mother had to take the thing off the top and deal with the wick. Smelly job that was! And when Aaron did it, he was told he had to burn incense before the Lord. Whatever the spiritual significance of the incense was, it seems that God doesn't like bad smells! To cover the smell of dealing with the wick of a lamp that had been burning a long while and was now smouldering a bit, God asked that they burn the incense to cover the bad smell. And again, when the lamps were to be lit in the evening, there was a new wick, perhaps, new light. But you know what wicks are—they will be wicks! When you first try to light them there's a danger that they'll give out more smoke than light and the smell isn't good either. When he lit the lamps in the evening, Aaron was told to burn incense before the Lord.

We are lights in the world and in order to shine as lights before God and before the world we need a lot of attention from our great high priest, for sometimes we issue more smoke and bad smells than we do light! Thank God for a high priest who will not give up on his people, but tends us. While he's tending us and covering our errors, the incense—the perfume of his gracious character and the wonder of his sacrifice to God on our behalf—comes up and fills the nostrils of God with everlasting delight.

So may the Lord use our study that we might understand these deeper things that are given to us of God. And above all may we fulfil the responsibilities given to us to be part of God's testimony in the world. Joined to Christ and filled by his gracious Spirit, may we shine before the Lord and shine clearly before the world.

The Table of Shewbread

The Bread of Presence

When we began this series we noticed that God himself had marked out the road for the ancient Israelites by having some sacred vessels placed along the direct route into his presence.

And so we concentrated first on the big bronze altar, with its sacrifices and shedding of blood. We then moved on to the laver, which was filled with water. Like the altar it offered cleansing; but whereas the altar offered cleansing from the guilt of sin by the blood of the sacrifice, the laver offered cleansing from the defilement of the body and the personality, and therefore prepared the priest particularly to approach the presence of God.

We then moved in, again on the direct route of approach to God, and came to the golden altar of incense that stood just outside the veil, right opposite the throne of God—the ark and the mercy seat, with the cherubim coming out of each end of the mercy seat. As the Old Testament puts it, God sat enthroned above the cherubim on the ark. Later in our studies we shall go through and past that veil, to come to what then was the immediate presence and throne room of God Almighty.

In the previous lecture we stayed awhile in the holy place, that is, the first division of the tabernacle, and we considered the two sacred vessels that stood, one on the left hand side and the other on the right hand side of the holy place. The one on the left side was the beautiful lampstand and we considered it in great detail.

Now we move across to the other side of the holy place to study the table, called generally in the older translations 'the table of shewbread', but more accurately in the modern translations 'the table of the bread of the Presence.' The lampstand and the table were vessels of presentation. The lampstand's function was to present the seven oil lamps that they might shine before the Lord continually. I suspect you have electricity in your house, but you don't have just a bulb on the end of a bit of wire, do you? You have a bulb, but then you have it in a beautiful article, colourful and artistic, that presents the light to all who are in the room. That was the function of the beautiful, delightful lampstand.

The table on the other side was likewise a vessel of presentation. What it presented before God we shall now presently discover. But first we read the directions for the making of the table and by the time we've finished I'm sure you will agree with me that it was some table indeed!

You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a moulding of gold round it. And you shall make a rim round it a handbreadth wide, and a moulding of gold round the rim. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly. (Exod 25:23–30)

Let's just ponder that, so that we can digest some of those details. I say again, it was some table, wasn't it? Made of the very precious and costly acacia wood that is nearly incorruptible. And then, if you please, it was overlaid with gold. Not just any old gold; pure gold, the highest carat. Then they had to make a moulding around the top of it and that was of gold as well. Then there was a border. We are not sure whether it was horizontally out from the table, perhaps as a ledge to put the vessels of service on them, or whether it was for strengthening the legs of the table, but it doesn't matter. It, too, had a moulding that was gold. Because this was a portable shrine and had to be taken through the desert by the Israelites when they were on the march, the table had to be transported, so it had four rings, two by each leg on the long sides and the rings had to be of gold. They were for putting staves through, from one end of the table to the other at each side, and it was then carried on the shoulders of the appropriate Levites. The staves were of wood, of course, but not just wood—not with this table!—the wood was overlaid with gold. Then there were vessels of various sorts to service the table and they too were of pure gold.

If you had a table like that in your home, I think it wouldn't be in the kitchen. What would you choose to eat on a table like that? You wouldn't present your guests with beans on toast on it; it would surely be the most elaborate meal that anybody ever saw.

The table was so elegant, because of the gold, so it is often called *the pure table*. Whatever was placed on it must have been glorious, don't you think? So let us read what was placed on the table and presented before God continually.

You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the LORD. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant for ever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due. (Lev 24:5–9)

What was on the table, then, were these twelve loaves of bread, in two rows. And then there was frankincense. At the end of each week the priests were to take the old bread that had been there for a week, remove it from the table and immediately put twelve new loaves on the table. They were to take the frankincense outside to the big altar and burn it as a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord and we need to get the connection between these two

things. Those twelve loaves were primarily for God's benefit; they had to be presented before the Lord regularly and continuously. And when they were taken down, then the frankincense had to be burned as an offering—a memorial, a token of that bread as a sacrifice to God. It was primarily for God's benefit that the table held up those loaves before the eye of God.

Now some people have found a difficulty with that. They have said, 'Surely the loaves weren't there for God's benefit. Are you saying that the Israelites thought their God had to be fed on loaves of bread?' The old pagans did think like that, but I am just going by the text. The bread was called *the bread of the Presence* and it was before the very presence of God continually for his satisfaction. The frankincense was then burned as a sacrifice on the altar. At the end of the week, when the priests came and took away the bread that had been there for seven days and put new bread in their place, they were allowed to eat the old loaves. But they weren't just ordinary breakfast food—this was a very sacred meal and had to be eaten in a holy place.

Now we begin to see what is happening. Here was a table; it presented these twelve loaves. They were for God's satisfaction, but of course he didn't eat them and Israel never imagined that he did. The loaves were still there seven days later—they were being *presented*. Did we listen to the text? 'They shall be there before the Lord regularly.' As the eye of God looked down on that table with its loaves he was satisfied in his heart. Then the priests could come at the end of the week and from that very same table they ate those twelve loaves as a sacred meal and put new loaves in their place. The stupendous wonder of it is that, even in those far off ancient days, God and man ate, so to speak, at the same table and the table became a symbol of fellowship between God and man. Thus it was for Israel in those far off days.

Fellowship

But in this series we are more interested in the tabernacle as a shadow of the good things to come; as such it speaks to us of that glorious fellowship that has been instituted between God and his redeemed people. So let us turn now to the passage in the New Testament that talks in some detail of this fellowship that believers in Christ enjoy with the Father—and indeed with his Son, with his Apostles, and with all other fellow believers.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1–4)

These marvellous words are from the pen of the aged Apostle John. He's talking about fellowship; so let's begin by thinking through what fellowship means. It doesn't necessarily mean a sort of humming in my heart, or a communion with my spirit! When the Greek uses

the term *fellowship* between two people, or more than two, it implies that person A and person B have something in common—they share something between the two of them. That is the meaning of fellowship and as we see here that is John's implication. What is it that you as a Christian have in common with God? John informs us, 'And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son' (v. 3). How shall I bear such unutterable concepts—that I, a poor human being, have something in common with almighty God and his glorious Son, so that we are fellows with this thing in common? What is it that we have in common? John spells it out; it is 'the eternal life, which was with the Father' (v. 2).

And we pause to try and let our imaginations catch up with the fact. Long before there were any humans on this planet, or a planet-earth to start with, that *eternal life* was with the Father, to his infinite delight and satisfaction. 'The eternal life' is of course our blessed Lord himself. Do we not remember what John tells us in his Gospel? 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God' (1:1). The particular preposition in Greek that he uses for the word 'with' is a preposition that is used when persons have fellowship in common. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God'—in glorious, personal, eternal satisfaction. The infinite heart of God was infinitely filled with the pleasure of his dear Son.

That eternal life, then, was with the Father. Now John takes up his pen to write to the likes of us who, like him, have come to believe in the Lord Jesus. He says the life was manifested unto us, 'and we have seen it' (v. 2). The apostle is telling us of that indescribable experience when they looked upon Jesus as he walked and perceived that this was none other than the Son of God. That eternal life is now manifested in the person of Jesus Christ, the one who had ever been before God has now been manifested to us. Says the Apostle John, 'We saw him, and we declare it now unto you also, that you may have fellowship with the Father and with his Son.' In verse 1 he goes so far as to say, 'Which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands.' I try to imagine sometimes what must have been the experience of those fishermen, rowing their boat and waking up to the fact that the man who was asleep on the cushion at the end of the boat was God's own Son, who could rise and still the storm. The very winds were obedient to him and they were allowed to touch him!

Uzzah touching the sacred ark

The ark was later taken captive by the Philistines. When they sent it back, the Israelites didn't put the ark in the tabernacle again. They put it in somebody's house. When David became king, eventually he decided to bring the ark out of that house into his capital city, Jerusalem. He made some curtains as a tent for it and sent his servants to fetch it. They got a cart—very well intentioned—took the ark out of the house of this good man and put it on the cart. Two men were to accompany it to Jerusalem. At one point the oxen stumbled and one of the men, his name was Uzzah, saw it toppling over. He knew that the ark was the very throne of God and it wouldn't do for the throne of God to fall over, would it? So he put out his hand to touch it and in that moment he fell dead (2 Sam 6:6–7). That was the sacredness of the ark upon which God sat enthroned.

Let me give you some advice. If one of these days, when you get to heaven, you think you see the throne of God beginning to totter, whatever you do don't try to hold it up. Run as

hard as you can run, for if the throne of God totters the universe will collapse. Such is the holiness of God.

‘See the wonder,’ says John, ‘that eternal life that was with the Father was manifested. We saw him and we actually touched him.’ What a magnificent story this is! ‘And I’m writing to you,’ says John, ‘that you may have fellowship with us (the apostles). Though you have never seen him, you may have fellowship with him as we did; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.’

Walking in the light

We have thought up until now of the loaves upon the table and I shall ask you to think presently on what the table represents. But I leave that for the moment, because we must follow John now, as he lays down the conditions that must be fulfilled if we are to have this kind of fellowship with the Father and with his Son. There are certain conditions to be fulfilled, if we would enjoy this fellowship.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1: 5–7)

Here then is the first absolute condition. *God is light*; in him is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, that’s a contradiction in terms, so we lie and do not practise the truth. The one big condition necessary for this fellowship is stated in verse 7, ‘But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.’

Here the tabernacle shall help us. There were three vessels that stood in the holy place: the altar of incense in the middle, right up against the veil; on the left the lampstand with its seven lights; on the right the table with its twelve loaves. The table stood directly over against the light. When the lamps on the lampstand were lit, the spout with the wick was so placed that the wick should be pointing across the tabernacle. Suppose, then, a priest wants to come and take the bread from that golden table—where must he walk? Well obviously, he has to walk in the light if he would have fellowship with God at that table. Suppose he keeps outside in the dark, for instance, he couldn’t take the bread from outside, could he? That ancient priest had to come in and walk in the light, as God is in the light.

What does it mean? There are some good Christians who think the verse means that, if we would enjoy the eternal life that Christ gives to everyone who believes in him, we must be careful to walk in the light. That is, to lead holy lives. If we were to do a sin or make a mistake, that would be walking in darkness and we would lose the fellowship. While that may be practically true, I don’t think it’s what this verse is saying. What is the ‘fellowship’? It is nothing less than sharing the very life of God. That’s what having eternal life means—sharing the very life of God as manifest in his Son. What is the condition for it? We

have to come and not merely just *come* to the light (did you notice that?), we have to '*walk* in the light, as he is in the light.'

Now I can guarantee you one thing. If you come and walk in the light, you won't be there five minutes, perhaps, before the light will expose you. You'll see your faults as perhaps you've never seen them before. But listen, 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another'. What about my sins and my shortcomings? 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light' then we are told that we have fellowship—'and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). You should say a *hallelujah* to God at this very moment! We can come to the light as he, our blessed Lord, is in the light and God himself is light. We, poor broken men and women, can come to the light and if it exposes us we have the assurance that 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.'

But notice again that it doesn't simply say, if we *come* to the light, but if we *walk* in it. John himself in his Gospel records that our Lord claimed, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' (8:12). When they heard that, there were many Jews who believed on him. Or at least so they said. Then Christ said to them, 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed' (v. 31 KJV). That is to say, the mark of a genuine disciple is that he not merely comes to the light, he *continues* in Christ's word. 'If you continue in my word then you are my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' (v. 32).

They said, 'Did you say free? Free from what?' He said, 'From sin, of course!'

Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remains for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (vv. 34–36)

Not slaves, but members of the very family of God. At which point these so-called disciples began to get angry. He dared to suggest they were sinners! It wasn't long afterwards that they picked up stones to stone him (v. 59).

And we come back to our verse, 1 John 1:7. It's not a matter of simply coming to Christ; it's a matter of walking in the light. Not just coming to the light, but walking in it. And I repeat, if we do that, the light will eventually expose us. I'm not saying that it doesn't matter if we sin, but what Scripture says is that, as we're walking in the light and it exposes something we've done, or some wrong attitude of heart, we are to confess our sins. Not run away from the light; we are to confess our sins, 'And the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.' God's realistic provision, that we might walk in the light and have fellowship with him.

Now just in case you think I am taking a light view of sin in a believer's life, I am not doing anything of the sort. I have noticed that John adds, 'Whoever says he abides in him [Christ] ought [he has a bounden duty] to walk in the same way in which he walked' (2:6).

So we have two concepts. In our earlier verse it was a question of *where* we walk that is all-important: *do we walk in the light or in the darkness?* When we've learned that lesson, then it's a question of *how* we walk: '*He that says he abides in him has a bounden duty to walk even as Christ walked.*' We come short; but thank God, when a believer sins he doesn't lose his eternal life. He may not be enjoying it at the present moment, but he doesn't lose it. The one condition is that we come to the light.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (v. 7)

If a priest were to come towards the table and his toe catches in the hem of his garment and he falls head over heels, he's a fallen priest now! May I ask you to perceive where he's fallen? He's fallen in the light! He shouldn't have fallen over like that, but thank God he's fallen in the light. In many things we all fall and we still come short, don't we? But, thank God, if we're walking in the light, we've not only come to Christ, we're walking with him. If we fall, we fall in the light. It will expose us, but not throw us out.

And lest you should think I am putting a wrong emphasis on these verses, let me come to the great secret. 'I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin' (2:1). This is not to encourage us to sin. In fact, John has just said, 'If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us' (1:10). 'But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world' (2:1-2).

The trinity of fellowship: the lampstand, the table and the altar

So we come back at this point to a topic that we discussed two sessions ago. There are three vessels in the holy place: on the left *the lampstand* and on the right *the table*. The lampstand is shedding its light on the table, so that if a priest comes near he inevitably walks in the light. If he's not prepared to walk in the light he can't come to the table. But what happens if the priest in that very moment has a sinful thought or something? Well then, in front of the veil there is *the altar of incense*. And so we are told we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The blood of atonement was smeared on the horns of that incense altar and thus gave confidence to the priest if he failed.

Why did God make provision to share with us that eternal life that was with the Father? Why did he bother to make our universe? Why is our planet so wonderfully tuned that human life is possible? When we were sinners of a sinful race, why did God send his Son to the point of dying for us at Calvary? Because this is the very heart of God! He would not keep his Son to himself, but shared him with us so that we might share his eternal life.

The twelve loaves represent the twelve tribes of Israel and for centuries that table presented those twelve loaves before God for his satisfaction. Deuteronomy tells us, 'The LORD's portion is his people' (32:9). He redeemed them out of Egypt. Through many generations they were false to him, but God told Jeremiah to remind them, 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness' (Jer 2:2).

Fellowship with the Father and with his Son

But since Jeremiah's day something more wonderful has happened—God has sent his Son. This very Son, who was with him for all eternity, has now become human. Israel's fairest Son, human as well as divine, walked our world for thirty-three years for the infinite satisfaction of God. He died for us and he's now gone back to heaven and sits at the right hand of God. We who trust him, Jew and Gentile, are now in Christ, formed into one body, presented

before the Father. 'And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds' (Col 1:21)—prodded on our way by the malevolent Satan himself. 'And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh' (2:13).

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:4–6)

Let me ask you how much of that you believe. I think you believe the first bit, don't you—that Christ is now raised up by the Father and sits at the right hand of God? He's sat down on his Father's throne, for the Father's eternal satisfaction. You believe that, yes? But listen to what the rest of the verse says. In Christ, God has not only given us new life, but he has raised us up and 'seated us with him in the heavenly places.' Do you believe that bit too—that at this very moment we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places, and for his sake are accepted with the Father?

I can tell you something more, for I have read these magnificent words in Jude v. 24: 'Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to *present* you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.' And just like that gorgeous table in the tabernacle was built to present those twelve loaves before God continually for his satisfaction and then ultimately for the priests to share that joy with God himself at the table, so now we have the reality. 'To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory.'

God help us to use our imagination to begin to see what a wonderful thing that will be, when Christ takes us and the believers of all time and, like that table held up the shewbread before God, presents us to the Father before the presence of his glory. It will have to be some 'table' to present us, won't it? And in such a magnificent situation—to present us 'before the presence of his glory with great joy.'

One day that will be a fact. Already we are seated in the heavenly places in Christ and we are welcome there for his sake. Welcome by the Father, who scrutinises us every day that he might find more and more pleasure in us, as Christ himself is developed in us and we become more conformed to the image of God's Son. One day the process shall be perfect, my dear brothers and sisters; and as surely as we have sat on these seats tonight so will the blessed Lord Jesus take us and present us before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy.

But you say, 'I am a little bit worried—I'm still uncertain of your interpretation! You said the loaves were there for God's satisfaction, but how can that be? Surely the loaves were simply there as God's provision for his people? Not his people feeding him?'

Well, we read of our risen Lord, in all his glory, as he stands outside the door of the church at Laodicea, apparently shut against him. He knocks upon the door and says, 'If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him' (Rev 3:20). Really? Do I get that right? I can understand the next bit, 'and he with me,' but is the Lord proposing to dine with me?

He dined in Mary and Martha's house didn't he? Many times. I wonder what he'll say to Mary and Martha when he gets them home to Glory and they see his Father's house. 'Remember, Martha; remember, Mary; when I sat at your table and that lovely meal you prepared for me? I so enjoyed eating it.' He dined with them then. That same blessed Lord Jesus shall dine with us hereafter. He says in one place he'll make us sit down and come and serve us like a waiter at a table (Luke 12:37). You can't get over it or to the end of the grace of God in Christ. May God strengthen our hearts, and I leave you with the promise encompassed in that lovely verse:

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. (Jude 24)

The Veil and the Most Holy Place

We are now to resume the journey that we began at the beginning of the series. We noticed early on that, when God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle, God himself laid down the road by which his people might approach him. As he deigned to come and presence himself in the most holy place, he marked out the road by stationing certain sacred vessels that should act as guideposts from the outside inwards.

So we began to study the first sacred vessel, the bronze altar at which sacrifices were offered and the atoning blood was shed. Then we moved on to consider the second of the vessels, the laver that offered cleansing to the priests. The bathing once-and-for-all that they received when they were inducted into their priesthood and then water to rinse and wash their feet and hands whenever they came to perform some service for God and the people in this sacred building.

Then we moved on again into the first division of the tabernacle and came to the little altar of incense, the golden altar that stood just in front of the veil. That was the altar at which the priests burned incense morning and night, and came to be associated with the prayers of the people as the high priest prayed for them.

Then we interrupted our journey, because we were interested to study the two other sacred vessels that stood in the holy place. The one on the left was the lampstand, the gorgeous lampstand, and the one on the right was the table. We noticed that both those vessels were vessels of presentation; the lampstand made to look like a living tree, an almond tree, with the various stages of growth in its trunk and branches. It was a vessel to present seven olive oil lamps to shine before the Lord. We noted that their primary duty was to shine before the Lord and the lampstand presented them for that purpose.

At the other side was what was called in the ancient translations 'the table of shewbread', meaning in Hebrew 'the bread of the Presence'. That table supported twelve loaves of bread and presented them before the Lord continually. They remained on the table for a week along with the frankincense, which was the most costly of all the offerings made by fire unto the Lord. At the end of the week the priests were allowed to come and remove the bread, put new bread in its place and then to eat the old loaves. But that was a sacred meal, which they had to eat in a holy place.

Now with expectant hearts we resume our journey. We are invited to do what the people of Israel were never able to do, and the high priest among them was able to do only once in a year. We are to pass through into the immediate presence of God and of his throne. But as we

attempt that, we find across our path a barrier called *the veil*. We are perhaps wise just to read the directions for the making of that veil.

And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skilfully worked into it. And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. (Exod 26:31–33)

So, as we begin to resume our journey in toward the presence of God, we find a barrier in front of us. It is called the veil, and in some chapters *the second veil* because there was already a kind of veil at the door through which you had to enter. That, however, was distinguished very carefully from this second veil and a special word is used for the veil that barred the way into the immediate presence of God. We have to ask first what that veil signified to Israel in those far off days; then we shall presently enquire what it means to us. The tabernacle was built first of all for the Israelites as ‘a copy and shadow of the heavenly things’ (Heb 8:5). But for our benefit, who live in this age, it was also designed as ‘a shadow of the good things to come’ (Heb 10:1). Those good things came actually with the birth into our world of our blessed Lord Jesus, the Son of God, in his life and ministry, in his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

What the veil meant to the Israelites

It represented that physical barrier, whatever it is and whatever it’s made of, that hides the presence of God and his heaven from us who live here on earth. I would like to point out, so that we don’t get confused later on, that the veil in this sense is not rent—it was not rent at Calvary. The veil, in the sense of the barrier that hides the immediate presence of God from our eyes, is still there. You can’t see the Lord Jesus, can you? You can’t see the throne of God; the veil remains to this very present day. Let me quote you a scripture that will show us that it is so.

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 6:17–20)

You will see that these verses say that our blessed Lord passed through this veil. What veil? The veil that hides God and his throne from our visible sight! It is a glorious thing to remember that our blessed Lord did pass through that veil. And as we said the other night, but it bears repetition, Luke described it very deliberately in his Acts of the Apostles. Forty days after he was raised from the dead our Lord took the disciples to the Mount of Olives and as he blessed them he was taken up from them. They watched him going into heaven and we

are not told by what exact process he entered heaven. Luke tells us that a cloud (doubtless the *Shekinah* glory of God) enveloped him and hid him from their eyes, as he passed from our visible world of earth and space into what is for us the invisible world of the immediate presence of God. Our blessed Saviour is there and one day we shall join him.

But I would remind you of what Peter says: 'Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory' (1 Pet 1:8). You have never seen the Lord, have you? And yet you love him! It's an extraordinary thing, isn't it? I put it to all who are believers in the Lord Jesus; you don't merely believe in him as an historical fact, you love him. He's real to you and, though you still don't see him, 'you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.' We are hastening towards the day when the blessed Lord will come again from heaven, receive his believing people to himself and conduct them into the Father's house.

The veil in this sense then still stands. There have been occasions, of course, when the heavens have been opened. We are told, for instance, that when Stephen had finished his testimony before the Sanhedrin (they had condemned him to death and were about to stone him), he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56). Revelation chapter 6 describes a time that shall surely come. As the climax of the judgments that God shall send on earth, the heaven shall be removed like a scroll that is rolled up (v. 14). The great and the small of earth—unconverted rebel sinners still—shall see to their horror the throne of God and the Lamb of God, as the heaven is 'rolled aside and opened' and men are allowed to see into heaven. But these were exceptions and in this sense, I repeat, the veil is still there.

What the veil means to Christians

But now, let's move on and study the veil. According to what the New Testament says, it was also *a shadow of the good things to come*. Those good things came with the birth and life, the ministry, death and resurrection of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. I must make you work hard over the technical details, but this is Holy Scripture so I mustn't apologise! We do need to get the technical terms right in this particular context or we shall get ourselves sorely confused.

The building was divided in two. In the front there was a screen, sometimes called the *first veil*. Then there was the second veil: *the veil*. In Hebrew *parōketh*. So the building was in two parts, *the holy place* and *the most holy place*. The first part is sometimes called the *first tabernacle*, as in Hebrews chapter 9 (KJV), and beyond the veil is the *second tabernacle*, or, to use another term, the most holy place. So the holy place and the most holy place were separated by the veil; the first tabernacle and the second tabernacle were divided by the veil. So we are to read now from Hebrews chapter 9 and see how its argument goes.

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section

called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing. (Heb 9:1–8)

It's my job to try and explain what that verse means. 'The way into the most holy place is not openly visible while as yet the first tabernacle has separate status.' If you care to look at any picture of the first tabernacle, you will see that it had separate status. It had *standing*, to quote the Greek—separate status from the second tabernacle; what gave it its separate status was the veil that hung right across from side to side of the building. There were two entirely separate compartments and now you will see clearly what the Holy Spirit is saying. As long as the first tabernacle had separate status from the second, the way into the second tabernacle (the most holy place) was obviously not open and manifest. The veil was there; that stopped even the priests from looking in or entering the second tabernacle, the most holy place.

The veil was a barrier and we are given the reason why God had the barrier there.

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. (vv. 8–10)

Significant words, but sad in their way. The writer is observing that all those sacrifices, the blood of those animals, the water in that laver, the bread on the table, the oil lamps in the holy place, divers washings in water and so forth, were only physical things. They were emblems and symbols; useful for teaching Israel in its day but the trouble was their inadequacy. Those sacrifices, which they offered continually, could never make the worshipper perfect as pertaining to the conscience. Surely we have to ask therefore what Holy Scripture means by using this word 'perfect' in relation to a person's conscience. To bring it home to us, might I ask if your conscience, or mine, is perfect in this sense? What does it mean to have 'a conscience made perfect'?

Well the same thing is said, for instance, in chapter 10:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. (vv. 1–3)

The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ

So the Israelite came individually with his sacrifices. The nation came on the great Day of Atonement and confessed their sins before God; the sacrifices were slain and the blood brought into the most holy place. That was good, but then they went away and not many days after they sinned again, and again, and developed a bad conscience. 'What will happen to me now? Will God be angry with me? If this day were my last, what would happen to me, with a conscience not made perfect?' The writer observes that if a person had his conscience made perfect, he wouldn't have offered anything else; he would cease offering the sacrifices if the one sacrifice could have purged his conscience clean. What those animals couldn't do, this passage tells us, Christ can do—'For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified' (Heb 10:14).

These are the most glorious words and it is worth taking time to study the technical terms of the tabernacle as a guide for our own acceptance with God. The Israelite, even the high priest himself, was not allowed to come into the most holy place. The high priest could enter only one day in the year, by himself, the rest of the priests could not enter and the people certainly not. Ever lurking in their minds was the presence of God and the throne and the tablets of the law. What should happen to them; and when life is done, what then? O the wonder that Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Those sacrifices were mere animals; carnal, physical, material things. They could never put away sin, they were only symbols; but our blessed Lord in his sacrifice has put away sin once and for all by the sacrifice of himself. The blood of Christ cleanses the believer's conscience—which doesn't mean that if we tell a lie or act disgracefully we don't get a bad conscience. We jolly well ought to get a bad conscience! It is talking about preparedness to meet God's throne.

Presently we must look at that throne; it will remind us that one day we shall all stand before it. How can we be prepared? How could we have peace of mind now, knowing that one day we shall be called to stand before that throne? And here is the glorious answer: 'By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.' His sacrifice paid the penalty of our sins; not merely some of them, but all of them. And the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Redeemer, our substitute and Saviour, our conscience is cleansed and we may know that we are ready to stand in the very presence of God.

The veil, then, and the contrast between those sacrifices that were ineffectual (and therefore people couldn't be allowed into the most holy place) and the sacrifice of Christ which has cleansed us and permits us now in spirit to come into the very holiest of all and stand before God at his throne. But now the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us of a further significance of this veil.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. (10:19–22)

Wonderful words; we shall take our time over them. Here it is said that that veil in the tabernacle was intended, as a shadow of the good things to come, to represent Christ, God's

Son, in his humanity. When he came on earth he acted like a veil—‘through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.’

Now some of you may be conspiring against me at this juncture, because you will have read Bishop Westcott and his comment on this verse! Bishop Westcott adamantly refused to accept that this verse meant that the humanity of Christ was a veil. He thought that the veil was there to hide God from people. He wanted to retranslate the verse like this: ‘Having boldness to enter into the holy place by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, the way through the veil.’ Far be it from me to say so, but the dear Bishop hadn’t quite understood it, had he? He rightly thought of the veil as a barrier; but in those far off days, even though the veil was a barrier of a kind, the priest could come right up against it and touch it if need be. It was a beautiful thing, made of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet, with cherubim on it. Delightful it was! And the people—the priests at least, could come and scrutinise it, look at the beautiful colours and those symbolic cherubim and begin to understand something of the glory of the God who presented himself behind that veil.

A merciful provision

I’m arguing now that the veil, though a barrier into the presence of God, was nonetheless a merciful provision even in Israel’s day. If there had been no veil there, no priest could have entered into the holy place to start with. As soon as you walked in the door, you would be in the immediate presence of the throne and the presence of God and that was impossible. What permitted the priests to come as far as the golden altar, the lampstand and the table was the presence of the veil. It was a merciful provision from which the priests could learn something of the majesty and the glory of God. Hebrews chapter 10, in that sense, is saying that the veil was a foreshadowing of Christ. Delightful to think of it, isn’t it? He was truly human, yet divine. In him all the fullness of the Godhead dwelled bodily and yet sinners could come up and touch him. Little children could nestle on his knee. What a lovely God we have; what a merciful provision he has made in the sending of his Son, so that down-and-out sinners and proud hypocrites and innocent children could come and look at him. ‘Whoever has seen me,’ said Christ, ‘has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). What a wonderful thing it was.

Do I get the feeling that some of you are saying, ‘I wish I had been with him then’? It must have been marvellous to have been with Christ when he was actually walking here and you could go up to him and touch him and hear him speak. You’d feel very near to God, wouldn’t you? But you have something better—surely you have! We know what happened to our blessed Lord in his flesh. As that ‘veil’ they hounded him to Calvary, where he bore our sins in his body on the tree. Rude and wicked men not only nailed his hands and feet to a cross; they took a spear and pierced his side, ‘and at once there came out blood and water’ (John 19:34). In that moment, when that lovely veil of our Lord’s humanity was pierced and rent there opened up a vision of the heart of God, what God is really like. O the wonder of the cross of Christ! That perfect humanity—crowned with thorns, nailed hand and foot, his side rent—opening up to our vision what God is really like. ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son’ (John 3:16); ‘God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom 5:8 KJV). It is a remarkable word—he *commends* his love to us.

I am old enough to remember the hunger marchers in the late 1920s and early 30s, who marched down from the North of England. Some of them had not worked for ten years because of that terrible depression. In those days men who could have been accountants or lawyers couldn't get work; they would come round to the houses and knock on the doors, because the labour employment place had sent them. If they were going to get unemployment benefit they had to take what work was offered to them, so they came round perhaps with a few brushes and dusters and things. Of course the housewives didn't really need them, but the men were anxious to get a living so when the doors opened they put their foot in the door. At least they would get a hearing to advertise the goods they had to sell.

In this hard-bitten world God put his foot in the door, didn't he? O, the wonder that God did at Calvary; 'he commends his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' If there is an unbeliever here, may I ask you, 'Will you not let God *put his foot in your door* and tell you how much he loves you? He commends his love to you, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

Now that blessed Lord, with a body still carrying the marks of his crucifixion, has ascended into heaven. You say, 'Half a minute! You said just now that he represented the veil.' I did, yes. For the believer now there isn't any veil. 'The veil' has gone into heaven, into the very presence of God and we are told that we have the right to enter in. So let me quote you those verses again:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19–22)

Let us draw near; and not cringingly either, but boldly. With *confidence*, or boldness, for *the entrance*, or for the entering in. Let me pause to explain what the word means. I have friends who tell me that when Hebrews 10:19 says, 'We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,' we should translate the Greek word there to mean *the door*. Just like, for instance, if somebody came to you when you were outside and said, 'What's the way into this building?' you would have said, 'There's the entrance,' meaning the door through which you come in. That's one sense and the Greek word *eisodos* can mean entrance in that sense—the door.

But it can also mean the actual practical *entering in* through the door into the building. What does it mean here? My friends tell me that I should take it to mean that, as we go through life, with the increase of years we get nearer to eternity and we can have confidence that over there somewhere is the door into heaven. 'As we approach the door we may have confidence that when we die the Lord will let us into his heaven,' they say.

No, thank God, it doesn't mean that in the actual intention of the writer. It means that, just as Christ has entered into the very presence of God and has made a way for us to enter in, *we can actually enter into the holiness of God's immediate presence now*. Not bodily of course, but in spirit. A believer can lift his or her heart in the home, in the street, in the church—it doesn't

matter where—and sense that in spirit she or he has entered the very throne room of God and God has accepted them.

I have enough wickedness in me to provoke some people! And when they say to me, ‘You say you’re sure of going to heaven—no one can be sure of heaven,’ I might even reply, ‘What do you mean, I can’t be sure of going to heaven? I’ve been there today!’

‘What do you mean; you’ve been there today? Don’t talk so silly.’

But I mean what this verse is saying, ‘We have boldness to enter, to come to the throne of grace’—to enter along the way that our Lord has pioneered for us, and come to the very presence and throne of God.

The Ark

As we come in we must now begin to study the great and noble piece of furniture that we shall meet when we step inside the veil. The ark was a chest made of wood overlaid with gold, with a crown of gold around it. Inside were a number of things, particularly the two tablets of stone on which the law had been written by the finger of God. They were put into the ark because it was a symbolic throne of God. On the top it had a slab of pure gold. No wood in this; it was pure gold. From the ends of that slab of gold there were cherubim; they arched their wings and their eyes were looking down towards it.

Now I am aware I shall need to justify my claim that this ark and mercy seat was the symbolic throne of God. So I read from 1 Chronicles, simply to observe the phrase that is used there. This is talking about subsequent history, when David became king and he went to bring back the ark of God that had long since been taken out of the tabernacle and was now in the private house of a certain gentleman. So David went to take the ark and bring it to Jerusalem.

And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim that belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD who sits enthroned above the cherubim. (13:6)

The Hebrew word that is used for *sitting* is not just sitting on a seat; it is the word you would use of a king sitting on his throne. And so the historian says here, ‘The ark of God . . . the Lord who sits enthroned above the cherubim.’ It was his symbolic throne.

How then can we approach him? Inside the ark, as I have just said, were the tablets of stone and the law inscribed on them, written with the finger of God. How can I possibly come and stand before God in the face of that law? The Bible reminds us of the seriousness of God’s law. I shall read to you now some very well-known verses, but we need to listen to them. This comes from Paul’s letter to the Romans,

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (3:19–20)

We do well to underline those words not only in our Bibles but in our minds. The purpose of the law is clearly stated here. God has not given his law so that by keeping it we may earn a place in his heaven, or that by keeping it we may earn our salvation. The very opposite! 'We know that what things the law says, it says to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty—subject to the judgment of God.' That is why the law was given. Because 'by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight'—for the simple reason that 'through the law comes knowledge of sin.' That is the prime purpose of the law; to show us how sinful we are in the sight of God. 'It is not given,' says Paul, 'that we might earn sufficient righteousness to deserve to be admitted into God's heaven.'

These are solemn things, but let me impress it on you by a very simple analogy. Thermometers can show you how ill you are, if you are really ill, but they can't cure you! Suppose you hear some of these days that I am ill in bed with the flu or something, and your Christian heart leads you to think that it would be a good thing to visit me. So you enter my bedroom and there I am sitting up in bed, sucking a thermometer for all I am worth.

And you say, 'Gooding, what's wrong with you?'

'I'm ill.'

'I can see you're ill, but why are you sucking that thermometer?'

'The doctor came and he got out a thermometer and put it in my mouth. When he looked at it he said it was dangerously high and if it went much higher I could die, so we must get it down if ever you are to be well. I'm doing my best to get it down by sucking it!'

What would you say?

'Gooding, yes you are ill; you are more ill than you think you are!'

Thermometers can show us how ill we are, they can't cure us.

God's law was given to show us how sinful we are. When we have done our best, the law will say, 'But you still come short.' You cannot find salvation by the works of the law. It's good to do what the law says, but salvation doesn't come that way. How then does it come?

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood. (Rom 3:21–25)

Let me stop at that point. In the ark were the tablets of the law and with them uncovered none would dare to come. But God in his mercy had made a covering, a slab of pure gold, with the cherubim arching their wings above it. On the great Day of Atonement the high priest outside took a goat, the people confessed their sins, the goat was killed, its blood was shed and the high priest came in. He stripped himself of his colourful robes and put on simple white robes. Pulling aside the veil he entered into the immediate presence of God, took of that blood and sprinkled it on this slab of gold, and in front of it. There's no record that he *said* anything, what he *did* was saying everything. He and his nation had sinned, had broken God's law and deserved eternally to be banished. But by God's mercy God himself had allowed him—the high priest, on behalf of his people—to kill a sacrifice, take its blood

and sprinkle it on that slab of gold. By doing this he was saying (implying), 'Yes, we have broken the law and deserve its penalty; but, God, according to your mercy, you provide us a substitute whose blood you are pleased to regard as covering our sin.'

Our English translation says, 'Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation' (v. 25 KJV). *Propitiation* means 'the sacrifice that meets the indignation of God.' It's not a question of how bad I feel about sin; it's a question of how bad God feels about sin—that's what has to be dealt with. God can never and will never say that sin doesn't matter. If through drunk driving I carelessly kill your daughter, God will never say it doesn't matter. And if I never repent, God will hold it against me for all eternity. Why? Is it because he's a cruel God? No, it's because he loves your daughter. Never say that it doesn't matter that my carelessness killed your daughter.

We stand guilty before God. We are told that the blood of Christ, which is far superior to that of animals, has met the righteous demand of God and his indignation against our sin so that he can accept us. It is an interesting word, *propitiation*. In Greek it's *hilasterion*; but when the word occurs in the book of Exodus and elsewhere it is the Hebrew *kappōreth*. Faced with this Hebrew word *kappōreth* the ancient Greek translators, who translated the Hebrew into Greek, used two words to refer to it. They used the word *epithēma*, which in Greek means 'something put on top'—a lid, if you like. And that's what this slab of gold was; it was a lid covering it. But it was more than a lid, so the Greek translated it *epithēma hilasterion*, meaning 'the lid, which is the place where propitiation is made.'

Now listen to Romans again. The law in this ark was given that we might learn how sinful we are; it shuts our mouths and leaves us liable to God's judgment (3:19). But on the ark there was what Martin Luther called a *mercy seat*, that slab of gold where the blood of propitiation was put. It covered the guilt of all who believe so that God might accept them, not excuse them but accept them righteously. 'It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (v. 26). Glorious liberating words these, it is not that God has chosen to ignore our sins or cover them up. At Calvary, in front of the whole world, God advertises what he thinks of our sin and the penalty they deserve, and his Son paid that penalty so that God can be just, absolutely just, and yet justify those that have faith in Jesus.

The Day of Atonement

Finally, I want to teach you a little parable from the ceremonies of the Jewish high priest on the Day of Atonement and I go back to Hebrews once more, chapter 9. In his official duties on the Day of Atonement, the high priest made three appearances. First, he came out of the tabernacle and appeared in the presence of the people in the court of the tabernacle. They brought him two goats; the one was killed and its blood was shed. Then the high priest took that blood in a bowl and leaving the people he went into the tabernacle, past the first curtain, past the veil this time and into the very presence of God. He sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat, upon the ark.

So, he appeared first in the presence of the people out in the court, then he took the blood and appeared in the presence of God for the people and put the blood upon the mercy seat. After sundry duties he came out and appeared the second time before the people. And when

he appeared that second time he had to take the second goat, the elders confessed their sins over it and it was driven away into a land of forgetfulness. These are two of the three appearances of the Jewish high priest.

In these final verses of chapter 9 of Hebrews the writer draws the parallel between those three appearances of the Jewish high priest and the three appearances of Christ.

1. 'Once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (v. 26). This thing wasn't done in a corner. He appeared first in our world, came out of his heaven and at Calvary was crucified. *'He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'*

2. Where is he now? He is in 'heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf' (v. 24)—his second appearance. I want to inscribe the implications of this on your hearts: *'Christ appears in the presence of God for us.'*

There is a legend among the Jews that when the Jewish high priest went into the holy place to appear in the presence of God on behalf of the people, they tied a rope around his waist and left the rest of it dangling outside, right through and outside into the court. Why? If God didn't accept him he would die there and then the people would be able to draw him out, a dead corpse. The legend arises because of the Jewish sense of the seriousness of what was happening. The high priest was appearing *for them*. And suppose God didn't accept the high priest, then he didn't accept them either!

Once in the end of the age Christ appeared at Calvary, and he did so in order to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Now he appears in the presence of God for us and I have a vested interest in this. Christ appears in the presence of God and God has made him welcome, bidden him to sit at his own right hand. But what I want to know is this: Does God really know that his Son is appearing not simply for himself, he is appearing for David Gooding? Perhaps he's kept that bit secret, in case, if God knew he was appearing for David Gooding, that would be another story? Excuse my childish mind, but then these things are personal in their application, aren't they? Do you trust the Saviour? Then Christ appears in the presence of God for you. God knows that he's appearing for you, God has accepted him and with him his people as well. What an immense assurance and comfort it brings.

3. Then the Jewish high priest had to appear the third time. He had to offer another sacrifice out in the court. Christ will appear again; but this time, unlike the high priest, he will not have to offer another sacrifice. Well then, why will he appear? *He will appear for salvation*, because when he comes the next time it will be to take his redeemed and blood-cleansed people home to the Father's house, to be bodily with him, even as now they are there in spirit.

'I am not ashamed of the gospel,' said Paul (Rom 1:16); and I lisp it out myself as I think of these things. I am not ashamed of the gospel either, for it bears every mark of the countless wealth and riches of God's love and God's mercy.

[The Ark of the Covenant and the New Covenant](#)

In our last study we came to the goal of the journey that we undertook at the beginning of these studies. We were following the road that God himself mapped out, by which people might come and approach him in his presence. The road was marked out by the stationing of certain sacred vessels as signposts—each one of them not only a signpost, but a time to stop and to enjoy the experience that this spiritual exercise was meant to convey.

So we followed first of all the big altar, with its shedding of blood and the pronouncement of forgiveness. We came next to the laver, with its water offering cleansing from defilement. We came in at last to the third marker, the little golden altar of incense, standing immediately before the veil. Then in our last lecture we confronted the veil. *The veil*: not just the curtain that hung at the door at the front of the tabernacle, but the veil that divided the building itself into two compartments. The holy place, called elsewhere ‘the first tabernacle,’ and the most holy place, otherwise called ‘the second tabernacle.’ We considered that veil, with the authority of the New Testament, as a foreshadowing of the humanity of our blessed Lord and then we moved into the most holy place, the holiest of all, where the presence of God was and the symbolic throne of God.

We noticed that the throne of God was composed of two parts, not just one. There was, first of all, the ornate chest made of wood overlaid with gold, with a crown of gold around the top of it. In it were several objects, including the two tablets of stone that were inscribed with the law of God given through Moses. Then on top of it was a slab—a lid of pure gold. No wood in this whatsoever. It rested on top, contained by the crown. From each end of that slab of gold there was a cherub and the two cherubim arched their wings over it, their eyes pointing down to the centre, because once a year, on the Day of Atonement, that is where the blood was sprinkled in the name of all Israel. The blood itself was brought in by the high priest on that one solitary occasion and sprinkled before and on ‘the mercy seat’—as this has come to be called in English. Actually in Hebrew it means both ‘a lid’ and ‘the lid where propitiation was made’—as it was translated in the ancient Greek translation. I was brought up on the old English translations and so from time to time I will drop into calling it the mercy seat, instead of the propitiatory as it should be called.

So in our last lecture we studied it in some detail. We found that Aaron’s acceptance in this most holy place was not because either he or the people had kept the law of God perfectly. The reason why he was accepted in the immediate presence of God was not on the grounds of that law at all, but in virtue of the blood of the propitiatory sacrifice that was sprinkled there on the mercy seat.

Then we noticed how the New Testament comments on this.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19–20)

Just in that moment when we might think we had done enough to qualify, and had kept God's law enough for him to accept us, the law would spring up and apply to us one of its many commandments and demonstrate that we are sinners and deserve not acceptance but exclusion—'through the law comes knowledge of sin.'

Then we heard the glory of the Christian gospel: we are accepted by God, forgiven and justified. Not on the grounds of keeping the law that God gave through Moses, but because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord, 'whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood' (v. 25). And the word that Paul uses is the word that the Ancient Greek translation uses to name this slab of gold, 'Whom God put forward to be a *propitiatory*,' or in the old English versions, 'Whom God has set forth to be a *mercy seat*.' It is through faith on our part, but in value of the blood of Christ. The blood signifies that on the cross he paid the penalty of human sin on our behalf, and all who come in true repentance and put their faith in Christ are there and then accepted before God. So much so that we do not have to wait until the final judgment delivers its verdict. We can know ourselves accepted with God the very moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice upon the cross.

Just like the so called dying thief came to see the folly of his sin just a few hours, maybe, before he died. He came to see that Jesus Christ was more than human and had done nothing amiss; he was indeed the Messiah and one day would come again in his kingdom. As best he knew how, he turned to Christ in repentance and said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Luke 23:42). A wonderful act of God took place in his heart. Erstwhile rebel, asking if he could be allowed entry into Christ's kingdom and thereafter obey him. And Christ's reply was, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (v. 43). This is the magnificent story of the grace of God, of salvation by grace through faith.

Does sin really matter?

But it is the fact that when people hear of this salvation by grace—not by keeping the works of the law—they sometimes find it difficult to accept. It seems to them that the preacher is saying (and perhaps the New Testament is saying) that it doesn't really matter whether you keep God's law or not, so long as you believe in Christ. In other words, sin doesn't really matter; you can go on sinning. Not, of course, alarming sins, but the kind of sins that we commonly do (you know, we good people!) and that doesn't matter at all, really, because salvation is by faith. But that is an absolutely false deduction. Salvation is not by the works of the law, it is by grace through faith; but that does not mean that a believer in Christ is free to go and sin as he will.

One verse for the moment could guarantee that fact:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the

righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4)

Let's underline that in our thinking. The whole object of salvation, pardon and acceptance with God through the sacrifice of Christ, has this in mind. What we were unable to do in our own strength before faith in Christ, now we shall be enabled to do, so that 'the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.'

The Ark of the Covenant

Now to write that indelibly, if we can, on our minds and hearts, we are to look again at this ark and its contents. Sometimes it is called the ark of *the testimony* because it contained God's testimony to his people of what his requirements were. And sometimes it is called the ark of *the covenant* because it contained the terms upon which God made a covenant with Israel and Israel made a covenant with God, the *Ten Commandments* engraved on two tables of stone, and perhaps the book of testimony (Exod 24:7).

The Old Covenant

That covenant is normally called 'the old covenant', so allow me to read to you the famous description of the institution of the old covenant.

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, '*All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.*' And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, '*All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.*' And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.' Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. (Exod 24:3–10)

I'd like you to cooperate with me now and visualise the situation as Moses takes one of the bowls filled with the blood of the sacrifice. He sprinkles it on the people and on the book containing the words and conditions of the covenant. Can you picture him, with that basin in his hand, saying, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you' (v. 8)?

The New Covenant

With that in your mind then, let me turn you to the New Testament, because we have observed many times that the tabernacle was a foreshadowing of the good things to come.

That old covenant was at best but a foreshadowing of a far better covenant. This is Luke's description of the Last Supper that Christ held with his disciples: 'And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"' (22:20).

Can you picture the similarity? There was Moses with the basin and as he sprinkled the blood in that basin upon the people and on the book, he said, '*This is the covenant that the Lord has made with you.*' We come down the centuries to that upper room with Christ and his disciples. He took a cup of wine and holding it up he said, '*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*' And according to Matthew he added, 'which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (26:28).

Shall we notice then, that he didn't say, 'This is *a* new covenant.' He said, 'This is *the* new covenant,' and we have to ask what he meant. What he was referring to was the promise God made through Jeremiah the prophet. Israel had failed to keep the first covenant given through Moses; but God promised that one day, in his mercy, he would make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

I am going to read this promise given by God in Jeremiah. Permit me to read it all, because the terms are exceedingly significant.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when *I will make a new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer 31:31–34)

You can't read it, can you, without your heart taking a little bit of a leap? That is to say, not if you're listening to the words and what they mean. That old covenant, where the people said, honestly meaning it, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient' (Exod 24:7). Alas for the reality, they broke that covenant. We have no reason to criticise ancient Israel, or if we dared to they would point the finger at us. Have we not broken it times without number?

What then is this new covenant that God proposes to make, and where is its advantage over the old covenant? This is the wonderful thing! The old covenant had laws written on tables of stone—written indeed, we are told, with the finger of God. But then, if you were a careful and clever stonemason, it wouldn't be too difficult to carve the Ten Commandments on bits of stone and make them legible. No, that's not difficult, the difficult thing is getting people to keep them! Now God has a new promise and this time the principles of the covenant will not be inscribed on tables of stone. God shall do—I nearly said 'the impossible', and write them on the hearts of his people.

You say, 'How on earth does he do that?' The heart is an old palpitating thing! And in the Hebrew sense of *heart* (the mind) that's a very changing thing. But this apparently impossible

thing is what God promises to do. He's going to put his laws into the hearts of his people, and on their minds will he inscribe them (Heb 10:16). It will no longer be a question of those things simply being written on stone; it will be a veritable new nature produced in the heart of the believer that will instinctively think God's laws and will be given the grace of God to begin to do them.

This was the promise, therefore, of the new covenant. When our Lord took the cup filled with wine, held it up to his apostles and said, 'This is the new covenant in my blood,' he was indicating that now the time had come for him to fulfil that gracious promise of God and institute the new covenant.

What is a covenant?

Let's pause a moment at this point to examine the term 'covenant' a bit more. So let me diverge for a moment to tell you about a very important archaeological discovery. Somewhere about the 1930s, archaeologists digging in places like Ugarit and Ebla discovered a Canaanite empire that they had scarcely known existed before then. They got to know more about it as they uncovered thousands of clay tablets. When they began to read them, many were authorised by the great Canaanite emperor, addressed to the vassal kings in various little states that owed their allegiance to him.

What interested the archaeologists and historians was to notice the form that these covenants took. It varied over the centuries; but at the period when Moses was in receipt of the old covenant, the Canaanite emperor at the time would write like this to his vassal kings. Let's take as an example, Suppiluliuma. He would mention his name, 'I am Suppiluliuma,' and then he would describe what he had done for the people (generally conquered them and beaten them up!). He would add the general prohibition, 'You shall have no other emperor but me.' Then a list of dos: what the vassal king and his people had to do. And a list of don'ts: what the vassal king and his people had not to do, and all the threats of what would happen to them if they broke these commands. Then, being an old pagan, he would call upon the gods to witness that this covenant had been made. He would direct that the vassal king should take these laws, these principles of the covenant, and put them in safe containers. From time to time he should assemble the nation, bring the containers out of storage and read the terms of the covenant in the hearing of the people.

Now I suspect you have already perceived the corresponding form in the old covenant given through Moses (Exod 20:1-17). Remember how it begins, 'I am the LORD your God.' Then it describes what God has done for them, '[I] brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (v. 2). The prohibition, 'You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image' (vv. 3-4), and the list of 'You shalls', and 'You shall nots.' Then Israel is warned of the consequences of disobeying those commandments, and Moses calls, not on the gods, but on the true God (and heaven itself) to witness the terms of this covenant. God prescribed that the stones and the book of the covenant should be kept in a safe place, namely in his symbolic throne. They formed the principles of his government.

So now we see quite clearly that the covenant with the Canaanite emperor was *an instrument of his government*—the way he wanted to control his subjects. Then we perceive

that the old covenant, the terms stored in the very throne of God, were likewise God's instrument of government of his people.

With that in our minds, let's read again. This is Paul writing to the believers in Corinth.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Cor 11:23–32)

It seems to me to be fairly obvious that what Paul is saying here is that, when we keep the Lord's Supper and the Lord's command, it is *an instrument of his government*.

Let me quote again what our Lord Jesus said when he instituted the Lord's Supper, which was to be held in remembrance of him. Holding the bowl of wine, the cup of wine, before his apostles, he said, 'This is the new covenant in my blood.' Writing to this largely Gentile church in Corinth, Paul is inspired to remind us what the Lord Jesus says as he hands us the cup: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' These are solemn words, designed to tug at our hearts. As we come to the Lord's Supper and take the cup, we don't just take it from our neighbour who sits in the same pew or on the same row of chairs, do we? As we take that cup we hear the Lord's voice to us, '*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*'

The terms of the new covenant

Sometimes a wicked notion comes in my head (you'll have to pardon me!). You who have many times taken the cup at the Lord's Supper—may I ask you frankly, can you recite by heart the terms of the covenant? I will suppose you can! There were days when I couldn't have done so. The terms of the covenant are repeated in the New Testament: '*I will write my laws on their hearts, and on their minds will I write them*' (Heb 8:10; 10:16). As he hands us the cup, saying, 'This is the new covenant in my blood', the gracious Lord Jesus is reminding us, 'I will write my laws on their hearts, and on their minds I will inscribe them'. As the Lord hands me that cup with his promise, my response ought to be to say, 'Lord, please write your laws more deeply on my heart, and in my mind more clearly, so that I think in terms of your will and your laws and my heart comes affectionately to long to do what you say.'

That is why, in this context, Paul gives us his apostolic advice. He says, 'As we come to the Lord's Supper, it is proper that we should examine ourselves' (v. 28). What does that mean? Well I can tell you what it means for me. I know, as I stand here—and my friends

know better than I do—that I am not yet all I ought to be. I hope they find some Christian graces in me and sometimes they speak so generously as to suggest they do. But in private they say, ‘You know him, his behaviour is a bit odd at times!’ They mean it well, of course, and truly! But I ought to examine myself. Not to become unhealthily introspective; yet to say to the Lord, ‘Lord, there are things I’ve done this week and they’re not as I would like and not as you would require, if I were to examine myself and so come to the Lord’s Supper.’ It doesn’t say that I have to be perfect to come, but what is required is that I discern myself. Then I may come to hear those blessed words again, ‘This is my blood—the cup of the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.’

I nearly forgot to tell you the best bit in those terms of the covenant and the Holy Spirit reserves it to the last. First of all it says, ‘I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts,’ and then it adds, ‘And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, “Know the Lord”, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest’ (Heb 8:11). ‘*There is coming a time when all believers will know me,*’ says God, ‘from the least to the greatest’ A personal relationship with the Lord—marvellous, isn’t it?

I enjoy those bits in the Gospels where our Lord said to Peter, ‘Simon, Simon . . .’ (Luke 22:31). Peter had said something outlandish that he ought never to have said and our Lord gently rebuked him. And when the Lord said to Martha, ‘Martha, Martha . . .’ (Luke 10:41). Yes, ‘he calls his own sheep by name’ (John 10:3), doesn’t he? And the promise is, ‘They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.’ And then the Holy Spirit adds, as a term of the old covenant: ‘*For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.*’

Praise God for his new covenant and its glorious promise! I enjoy the order in which the terms are given. I’m glad it doesn’t go the other way around. It doesn’t begin by saying, ‘Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more forever,’ and then add, ‘and I’ll write my laws on their hearts.’ I might then get the impression that we start off by forgiveness, but then if we don’t examine ourselves and behave as we should we shall lose some of the forgiveness. It’s the other way around! When I have had a rough week and my conscience is burdened, I must examine myself and confess it to the Lord. As I come then to the Lord’s Supper, how wonderful it is to hear him say, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.’ And after all the terms, then, ‘Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more.’ Glorious, isn’t it?

What happens if a person comes lightly to the Lord’s Supper and doesn’t examine him or herself? Well, if he or she is a true believer, the Lord was going to fulfil his covenant anyway. He’ll do it in a way that’s comfortable to us. If we make it difficult he’ll do it anyway, but it could be uncomfortable. To come to the Lord’s Supper carelessly is to invite his discipline. ‘*That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died,*’ says Paul (1 Cor 11:30). Why does the Lord chastise some of his own people in that fashion? Because they are his; ‘so they we may not be condemned along with the world’ (v. 32). If they are true believers the covenant holds. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 8:1). While there is no condemnation and no wrath, if need be, there must be discipline.

According to the old covenant, ‘every [Jewish] priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins’ (Heb 10:11). You can sense the drudgery of it all, can’t you? The sacrifices they offered could not in themselves ever put

away sin. They were but foreshadowings of the great Lamb of God, whose sufferings can and do put away sins. Let us grasp the wonderful encouragement of the last terms of the new covenant:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.
For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (vv. 12–14)

How can the writer to the Hebrews, whoever he was, make such a claim—‘he has perfected forever them that are being sanctified’? So he quotes the authority of Scripture itself:

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’, then he adds, ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ (vv. 15–17)

The blessedness of this great climax in the terms of the new covenant: ‘*Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*’ And I remind you of what I said in a previous lecture. When God says, ‘I will not remember their sins again,’ he doesn’t mean that he will forget that we have been sinners, and nor shall we. Shall we not know, even when we get to Glory, why the Lamb was slain? When we finally see ourselves as we really were, then glory will be ten thousand times more glory, as we think that the Lord, knowing the very worst about us, loved us just the same and gave himself for us.

When it is said that God will not remember our sins any more, it doesn’t mean that God forgets we are sinners. It is using the old metaphor drawn from the procedures of a royal court. A book of remembrance was written, in which the names and deeds of sundry enemies were recorded. If the emperor chose to tell the scribe to bring out the book and read it in his presence and the scribe should read that certain people had committed offences against the king, then the king would ask if they had been punished for it. If the reply was, ‘No, not yet, my lord,’ then the emperor would command, ‘Get going, then. Punish them.’ That’s what it means when Scripture uses the term, ‘to bring sins to remembrance’. In the terms of the new covenant that is precisely what God has guaranteed never to do for a believer. When we stand before the Lord he’ll not get out the book, read all our offences and then demand we be punished, for the simple reason that his dear Son bore our sins in his body and was punished by God on our behalf. Thank God for the assurance!

Now let me just point out the conclusion that the writer draws. ‘Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin’ (v. 18). That is not saying simply that there is no other sacrifice beside the sacrifice of Christ. It doesn’t mean that; it means that *there is no longer any process of offering a sacrifice for sin*. As you see from the context, this is the process of offering sacrifices and sin offerings every day. But they could never take away sin and the [Jewish] priest is never finished and not allowed to sit down. He continues doing it, although those sacrifices could not perfect anyone according to the conscience. But our blessed Lord,

'offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins' (v. 12); he has discharged our debt of guilt before God and God has promised not to rake up our iniquities against us in the judgment. Therefore, there is no longer any need to go on offering anything. When we assemble at the Lord's Supper, we take the bread and the wine in *remembrance* of the Lord; we are not *offering* them to God.

I go to many places. It saddens my heart to see in some countries people in an ecclesiastical building and stretched from side to side, two thirds of the way down the building, is a large screen, and in the screen there are three doors. The central one is the door of the King. It has a door and a curtain, just like Solomon's temple had. During the services the door is opened and only the priests are allowed inside that 'most holy place'—if that's what it is. The people are not allowed in, they have to stand outside. No 'boldness to enter the holiest of all.' Then the people are encouraged to think that what they have given in terms of bread and wine are now taken, made into the body and blood of Christ and offered to God. It is evident that they have no 'conscience perfected by the sacrifice of Christ.'

Since Christ's sacrifice was perfect, he doesn't keep repeating it in heaven. He is sat down; there is no longer any process of offering sacrifice for sins. Through his sacrifice there is complete confidence, boldness indeed, to enter into the very presence of God—in spirit now and one day bodily to be with Christ, 'to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne' (Rev 3:21).

The Ten Linen Curtains – The Tabernacle

So far in our studies we have used the term *tabernacle* to refer to the whole of this building and to its contents. We have even observed that the first part of the building is sometimes called the first tabernacle; it was the holy place. The second part of the building is called in some places the second tabernacle; it was the most holy place. The term tabernacle is used generally of the building, its coverings and the sacred pieces of furniture. While that is so, we have to accustom ourselves to the fact that the term is sometimes used in the Old Testament in a much more restricted sense; not to refer to the building as a whole, nor indeed to all the coverings that covered the building, but to the innermost set of curtains that formed the dwelling place of God.

They were made of pure, fine twined linen, coloured with blue, purple and scarlet, embroidered with representation of cherubim. There are ten of these curtains, joined one to another in two sets of five by fifty loops of blue on the selvedge of each set with fifty clasps of gold. All the curtains were joined together so that they might be *one tabernacle*. So, when we are talking about the tabernacle, we shall be talking about these curtains.

There was another set of curtains, which was used to cover the tabernacle curtains. They were made of goats' hair woven. There were eleven of them, similarly joined together in two sets. I mention them to show you the distinct term used of the first set, which comprised the tabernacle. The goats' hair curtains that went over them are called a *tent over the tabernacle*. And that makes sense, of course, if you observe that the term 'tabernacle' is now being used in that restricted sense, referring not to the whole building but to this inner set of ten curtains.

So let us read some of the technical details about these curtains and that will prepare us to see their spiritual meaning.

Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skilfully worked into them. The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that *the tabernacle may be a single whole*. (Exod 26:1–6)

Let's pay close attention to that phrase. That is, the ten curtains when thus coupled together form one tabernacle.

And you will find that technical term, 'the tabernacle', used consistently, if you follow down the next instructions for the goats' hair curtains. 'You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make' (v. 7). 'You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood' (v. 15). The purpose of the frames was to hold up the ten tabernacle curtains.

So now we are used to this, we shall be using the term in this restricted sense. *The tabernacle—the ten innermost curtains of blue, purple and scarlet, adorned with cherubim—was the dwelling place of God.* In Hebrew the word for tabernacle is *mishkan* and these curtains are called the *mishkan*. When the tabernacle itself was erected, we are told,

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exod 40:34–35)

So far then, the tabernacle, the *mishkan*, as a copy of the things in the heavens (Heb 8:5).

God dwelling among us

But we are more interested in this lecture in the idea that it was a shadow of the good things to come. In our studies so far we have seen what those good things are. In the first place, our blessed Lord himself, from his conception and birth—his incarnation, his life and ministry, his death on Calvary for our sins according to the Scriptures, his burial and resurrection, being with his apostles for forty days, his ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost fifty days after he rose from the dead. So if this principle of interpretation runs true throughout, then in studying the *mishkan* we shall be studying a foreshadowing of Christ himself. Please remember that the *mishkan* is the dwelling place of God.

Let me prove my point, if I must, by reading to you from the Gospel by John: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (1:14). John has already told us, 'In the beginning *was* the Word' (v. 1). Not, 'In the beginning the Word *began*.' Not, 'In the beginning the Word *became* anything.' He had no beginning, 'the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Please don't read that phrase, 'And the Word *was* God,' as though he ceased to be God later on. Read it with the proper emphasis: 'and the Word *was God*.' 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life [that created life] was the light of men' (vv. 2–4). But now John tells us something stupendous, beyond even the fact of creation by the Word of God. He tells us, 'The Word became flesh' (v. 14). God became human—without ceasing to be God of course.

God is so very marvellous and wonderful and big; he's always doing new things. You'll never get bored with God, even when you live with him for eternity. There was a time when he hadn't created the universe; then he did it. There was a time when 'the second person of the Trinity' was not human; then he became human, without ceasing to be God. And the wonderful implication of that is, God knows what it is to be human and to feel like humans do.

Again I have to draw your attention to a few technical matters, and afterwards we shall get on to their implications. John is concerned to show us that, whatever the tabernacle was in its day, it was also a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus. So I must give you a little lesson in Hebrew and then in Greek. One of the words for the verb 'dwelling' in Hebrew is *shākān*. It has three consonants. Initial *shin* (pronounced 'sh'), a middle *k*, and an *n* at the end. If you take the verb 'to dwell', and make a noun of it—'a dwelling place', you call it a *mishkān*. That is the name of the tabernacle that we're studying tonight, which formed God's dwelling place. And John tells us, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'

Now the Greek! The word John uses is a word derived from the Greek word for a tent: *skēnē*. You will notice the consonants, won't you? *S*, and a *k* in the middle, and an *n* at the end. You say, 'It's like that Hebrew word!' Yes, indeed it is. The Hebrew word was *shākān*: *s-k-n*. Now John is pleased to use a word that comes from the Greek word for a tent, *skēnē*: *s, k, n*, with suitable vowels in between. He uses a verb that means 'pitched his tent': *skēnoō*—'he pitched his tent among us' (v. 14). You couldn't miss it if you tried! Those early curtains were the *mishkan* of the Almighty here on earth, a foreshadowing of the reality that came into our world—'The Word was made flesh and dwelt [*eskēnōsin*, pitched his tent; from *skēnoō*, to dwell] among us'. Some of the older English translations translate the verse, 'The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us.' That is a very good translation; it gets the whole point of what John is saying.

When the Old Testament *mishkān* was erected, then the cloud descended and the glory of the Lord filled the *mishkān*. Now listen to John: 'And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent [tabernacled] among us (and we have seen his glory)—far exceeding the glory that Moses saw. The person of our Lord had become human without ceasing to be God; all the fullness of the Godhead dwelled bodily in him (Col 2:9). 'We saw it,' says John. Can't you sense his excitement! 'We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Wonderful dwelling place of God! So we have authority for taking this inner set of curtains as a foreshadowing of Christ and using their pattern to provoke our imaginations to understand our Lord even more.

A plurality in a unity

So to come back to these ten curtains that formed the *mishkan*, please notice that the tabernacle was a plurality in unity. It wasn't just one curtain—it was a plurality of curtains. There were ten of them, five sewn together in one group and another five similarly sewn together in another group. There is a plurality of curtains. But then the instructions tell us how that plurality was made into a unity. You shall have fifty loops of blue on one selvedge and fifty loops of blue on another selvedge; and you shall make fifty clasps of gold, put them through the loops, *that the tabernacle may be a single whole*—see Exodus 26:4–6. It was a plurality in a unity.

And you rightly ask, 'What's that got to do with our Lord? When he was here on earth he was just one, wasn't he?' Yes, but now I must take you beyond his life on earth to what happened on the day of Pentecost. The day of Pentecost happened each year in the Jewish calendar, on the fiftieth day after the firstfruits. After our Lord rose from the dead, for forty days he visited his apostles from time to time. Just before he left he said to them, 'I want you

to stay in Jerusalem until you are baptised in the Holy Spirit, as John the Baptist announced' (Acts 1:4–5). You will remember that John the Baptist pointed to the distinctive things about our Lord. 'This is the one,' he says, 'who will baptise in the Holy Spirit and in power. I am merely his forerunner. I am not worthy to handle his sandals. I baptise you in water, he shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit' (John 1:26–27, 33).

We could pause there to notice the similarity and the contrast. If, upon the confession of your sins, you came to John the Baptist to be baptised, he would put you in water and then you had to come up out of the water. John baptised people in water. 'But,' said John, 'the Messiah, the Son of God, shall not baptise you in water. He shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit.' And we perceive at once that it's not the Holy Spirit that does the baptising; it is the Lord Jesus that does that baptising. He takes those who trust him and receive him as Saviour and he baptises them—he puts them into the Holy Spirit.

During those forty days that he was with them after his resurrection, our Lord Jesus told his apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they would be baptised in the Holy Spirit. After forty days he ascended into heaven and they waited another ten days. When the day of Pentecost—the whole fifty days after firstfruits—had arrived, Christ poured out his Holy Spirit on his people. They were baptised by the risen Lord in the Holy Spirit.

You say, 'When did that happen?' Well it happened fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits. 'How odd! When you were talking about those curtains, how did you say they were joined together?' Well, I couldn't help it because I had to read the text! There were fifty loops of blue on the one selvedge, fifty loops of blue on the other selvedge and fifty clasps of gold to join them together, so that they might be one. Don't make too much of that, because people will tell you you're fanciful if you do that; but I have to be true to the facts! Not only did our Lord baptise his people on the day of Pentecost, he has proceeded to do it ever since. His people have come to him in faith and repentance and he imparts to them the Holy Spirit—he puts them into the Holy Spirit.

But now we are to read another passage that brings out the implications of this for the person of Christ himself. Paul first uses an analogy of a human body:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Cor 12:12)

When our Lord baptised his people in the Holy Spirit he gave them his very life and they become 'one body in the Lord.' Don't ask me to explain it any further. This is a vast mystery, but a glorious reality—one body with Christ. How do we become one body? How does Christ become this body?

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (v. 13)

Here Paul describes the process by which we become *body of Christ*. It is a double process, as you see: 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit.'

Let's take a simple illustration. If I have a glass of water in front of me and I dip my finger in it, my finger goes into the water. And when Christ baptises his people in the Holy Spirit he puts them into the Holy Spirit; just like John, when he baptised people, took hold of them and put them in the water. That's the first bit of the process—*he puts his people in the Holy Spirit*.

But then the second part of the process is, as verse 13 says, 'And we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' So that if I took a glass of water and, instead of putting my hand in the water, raised it to my lips and drank the water, now the water would go into me! My finger went into the water and it was 'baptised' in the water; but now I drink it and the water goes into me. Simple, but very important, isn't it?

Look at this human body standing in front of you. It's got many members—what keeps these members all in one body? You say, 'Well anybody knows that. It's all the bones, the ligaments and muscles and things.' No it isn't! Because if you strangled me and laid me out on the floor and came back in fifty years you would find that lots of my bones had come apart, in spite of all the muscles. What keeps me all together? Well, the fact is, I am in the air and the air is in me! I need both, of course—you can't have one without the other. I have to be in the air and the air has to be in me. Suppose you throttle me for some reason or other. Then I am still in the air, but the air isn't any longer in me and I shall die, of course. It's not enough for me to be in the air—I must also have the air in me.

If you were to take me to Cape Canaveral, and say, 'Gooding, you're interested in astronomy; we're going to give you a free ride! We're going to tie you on the outside of this rocket and send you up into space, where you will get a marvellous view of the galaxies.' They say, 'Take a deep breath,' and they shoot me up into space. I've taken a deep breath and the air is in me for the time being. The trouble is, I'm not in the air. To have the air in me and I not being in the air, that's no use whatever. For a human body to have life, the body needs both to be in the air and the air to be in the body.

One body, many members

The same thing is true of the body of Christ. To form us as members of his body, *Christ puts us into the Holy Spirit*. Not content with that, *he puts the Holy Spirit into us*. It's no use having one without the other; for that is what life is in the body of Christ. It very quickly goes beyond our comprehension, doesn't it? But it is a reality and we have to think now of the significance of the body of Christ, as given us in various parts of Scripture.

Here in 1 Corinthians 12 and then again in chapter 14, it is pointed out to us that as believers we are all in the body of Christ. But we don't all have the same gifts; the gifts vary and they vary because they reflect the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. (12:4–6)

The variety of gifts reflects the three persons of the Holy Trinity—a variety of gifts, but one body. It's a comforting thought to the likes of me, because it works twofold. 'If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it

any less a part of the body' (v. 15). If the foot should say that, it would be talking nonsense, wouldn't it? It wouldn't be a foot if it weren't in the body! When God was making the body of Christ, he didn't say, 'Now where shall I find a few feet?' Did he go to a shop for second-hand feet or something? No, that's nonsense! He put us in the body and, being in the body, we eventually find what gift we have. It might be a foot, or an eye, or a brain, or something.

You say, 'Well then, what decided the gift I have?' The Bible says, 'But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him' (v. 18 KJV). And that's been a great comfort to me over the years. I've often regretted that I wasn't an evangelist—a big evangelist like Billy Graham or somebody. It would have been marvellous! But I'm not that, and I felt disappointed until I read this: 'God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, *as he chose.*' All dear old Billy Graham can do—tremendous evangelist as he is—is to please God. God has put him in the body, *even as it pleased him.* And I can please God, because God has put me in the body, even as it pleased him. What higher occupation and calling is there in the universe than to please God? And what is more, the 'big' gifts should not despise the lesser gifts. They cannot say, 'We have no need of you—we could get on without you.' They couldn't! All the members of the body are necessary and all are given their gifts so that they might please God.

Sometimes we might be inclined to regard the metaphor of the body of Christ as being simply good advice for the way Christians should get on with each other in the church. It is very good advice indeed, but it's more than that.

The cherubim were mighty powers created by God. Colossians chapter 1 tells me that the same blessed Lord, who died and rose again for me and has gone into heaven and put me in his body—*he made them.* He not only made our universe, but all the principalities, powers, mights and dominions (v. 16). What is more, upon his resurrection he was raised into heaven and sat down above all principalities, powers, mights and dominions—*he is above them* (Eph 1:20–21). Now let's listen once more: 'You too has he made alive . . . and raised us up with Christ, and made us to sit with him in heavenly places' (2:1, 6). Being part of the body of Christ is not merely a temporary arrangement for the running of the church here on earth; it is an eternal thing—*we shall eternally be part of the body of Christ.*

In a very real sense, this present age (the world as it is now) is under the administrative powers of some of these created beings, but not the age to come.

Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, 'What is man?' . . . But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels . . . crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death. (Heb 2:5–6, 9)

Ephesians tells us that he has been raised far above principalities and powers: '[He is the] head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all' (1:20–23). To be the body of Christ will mean then what it means now; we are Christ's executives, the ones he uses to do the tasks he has assigned for us. What a wonder it is, the eternity that lies before us!

You say, 'According to the Bible this universe is going to come to an end—what shall we be doing then?' Well I can assure you once more that God isn't hard up for ideas and the last

vision of the holy city in the book of Revelation is of the eternal city, the new Jerusalem. Says John, 'And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven [towards earth]' (Rev 21:2). Now if I had written it, I'd have said, 'I saw the new Jerusalem going up into heaven, fast moving away from earth, and saying, 'Good riddance to bad rubbish!' No, it's the other way around—he saw the holy city *coming down*. God will always have some material expression of his character, his ways and his purposes. O the wonder of it, when as his redeemed creatures, part of his very body, we are assigned our tasks in that glorious eternity. But even now,

[God] seated him [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all . . . so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 1:20–23; 3:10–11)

Through the members of the body of Christ, God is teaching the principalities and powers a very deliberate message: 'Through the church they might come to know the manifold wisdom of God.' The angels are looking on and mightier powers than we can imagine are scratching their heads and saying, 'How did God make them part of the body of his dear Son? By what power has he transformed them and placed them above us? With what wisdom has he ordered their way, saved them, made them loyal to Christ, eager and anxious to serve God?' And in the ages to come God '[will] show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus' (2:7). When at last we are conformed completely to the image of Christ and serve him as his executives, we shall be an eternal lesson to the principalities and powers.

Unity in the body

As the human body, then, has many members, but is one body; so is the body of Christ. And I remind you of the directions to Moses about these fifty loops and fifty clasps of gold—that the ten curtains (the tabernacle) might be one. Our Lord prayed for the oneness of the body of Christ. Lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, 'Father, while I was with them, I kept them in your name . . . and I have lost none of them, except the son of destruction . . . I pray that you should keep them' (see John 17:1–15). And do you suppose that God will be less skilful and able to keep us than Christ was? Well of course not! 'I pray that they may be one' (v. 22). That prayer has not gone unanswered. On the day of Pentecost the blessed Lord Jesus poured out his Spirit and baptised his people into one body. All true believers are members of that body and they shall reign with Christ.

'But Mr Preacher, you're being a little unrealistic now! Your enthusiasm has run away with you, talking of the oneness of the body of all believers. Have you forgotten that the church is sorely distressed by heresies, divisions and quarrels? Enough to break the heart of Christ, I should have thought.'

‘Yes, I am all too painfully aware of it.’

‘Has God not made provision to maintain the unity that he has created for all who have trusted Christ—those who have been baptised in his Spirit have been made to drink of one Spirit and therefore are of one body? What provision has he made for the maintenance of that body, for the keeping of the one faith and for growing up into Christ who is the head?’

That is a big question and realism demands that we face it. In the following section we shall consider what God provided so that the tabernacle should be one. ‘You shall make the frames [not boards] for the tabernacle’ (Exod 26). These were ladder-like constructs to hold up the tabernacle. When the tabernacle was put over those frames the edges of it didn’t reach the ground. They couldn’t stand by themselves and they didn’t just float in the air, so God told Moses to make these frames for the tabernacle to give practical expression to the unity that these curtains symbolised.

And then there would be all sorts of hostile elements raining down on them as they passed through the desert; so they were given a further set of curtains, this time made of goats’ hair, to be a tent on the tabernacle to protect it from destruction by the forces of nature. To that practical question we shall come in our next lecture. Let it not detract from what God has been telling so far. Every true believer in the Lord Jesus, placed in the Holy Spirit by Christ—baptised into the Spirit by Christ and made to drink of the Spirit, is thereby made a member of the body of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

[The Frames for the Tabernacle](#)

In our previous lecture we discovered a very interesting thing about the use in the Old Testament of the term *tabernacle*. It is used more generally of the whole setup: the building and the court, its curtains and so forth. But then we discovered that it has a stricter meaning; it is the term given to the lovely inner curtains of the building. There was another series of curtains that was put over those ten curtains; they are called *the tent over the tabernacle*. Moreover, the frames that held them up are called *frames for the tabernacle*, meaning they were the frames that gave practical expression to what the tabernacle curtains symbolised and held them up on three sides and at the back.

So we were studying this series of inner curtains and noticed that they are referred to as 'the tabernacle'—in Hebrew the *mishkān*. Immediately we saw the point of what John the Evangelist is saying, 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). Some of the older translations have it, 'The Word was made flesh and *tabernacled* among us,' and that gives us a clue to what John is doing when he makes that statement. The term 'tabernacle' in Hebrew is *mishkān*. It is the noun formed from the verb 'to dwell', *shākān—s-k-n*, with suitable vowels in between. When John wrote 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,' he deliberately chose a word that in Greek makes almost the same sound. It is derived from a noun, *skēnē—s-k-n*, with suitable vowels, just like the Hebrew word. It is no accident that John uses a Greek verb that contains it, *eskēnōsin*—and he puts it across in terms of the ultimate reality which that tabernacle for centuries symbolised. He said, 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt in a tent—dwelt in a tabernacle among us.' That gives us the authority to look back to this original tabernacle and to see in it not only the lessons that it taught the Israelites in those far off centuries, but the prophecies that its symbolism made; for the New Testament informs us that the tabernacle was 'a shadow of the good things to come.' Which good things were the coming of Christ, his incarnation, his life, his miracles, his death at Calvary, his burial, his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of God. And therefore in this study we shall once more consider how the curtains pointed to Christ and what practical lessons we shall learn from them.

We also noted that these ten curtains that were called 'the tabernacle,' the *mishkān*, were a plurality in unity. They were formed of ten curtains, each four cubits broad. Five curtains were placed side-by-side lengthways and sewn together and the other five similarly. Then the two sets of curtains were joined together by an elaborate system. There were fifty loops on the selvedge of the one set and fifty loops on the selvedge of the other set, and through the loops on both sides there were placed fifty clasps of gold. The text actually explicitly says that

this was done *so that the tabernacle might be one*. It was one tabernacle composed of ten curtains and joined together by these fifty loops and fifty clasps.

In our next and final lecture we shall be considering the second group of curtains that were placed over these to protect them on all sides. They were not made of linen but of goats' *hair* woven—not goats' *skins*. There were eleven of those curtains, one set of five and another set of six. They were joined together by that similar method of fifty loops down each selvedge and then fifty clasps—this time of bronze.

On top of them were various skins, simply to protect the building, the curtains and the furniture from sand and the occasional rainstorm that they get in those parts. A description of them is given in only one verse (Exod 26:14). They were simply practical affairs. There was a set of *ram skins* dyed red—we don't know how many. Above them a set of what the older translations called *badger skins*. That is a most unlikely translation, for I am told there are no badgers in that area of the world. They are more likely to have been *dugong*, the sea cow, which is plentiful in the Red Sea. They might even have been seal skins, but we need not trouble with them further.

The two big sets of curtains are what interest us; and when the description is given of the second set, the goats' hair curtains, it is emphasised that they were joined together so that the tent might be one. That is the stress of the text: *both of them were unities, but pluralities in unity*. And so we asked ourselves whether this detail too might be 'a shadow of the good things to come.' Were the ten inner curtains such a shadow? John tells us in the verse that we have already studied, 'The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us'; but when we consider what our blessed Lord did on the day of Pentecost we then find a clue to what the foreshadowing is telling us.

Far above all principalities and powers

On our Lord's own instructions, the Apostles had to wait in Jerusalem for ten days after his ascension; and on the day of Pentecost he poured out his Spirit on the early believers. The epistles subsequently explain the significance of it and what it achieved. According to Paul,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Cor 12:12)

Throughout the epistles of Paul we discover that our blessed Lord Jesus (forever himself, always distinguishable and now throned in glory) is the head of a body. This is not simply a metaphor to tell us, who belong to Christian churches, that we ought to behave like a human body does. In talking of the body of Christ, Scripture is talking of a fundamental reality that has existed in the universe since the day of Pentecost. A body is being formed of redeemed men and women by that same Holy Spirit coursing through them and in them, illuminating and guiding them; a vital living link with the head, our Lord Jesus Christ, in heaven.

As Mrs Alexander's hymn says, 'It is a thing most wonderful; almost too wonderful to [take in]'—that all believers here on earth today are joined together with our blessed Lord in

heaven by the fact that the Holy Spirit is in us all. He, therefore, is the head of the body, the church.

So we saw that this idea of a body of Christ, formed by all believers of the past, present, and future, is not something concerned merely with life on earth; it is to be an eternal feature. We are told that our blessed Lord, the head of the body, has been raised and is seated in heaven, far above all principalities, powers, might and dominions. As Son of God in the beginning he made those great spirit executive powers; but he became a man, human like we are, and God has raised him from the dead and seated him at his own right hand far above them all. And not only is he human (though he never ceased to be God), but we are said to be joined with him, one body in the Lord. God has raised us up too and seated us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, far above those same powers (Eph 2:6). I don't know whether Michael the Archangel has got over the shock yet, of redeemed human beings joined with Christ that sit above him—*far above him!* Therefore, as members of the body of Christ, our behaviour now here on earth is exceedingly significant.

It is on this that we wish to concentrate now. When we think of the tabernacle, the ten inner curtains, we notice they are basic linen with colours of blue, purple and scarlet; and then cherubim placed on them, we don't know whether by embroidery or damask work. The Old Testament talks of the living cherubim as God's executives. In the tabernacle they point to Christ, who is above them and controls them. Now we too are seated with Christ, spiritually above them, and one day shall control them. However, when people hear about this great unity in the body of Christ, they cannot help seeing that Christians throughout this world are sadly divided. What comes of the unity then, that the body of Christ is meant to show?

Ladder-like frames

With that in mind we come to consider these frames. When the directions are given for them, Moses is told, 'You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle' (v. 15), meaning frames for those ten curtains. Frames that held them up and the practical means of giving expression to those ten beautiful curtains, for this was where God Almighty condescended to presence himself.

Whatever else they were, they weren't boards. We get the impression from the details that they were ladder-like constructions and architects and experts disagree among themselves what exact form these frames took. But of this we can be sure, they were ladder-like constructions and served one obvious purpose. If they had been solid boards or planks, you could not have seen the curtains through the interstices in the frames. The only place you would have seen the curtains was if you had looked up to the roof. Whereas, being frames, ladder-like constructions, when you went in by the door you would have seen the delightful blue and purple and scarlet, the fine twined linen and the cherubim all around you. You would have seen them on the roof and in the veil in front, for it too was adorned with cherubim.

As we saw in a very early lecture, when you came in you not only saw cherubim, but on the left you would have seen the lampstand that was formed like a living tree. It had buds, calyxes, blossoms and then eventually almonds—oil lamps in the shape of almonds; a tree

made to look as if it was alive, with all its fruits simultaneously and the base like roots going down into the ground. As the priest came through the door he would have seen cherubim all around him and a tree, *the tree of life* indeed, and he could have remembered Adam and Eve in the garden. They disobeyed God and fell and were cast out lest they should put forth their hands and take and eat of the tree of life. At the gate of the garden were placed cherubim to stop them coming in again.

Now see the wonders of God's grace already. The people were redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb and by the power of God at the Red Sea. Now the priests were privileged to come in, at least to that first division, see the cherubim and touch the very tree of life, as they lit the lamps upon the lampstand. This was the beginning of the end of man's exile, but it would still be centuries before believers in general would be admitted to the equivalent of the most holy place. In Israel's day only the high priest was allowed into the most holy place and only once a year, but then Christ came and offered his perfect sacrifice for sin. He died, was buried, has risen and is gone into heaven; and because of his great sacrifice we too are enjoined to have 'confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh' (Heb 10:19–20).

Standing together

What else may we learn from these frames? I repeat, they gave practical expression to what the curtains were symbolising and if we read the further technical details in chapter 26 we should find at least four things that are important because of their significance.

1. Along the base, or at the base of each frame and therefore running along underneath all the frames, were *sockets of silver*.

2. At the corners there were *corner frames*. It is difficult from the Hebrew to understand just exactly how they were arranged, but their purpose is obvious, they kept the frames steady. They would need corner frames that could give and determine the angle at which the frames were spaced out. It wouldn't do to have the frames too wide or too narrow. They had to be exactly *it* and the corner boards determined the angle at the back and therefore the angle of the walls. Then, because they were individual frames standing side by side, they had to have means by which they could stand together, not higgledy-piggledy. One frame might stand upright, another lean outwards and another inwards; the frame that leant outwards would think that the frame that leant inwards was far too narrow and the frame that leant inwards would think that the frame that leant outwards was far too wide! All sorts of disputes could have arisen, had they been allowed to do what they pleased, so there was a device arranged.

3. Each frame had *a series of rings* on it.

4. When poles were put through the rings the frames all stood in alignment. It was a simple technique.

Let me repeat it. Each frame had rings, long poles were put through the rings and each frame had to get hold of the same pole by its rings. When that was done they all stood straight, shoulder to shoulder. Finally, they were overlaid with gold—not only the frames themselves, but the poles and the rings.

When some people read of this apparently extravagant use of gold they think that this is a fairy story. How could people in that far distant age have afforded such lavish decoration? But Professor A. R. Millard⁴ has shown that in those days gold was far more plentiful than perhaps it is even now. Many a temple had its pillars covered in gold. If you examine those that remain, you will find a circle of little holes at various stages around the pillar where the gold was nailed on. We shall all have seen pictures of Tutankhamun's tomb and the lavish use of gold in it. This is no fairy story; these frames were all overlaid with pure gold.

When we come to the New Testament we find authority again for making a comparison between that house of God and the house that Christ is now building.

Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Heb 3:5-6)

So Christ is the head of his house that corresponds to Moses and his house—or God's house that Moses built. And then we are told that Christ, as Son over his own house, has made believers part of that house: 'We are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.'

The one body

So now we come to the practical side of our topic. Let's look at Ephesians 4 and consider the problem that Paul is dealing with.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (vv. 1-6)

In the distressing fact that there are many divisions amongst God's people, I find this a comforting observation. We are not here told to make the unity; we are faced with a statement that there is a unity. Meaning, not a union but a oneness instead of a twoness. Did you notice the phrase, 'There is one body'? It is a fact; all true believers, whatever they may call themselves, are the body of Christ. It exists—it *is*!

What we are exhorted not to do here, is to act as if the body of Christ were divided. 'There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.' This is the glorious fact of the oneness of all believers in Christ; it is a unity that we don't have to make, the unity for which Christ prayed in his famous prayer recorded in John chapter 17. He stood on the threshold of Gethsemane and prayed to his Father that those whom the Father had given him may all be one. In answer to that prayer God has sent his

⁴ Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic languages, University of Liverpool.

Spirit and Christ has formed the body of Christ. There is only one body; all believers belong to it and in this we are to rejoice.

The silver from the ransom money

But now we could learn a lesson or two from our God-given illustration. Part of the success of these frames to perform their function of holding up the *mishkân*, the dwelling place of God, was that *they stood in sockets of silver*—every one of them. Each frame had two struts that went down, like a ladder, and there were two sockets, one under each strut. And it wasn't just any old silver; the silver for these sockets came from the *ransom money*. When the census was held in Israel everyone had to bring a ransom [an atonement] for his life in order for God to allow him or her still to live as a registered member of Israel (30:12). That ransom money, being silver, was then taken and moulded and it became, among other things, the bases for the frames—the sockets that gave them solidity. The centre of gravity was lowered and now the heavy weight at the bottom made the frames less likely to topple over. The silver came from the ransom money.

It is a foundational provision and requirement for the true church of God that every believer should stand on the ransom that Christ has provided for our souls. We are redeemed, 'not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ' (1 Pet 1:18–19). Here is the basis of all Christian unity; to be a true child of God we must each be 'standing' on the precious blood of Christ as our ransom, for Christ gave himself a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:6). Only those who in true repentance and faith receive Christ and take their stand upon his redeeming blood are ransomed. It is a source of serious weakness if the church forgets to proclaim that membership of the house of God depends on an individual's acceptance of the ransom and taking his and her *stand* on the redeeming blood of Christ.

It is a sorry state of affairs when an evangelical can write in a newspaper, 'If the theory of propitiation is right—that God laid on Christ the iniquity of us all and he suffered the indignation of God against our sin—then God ought to be had up for child abuse.' That was written and published by a professed evangelical. I cite it simply to show the importance of getting our foundation right. Every frame stood on the redemption money and every believer in the house and family of God must be redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

Christ the cornerstone

Then there were corner frames and I repeat we don't know exactly what the specifications mean, or how they were achieved in practice. Architects have different views of it, but we know that their purpose was to set the angle between the back wall and the two sides. When we come to the New Testament, it uses a similar metaphor. But not now the tabernacle, a portable shrine; it takes its metaphor from a solid building. So Peter says in his first epistle:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy

priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' (2:4-6)

The metaphor now is drawn from a solid stone building and in those ancient times they had at the corner a very big, huge cornerstone. If you want to see an example, go to the Wailing Wall in modern day Jerusalem and look at the cornerstones in the wall, they are huge. These stones not only took the weight of the building, they set the angle. Using the metaphor, God says, 'Behold, I lay in Zion, a *chief cornerstone*, to me elect, precious'—this is our blessed Lord Jesus; and Peter says, 'As you come to him, you also are built up as living stones.'

Dear old Peter, he is forever dropping hints about his own experience. When he came to Christ, Christ said to him, 'You are Simon . . . you shall be called *Cephas* [the Aramaic for 'stone']. In coming to Christ Peter was made a living stone; and in coming to Christ we are made living stones. For what purpose? To be built around a cornerstone! God is building a temple and he wants a spiritual priesthood to offer up sacrifices acceptable to him (1 Pet 2:5). That's the first requirement of worship, isn't it? Not whether we enjoy it—but whether God enjoys it.

I mustn't go outside my experience to give advice to married men about buying presents for their wives! But suppose this man is just hurrying out of the door after breakfast and his wife says,

'Have you forgotten what day this is?'

'It's Monday, isn't it?'

'I don't mean that.'

'Oh, it's your birthday—I hadn't really forgotten! What would you like? Would you like a lovely box of chocolates?'

'No, not chocolates. I would like a lovely bunch of roses.'

'You shall have them, dear!'

So he comes home that night, and he's got something behind his back.

'I remembered your birthday, and I've got you a beautiful present!'

'What is that?' she says.

'It's a box of chocolates—the very best I could get hold of.'

'But I thought I said I didn't want chocolates! Were there no roses?'

'Well yes, there were roses!'

'Then why did you bring me chocolates?'

'Well I like chocolates, my dear!'

I don't know what wives do to husbands like that, but he would be a fortunate man if he didn't get the chocolates thrown at him!

God was going to build a tabernacle and a temple where he might dwell and receive the worship of his people's hearts. He laid a cornerstone—our blessed Lord Jesus. Many of his contemporaries came and looked at the cornerstone and heard what he said and taught. They didn't like it and they took that cornerstone and threw him out. They nailed him to a tree.

God gave them forty years to repent. When as a nation they didn't repent, God said, 'I don't like your temple,' and he let the Romans destroy it.

This is a basic principle of worship. It's not primarily what I like, it is what God likes and it is centred on and around his dear Son.

Captives and gifts

Then there was a series of rings on the wooden frames, which the poles went through; each frame was required to submit to the pole that went through its rings. That was God's provision in those far off days. In Ephesians chapter 4 Paul is talking about maintaining the unity of the faith, 'But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men"' (vv. 7-8). What kind of gifts?

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (vv. 11-13)

Wonderful words of triumph! When Christ ascended on high he led captivity captive and thus gave gifts to men. The metaphor is drawn from ancient warfare, where a general would go out with his army and defeat the enemy. Then he would get the enemy generals that survived and many of the people, bring them back home and distribute them to his friends as their slaves.

Christ has ascended up on high, taken captive those that would otherwise have captured the Lord's people, turned some of them into gifts and gave these ex-captives to the church. What kind of people were they? Well, the man who wrote this epistle was one of them: Saul of Tarsus did his utmost to destroy the early Christians. He thought they were blasphemers and must be eliminated. When Christ met him he was on the road to Damascus to persecute believers in that city and perhaps have them executed. Christ conquered him and gave this erstwhile persecutor to the church as a gift. Thanks be to God for such a gift!

But to each one of us is given a gift. We are all, in that sense, conquered by Christ. We don't all have the same gifts, but we are now in the body. Some members of the body he gave to be,

The apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints . . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith . . . that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. (vv. 11-14)

The enemy will always try to delude and waylay us. That's why Christ has given us these gifts. We mustn't allow ourselves to be cynical; we need the evangelists, don't we? We've surely not arrived at a position where we no longer need evangelists! Men and women need to be born again; they need to hear the gospel, receive Christ and be saved. It is to those that receive him he gives the authority to become children of God (John 1:12). If ever an individual is going to be a 'frame' in the dwelling place of God, we need him or her to say,

'Yes, I accept the message the evangelist brings!' We need all that the apostles have written and be willing to personally grab hold of it. And if you grab hold of the Gospels and the teaching of the apostles and I grab hold of it, the likelihood is that we shall be standing pretty well alongside of each other! We could all have small differences of interpretation—we've not arrived at the unity of the faith yet—but we are not cynical and we press on.

The point of having these gifts, says Paul, is 'for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.' Let me cite John Stott, a dearly beloved teacher of the people of God. Commenting on this passage, he says, 'You know, the ministers are not just one man! All the members of the church are ministers.' He says that we should change our church noticeboards. Instead of, 'The Church Minister is XYZ', it should read, 'Ministers: every member of the church'. The point of the gifts is to foster all the believers in the particular work that God has given them to do. What is the standard? Not only the unity of the faith; we are part of the body of Christ and the ultimate objective is for the body to grow up in proportion to the head. We have a long way to go, haven't we? It would be a tragic thing if the head had only tiny little undeveloped members. Thank God we have the promise, 'When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

And finally from our object lesson we look at the fact that those frames, poles and rings were overlaid with gold. I cannot forget the words of the Lord Jesus as he stood on the threshold of Gethsemane and Calvary. Judas, who never was a believer, was already betraying him. Peter was a true believer, but he would deny him. Within a few hours the others would all leave him and flee. Yet he prayed for them that God would keep them. Having made many requests for those whom the Father had given them, he then adds, 'And the glory . . .'. O what a wonderful addition it is. After all we've thought about this evening or experienced in life, then let me quote it to you: 'And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one' (John 17:22 RV). How could Christ lavish such glory on a bankrupt failure like myself?

My dear Christian friend, as we leave God's word tonight and go to our beds, may these words of the Lord Jesus resound again in our ears:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one . . . that the world may know that . . . [you] loved them even as you loved me. (vv. 22–23)

So may God bless our study here this evening and make us to be 'frames' that stand up straight by the strength of God; reliable members that hold up the 'tabernacle' of his presence, thus to please him with our sacrifices and to bless the world with our testimony to God and to the love of Christ.

[The Eleven Goats' Hair Curtains – The Tent](#)

In our last two lectures we have studied in some detail the *tabernacle*, strictly so called. Let me say again, that the term 'the tabernacle' is widely used both in Scripture and elsewhere to describe the whole setup. Indeed, the first division in the building is called the first tabernacle and the second division the second tabernacle. Otherwise called the holy place and the most holy place.

But then two lectures ago we discovered that the term *tabernacle* is used in a more restricted sense in other places and refers to the inner set of curtains that formed the dwelling place of God, known as the *mishkan*. They were ten curtains, sewed along their length into two groups, five in one group and five in another. Then, by an elaborate system of fifty loops on the selvedge of one set and fifty loops on the selvedge of the other set and fifty clasps of gold, the ten curtains were fastened together *that they might be one*. We noticed that they were a plurality in unity; one tabernacle though it was composed of many curtains.

We saw that when John comes to write his Gospel, he deliberately invokes the memory of the ten curtains fastened together in this ancient tabernacle by choosing a word in Greek that sounds very much like the Hebrew word for tabernacle. The Hebrew word for those ten curtains is *mishkān*. The *m* in front denotes that it's a noun and then the rest of it comes from a verb. Its consonants are *s-k-n*: *to dwell*. John uses a Greek word that has those same consonants, *s-k-n*, and the verb he uses means *to pitch a tent*. So he says, 'The Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us' (John 1:14); deliberately recalling by the sound of the very words, and of course their sense, the ancient tabernacle where God deigned to *presence* himself.

Now we are to move on and consider the next set of curtains. Being so beautiful and so sacred as the dwelling place of God, the tabernacle curtains had to be protected from outside elements. So the outer set of coverings was made from *seal skins*. Older translations call them *badger skins*, but that is unlikely because there are no badgers in that part of the world. Most commentators imagine they may have been *dugong*, a sea cow, for many sea cows are to be found in the Red Sea. This covering went right over the top of everything.

Then, underneath the seal skins, there were *ram skins*, tanned. The older translations say they were coloured red, but the actual verb means that they were tanned. Scripture, however, only spends one verse to mention those two sets of skins (Exod 26:14). They were there for practical purposes, to keep the desert sand out from the inner part of the tabernacle and occasionally in the desert, when they got a thunderclap and a torrential downpour, to keep the rain out. They were practical in their purpose.

Underneath them, however, and once more over the tabernacle curtains, there was a very elaborate system of *goats' hair* curtains. Like the tabernacle itself, they were composed of individual curtains sewn together. Five curtains in one group and six curtains in another, with loops down the selvedge of each set of curtains and then, passing through the loops, clasps of bronze. Here we come to the name of this set of curtains, 'the tent'—Hebrew *ōhel* (26:11). It's a *tent* over the series of ten curtains that were the *tabernacle*. These goats' hair curtains were the first line of protection coming outwards and made with the same complicated method as the tabernacle itself.

The tent

So let us read some of the technical details from the actual record: 'You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make' (26:7). Notice the difference between them and the tabernacle. There were only ten curtains in the tabernacle, in the tent there were eleven, and, 'The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits' (v. 8a). And here we notice another difference, the length of the tabernacle curtains was twenty-eight cubits and as a result, when the tabernacle curtains were put over the frames, they didn't reach the ground. The frames on each of the two sides are ten cubits high, the breadth of the tabernacle is another ten cubits, which adds up to thirty cubits. As the tabernacle curtains were only twenty-eight cubits, they were a cubit short of the ground at each side. The goats' hair curtains, however, were thirty cubits so that they could cover the tabernacle curtains completely.

There were eleven curtains, the same breadth as the tabernacle curtains. But, because there were eleven of them, the eleventh curtain at the front was doubled over and under the tabernacle curtains, as far as we know, to protect them at the front and down the front sides. That gives an extra half curtain at the back and the directions tell us that this hung over the back of the tabernacle (v. 12), meaning over the back of the ten beautiful linen curtains.

So let's read further technical details of this exceedingly important set of goats' hair curtains:

You shall couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent. You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set. You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together that it may be a single whole. And the part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. And the extra that remains in the length of the curtains, the cubit on one side, and the cubit on the other side, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. (vv. 9–13)

Immediately we recognise the similarity between this tent of goats' hair curtains and the tabernacle curtains, which were of fine twined linen. When we were studying the tabernacle we observed that there were two separate sets of ten curtains sewn together, five in one set and five in the other. They were linked together by fifty loops on the one side and fifty loops

on the other and joined by fifty clasps of gold. We said to ourselves, 'Does that detail in any way act as a foreshadowing of the good things to come, because the New Testament tells us that the whole building and its sacred vessels acted for the Israelites at the time as a copy of the heavenly things?'

In his great kindness to his people when they were spiritually children, God brought down great eternal truths to them by means of simple symbols. Just as a mother, when she bathes her baby son, gives him a toy aeroplane to play with. He half imagines it's real and goes, 'zoom, zoom, zoom,' all over the place! Of course, he doesn't use a toy aeroplane now. He's grown up and he's a pilot, a captain indeed, on a transatlantic airliner. But the little toy aeroplane served its purpose, not only to entertain him in the bath but to get an idea of an aeroplane into his head. The toy aeroplane was a foreshadowing for him of the great reality that eventually he would captain as it flew over the Atlantic.

For the people of the time the tabernacle and its sacred vessels were copies of things in the heavens. But they were also, says the New Testament, 'a shadow of the good things to come' (Heb 10:1). When, therefore, we were studying the tabernacle with its ten curtains—two parts joined together, a plurality in a unity—we said to ourselves, 'Could that illustrate anything about our Lord?' And we found that it could indeed, for on the day of Pentecost our blessed Lord (in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily), having ascended to heaven, poured forth his Holy Spirit on his people. They were baptised in the Holy Spirit, made to drink of the Holy Spirit and thus baptised into one body. One body with the Lord Jesus; he is the head of the body. It's not just a metaphor it is a reality, for our Lord and his people have the same life; he has given them the Holy Spirit. So we enjoyed looking at what the New Testament says about the body of Christ; its present function and its eternal role as the executives of the Son of God in all the plans that God has for universes and worlds to come.

Once again we are met with the same feature. The goats' hair curtains are in two groups, this time five and six. They are joined together into one by the same system: fifty loops on the one side, fifty loops on the other, with fifty clasps, this time of bronze.

What happened on the day of Pentecost?

I can't resist the temptation at that juncture to remember what happened on the day of Pentecost. Fifty days after our blessed Lord rose from the dead as 'the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor 15:20), he sent out his Spirit and the body of Christ was formed—Christ and his members sharing the same body, the same life. If that's what the tabernacle curtains pointed to, could these goats' hair curtains point to a similar thing?

I am relying here on your knowledge of the New Testament. There is another very important part of our Christian gospel that talks about our being joined to Christ.

In Romans we are told that we were *baptised into his death* (6:3); because we were baptised into his death, we have *a death like his* (vv. 4–5); and just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too have been *raised with him* (v. 4). Then we have been *released from the law* so that we might be joined to Christ (v. 14).

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. (7:4)

We have become the body of Christ and therein lies a very big provision for our deliverance from the bondage to sin. The secret of our deliverance from the domination of the law is that when Christ died we died; when he was raised we have been raised to share his risen life; and, being joined to him, we bring forth fruit to God. So once more we are in the presence of a *plurality in a unity*.

The significance of baptism

We died with Christ, we are risen with Christ and we are joined to Christ. This is the secret of our deliverance from the slavery and power of sin, so let us turn to Romans chapter 6 to see what lessons are drawn from this.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (vv. 1–5)

You couldn't come across a more fundamental fact than this in Holy Scripture. It explains the significance of Christian baptism. It is a symbolic burial. When a person is baptised he or she is put under the water—buried. But you don't leave them there; it is followed at once by a symbolic resurrection. It's important to get both sides of it.

Under British law we don't bury people to make them die! We wait until they're actually dead and then we bury them. Candidates for Christian baptism have to be dead first. You say, 'What do you mean?' That's what *repentance* means. True repentance is not just repenting of this sin, or some other sin; it's coming to see that we are convicted of having broken God's law. 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them' (Gal 3:10). God's holy law curses us; we have deserved its sentence and repentance means coming to see that that is true. Some people find it difficult; in my experience it is the reason why many Christians do not have the assurance of salvation. They've got the idea that being saved means that they will improve out of all recognition. When they don't, they begin to doubt whether they are saved at all.

Let me use an illustration. A man comes to his doctor because he finds it difficult to breathe and he keeps coughing. He smokes thirty to fifty cigarettes a day and it's ruined his lungs. The doctor examines him and says, 'Yes, I'm afraid you have ruined your lungs. There's only one hope for you, you need a transplant—new heart and lungs.'

'O no,' says the man, 'I'm not as bad as that. I admit I am a bit ill, but I've given up smoking. That ought to count for something.'

‘Yes,’ says the doctor, ‘but it’s a pity you didn’t do it earlier. Giving up smoking won’t save you now. You are so bad that only a radical operation can save you.’

That is what God says to all of us:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Rom 3:19)

God calls on me to repent and repentance means agreeing with God over that verdict. Left to myself I will perish; nothing I can do will save me. But if I repent, the glorious news is that God’s own dear Son has died for me and borne the penalty of God’s holy law in my place.

We had broken God’s law and the law says, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Then Paul says, ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”’ (Gal 3:13). If a man committed an exceedingly serious crime in those old days, first of all he was put to death and then his body hanged on a tree until nightfall as a warning to all others. Paul saw that he deserved the law’s curse, but Christ had borne the curse for him. That is repentance: to admit that in the sight of God’s law I am worthy of death. Says Paul, ‘I died to the law’ (Gal 2:19). ‘The law condemned me to death and I accepted its verdict.’

When we do that, God has a salvation for us and that’s what baptism signifies. Baptism doesn’t do away with our sins, it signifies that we have admitted, ‘I am a sinner worthy of death, but Christ died for me and when he died it is as though I died. Believing on him, I am baptised into his death and then I am raised immediately out of that symbolic grave to walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6:4). That is not just a faint wish, ‘I hope I shall walk in newness of life.’ It is illustrative of a fact that, when we come to Christ, his death counts as our death, but his life is given to us. In his resurrection we are raised with Christ and he shares his risen life with us. That’s the glory of the Christian gospel, and Christian baptism symbolises that the person is raised up out of the watery grave to walk in newness of life because Christ has given them new power and a new life. Let’s pause a minute just to digest that. That’s tough theology, but it’s true doctrine and could mean somebody’s salvation even here and now.

Then we are to *know* certain things:

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Rom 6:6–7)

Perhaps a question is rising in your mind, ‘Please tell us who this “old man” (KJV) is.’ It’s quite a common notion that we human beings are like nice rosy red apples: very wholesome and sweet to the taste, except for a little bit gone bad. If only we could get that bad bit out of the apple we should be a complete rosy nice fruitful apple all the way through! That’s quite false. Our ‘old man’ is not the nasty bit of us, so that if we got rid of that we could then be altogether beautiful. It’s not that; and I can take an illustration to show it to you.

I'm called up before the magistrate because the police caught me doing sixty miles an hour in a road that was limited to thirty and the magistrate has convicted me. He has the evidence; I can't deny it but I try to explain what happened. 'I was driving up the road and this driver was wandering all over the place. Just as I wanted to pass she pulled out and if I went the other way she pulled back. I got so worked up and temper got the better of me, that when at last I got past her I put the foot down and scorched up the road. I do admit it, but that wasn't me, it was my temper!' So, would the magistrate say, 'Very well, we'll fine your temper then'? No he wouldn't; he'd fine me. I was responsible, I shouldn't have let my temper do that on me. I have to pay the penalty.

The 'old man' is we ourselves before we come to Christ. We have broken the law and are responsible for all our misdeeds. The only thing the law could do with us was to have us executed. God in his mercy has provided Christ, so that all who have broken God's law and deserve its penalty may put their trust in him and be regarded by God as having died with Christ. Isn't that a glorious release? 'For one who has died has been set free from sin' (Rom 6:7).

We are told that God keeps a record of our deeds. You'd love to go and get hold of one of the books where the records are, wouldn't you? Perhaps you'd like to turn up that Gooding man in the pages of God's records and just see the things that he's been up to! You would find a lot of red, but at the end it would say, 'Accused is dead. Account closed.' 'Dead!' you say. 'When did you die?' When I trusted Christ, his death was counted as my death. As far as the law and its penalties are concerned, I've ceased to be. 'For one who has died has been set free from sin.' You say, 'Well if that's so, how many times do we have to die?'

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (vv. 9-11)

Christ sets the pattern and we can ask the simple question, 'When Christ died for our sins, how many times did he die? Does he die every time we do a sin?' Well of course not: 'he died to sin once'. When Christ died, you died: 'So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' So we are alive, and no longer in fear of the penalty. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1).

Set free from the fear of condemnation, we are to present our members alive to God, for God to use to his glory. 'For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace' (Rom 6:14). What does that mean? In Scripture, when you read of *law* in this sense, we should remember that it is not just good advice. The word 'law' in the Old Testament means direction, teaching, instruction, advice; but it's not just advice, it is command plus prohibition. If I break it there is a penalty, and the penalty is death.

Suppose I wake up one Monday morning and the law is standing beside my bed. 'Gooding, get up, and this day you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and your neighbour as yourself; and if you break that command, I shall curse you.' What would you do? I think some of you would get up and have a go. I wouldn't! I know from my experience of many years. Good as my intentions are, and wanting to please

the Lord the best I can and love my neighbour as myself, in many things I come short of the standard required by the law. If I come short again and the law is going to curse me, what's the good of trying? So I say to the law, 'It's no use. I shall stay in bed.' And then it will curse me for staying in bed! Sin would have dominion over me; every time I failed I should be under the grim power of sin.

That is no longer true of a believer, for Christ has paid the penalty of the law and we are free now to present our members to God as those alive from the dead. Whenever we stumble and fall, as we do many times, then God's word assures us, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). We are dealing here, therefore, with God's provision to begin to make us holy. Now that we are justified by faith in Christ, the long process through life begins. God is training us by his Holy Spirit, to develop in us a truly Christian character. There is no deceiving ourselves; it's going to be a long business and we shall fail many times. God knows that it's a long business. As for the penalty of our failure, Christ has paid it in advance.

The school I went to eventually taught chemistry. The parents of boys who were doing that subject had to pay down a lump sum of money before they even began. The risk was that the boys would mix the wrong kind of chemicals and blow the whole place up! The school wasn't going to take the risk of that, so the parents had to pay in advance. As believers, God has paid in advance for our spiritual education. We may face it with him, without fear of final condemnation, knowing we are accepted. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' When we fail we must confess it, and 'he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins'. We can get up and go again—that is the glory of our salvation.

Let me just summarise what we've been thinking about. We died with Christ since he bore the penalty and we accept God's judgment. Now he is risen and we are risen with him—one body with Christ. This is our hope of progress in the Christian life and developing a truly Christian character.

No condemnation, but consequences

But, even as believers, we can bring our own *will* to bear upon life—'I won't do that; I will do this.' We are to try to develop strong willpower; but Paul says, 'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing' (Rom 7:19).

We can also bring our *emotions* into it. Paul again, 'For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being' (v. 22). When I consider the law of God, I see that it is the only sensible way to live and I delight in it. But then from time to time I go and break it.

Then our *intellect* can be brought to bear upon the subject: 'So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind' (v. 25). We know when our behaviour is not as it should be, but we go and do it anyway.

Will, emotion and intellect combined are not enough. It will leave us failures. What is God's answer? It is given by being joined with Christ, that he may bring forth fruit through us to God. Or, to put it in the words of Romans 8:

God has . . . condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (vv. 3–4).

Does that mean, therefore, that Christians can take a rather careless attitude to sinning? No, indeed not! At the end of chapter 6 Paul points out that though there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ, there are consequences.

Let's use a simple example. A Christian man goes to London for his firm and stays in a hotel. He yields to temptation, gets drunk, falls off the veranda twenty foot down to the ground. He crushes his leg and the surgeon has to amputate it. When the Christian man realises the foolish thing he's done he seeks the Lord's pardon and the Lord forgives him. And restores the leg? No, not necessarily. When the Lord Jesus comes and takes us bodily home to Glory he'll get a body with two legs, but there are consequences of sinning that remain with us to life's end. We are not wise to go on sinning; we are to 'perfect holiness in the fear of God' (2 Cor 7:1 KJV).

Holiness

And now, very briefly, I want to come to one other provision in this ancient tabernacle for the preservation of its holiness. Not now the curtain, but the wall of linen right round the court. It is pure white linen and it was there, of course, to preserve the holiness of God's house.

When we talk of *holiness* and ask what it means, we can do two contrasts. *Holiness* is the opposite of *uncleanness*; but it is also the opposite of what is *common*. As people who wish to be holy, we must avoid uncleanness, of course. But as people who want to be holy, we must give heed to the other dimension of holiness—the sense of holiness that is to be devoted to God.

Let me take an illustration. There were some sacrifices, part of which were given to the priests. They were given a big part of the meat of a bullock, say, and it had to be cooked. If the priest's wife lent him a dish and he cooked this meat in it, she never got the dish back again. By touching these things it was holy—it was given over to God.

For a believer, holiness means that we have to 'perfect holiness in the fear of God', cleansing ourselves from all defilement of the flesh and spirit. But there's also a positive side to it: we are required to give ourselves over to God. To change the language a little bit, we are to 'present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God' (Rom 12:1), so that we might serve God even in our secular employment and in our family life. We are part of God's temple, says the New Testament, 'For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple' (1 Cor 3:16–17).

Rooted and grounded

So let's consider the pillars. Just for the moment you can imagine them as individual believers. Their task was to hold up the screen, to make a difference between what is holy and what is common; what is clean and what is unclean. If they didn't do that, there would be no point in having a gate. If believers in a place misbehave, and it's scandalous misbehaviour, they might as well not preach the gospel. The world will say, 'Look at the way

they behave and they claim to be saved. Well, their gospel is nonsense.' It depends on our testimony as believers, whether it enforces the need for salvation on folks who want to come to God.

To help them in their task, each of the pillars stood in a solid socket of bronze. That gave them a solid sort of grounding. I notice the New Testament talks like that of believers. Says Paul: We shall be presented 'blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy' (Jude 24). That is, on the understanding that we remain grounded in the faith and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. We need grounding. Not only grounding *in the truth* of God, 'so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded *in love*' (Eph 3:17).

We do need rooting and grounding. I have seen many Christian young people come up to university and on the whole what a marvellous testimony they have given in the university. But I have seen more than I care, too, of young believers being swept away entirely as far as their faith is concerned. You pastors and elders, see to it that the young folks are rooted and grounded in the faith—in Christian doctrine so that they may know what they believe and be equipped to stand for it; and rooted and grounded in the love of God, with all the security that comes with it.

Then the pillars were given ropes—guy ropes that came from the top and went to a pin in the ground. When the wind blew they could hold on to the pin fastened in the ground.

I remember being on holiday in Peterhead in Scotland in my youth. One of the good Christians there had a fishing boat and he took me out on it. It was some unearthly hour of Monday morning and the sea wasn't very good. He later confessed that he was expecting me to turn green. I actually managed not to, but that's another story! The old fisherman told me that when the wave rocks the boat, if you know your boat it's all right, because whatever part of the boat you're in you know what to grab. But if you are in a strange boat and a wave comes suddenly, while you're looking for something to grab you're over the side.

It's good we have a Saviour, isn't it? And it's good to have some of his 'precious and very great promises' (2 Pet 1:4). To know them and dare to trust them, so that when the trouble comes they might be an anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19), even though the weather is rough.

The pillars had silver on the top—the same as the silver sockets in the tabernacle itself, but here it was on their heads. Again, it was made from the ransom money (the redemption money). If we are going to stand in this world for God and maintain his standards of holiness, we shall need to be grounded and we shall need to have upon our heads what the New Testament calls 'the helmet of salvation' (Eph 6:17). Whatever the trial, it will not last forever. He is coming and we wait for the Lord Jesus to effect our 'adoption . . . the redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8:23). What a glorious hope and that hope shall stabilise us until he comes.

Well, all I can add now is to say that when the tabernacle was built and the people had worked hard in all their various skills, it was a beautiful thing. Then came the day when they presented it to Moses and he saw that they had done what the Lord commanded. We likewise are to work for him in the church and in the world. When the Lord Jesus comes we shall bring our work and it won't be Moses who inspects it; it will be the Lord. God grant that

he may be able to say, of some of it at least, 'Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your master' (Matt 25:21).