

The Garden Of God

George Warnock

"Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth,
and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.
Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh"
(James 5:7,8)

Chapter 1

COME INTO MY GARDEN

"Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16).

"I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse" (Song 5:1).

"The whole earth is full of his glory", said the prophet; and in this age of clamor and bustle, when a thousand conflicting voices would invade our hearts and minds to distract us or distort our vision, it would do us all good to draw aside to hear a word from the book of nature..God's creation. But always, of course, in the context of the Bible, the book of New Creation. For the Bible teaches us that "the field" in which the seed of New Creation life is planted, is the world which is now under the curse.

"The field is the world", Jesus said (Matt 13:38). How wonderful to know that the old creation has become the seed plot of the New Creation, and God is the Creator of both; recognizing, of course, that the old creation has become subject to futility by reason of man's Fall. And so right here in the midst of the old creation God is able to speak to us out from that environment. Jesus said to us, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.." (Matt 6:28). And again, "I am the vine, ye are the branches.." (Jn 15:5).

Through these natural things God would point us to reality, to the New Creation.. and through them unfold to us something glorious from the Spirit of Truth. It is only after the natural instrument has served its purpose in the will of God that God removes it. Therefore He has removed the serpent of brass, and the ark of the covenant, and the golden candlestick,.. and every other form of ritual, type, and shadow that belongs to a past order. But the written Word of God remains with us; and so does the book of old creation.

So must they remain until the full glory and purpose for which they were given is manifested, and the New Creation shines forth in all its brilliance as the very expression of the thought and heart of God. Some would speak of the written Word as though it were something final and complete in itself. But not so. I am confident our present canon of 66 books is what God intended. But in reality the Word of God goes far beyond the scriptures; and the written Word is not fulfilled in God's intention until it has been written in the hearts and minds of God's people. God said, "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb.8:10). God's

Word has been written in nature, and it has been written on paper.. but its ultimate fulfillment comes when it is written in "flesh". And so we read, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

But we must understand that the purpose of His incarnation in flesh was not final in itself either. For after having "finished the work" that the Father gave Him to do on earth, He ascended into the heavens to engage in a "more excellent ministry" from the throne of God.

He ministers the same Spirit of Truth that He walked in when He was here.. but now He is ministering out from the true Sanctuary in Heaven, to His own who are in the earth, as "the Mediator of a better covenant" (Heb 8:6). In consequence of this ministry from the throne, His redeemed in the earth are to become His very own living epistles, "known and read of all men: manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor.3:2,3).

We have been very anxious to get the world to read our Bible-- and rightly so. I believe God intends that all people should have His Word written in their own language. It was the printing of the Bible in the language of the people that caused the light of the gospel to shine forth in the world about us, throughout the history of the Church.. and especially in the tumultuous period of the Reformation. But the fact remains, and grows more glaring year after year, that we are faced with an impossible task if we conclude that the distribution of more Bibles and more Christian literature is God's answer to a perishing world. The world does read the Church.. they always enjoy reading the Church-- and sad to say they are often greatly disillusioned with what they read, and what they see. And not until the Church has become "the epistle of Christ" are the nations going to hear and see the Christ of the Bible. We may train and equip and organize and finance the workers of God, but it is only the reflection of His glory in His people that will change the hearts of men.

What Is God Looking For?

If we know what God is looking for, and what He is waiting for, we would scrap all those theories and dates about the coming of the Lord. If we know for sure that our Lord Jesus is on the throne of glory, interceding for His people to bring them into the fulness of God's intention.. then we would be more concerned that His intention be realized than in speculating about when He is coming back. What is He waiting for?

And what is He coming back for? And what is He doing about it right now? He is waiting for a family of sons and daughters in His image and likeness. He is preparing an army who will overcome "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (Rev.12:11).

He is building a habitation for Himself, a building made up of "living stones", a temple "not made with hands". He has found "a pearl of great price" ..a pearl that is formed from a mere grain of sand, but transformed into a gem, by marvelous grace. For it is the Spirit of God who takes the virtues of the living Christ and manifests them in His

Church to bring about this precious gem. He is cleansing for Himself a Church, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.." And how? "With the washing of water by the Word" (Eph.5:26). He looks for a Holy Bride, and John saw her in prophetic vision coming down out of heaven, and "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev.21:2; see 2 Cro.11:2). He looks for fruit from the Vine that was planted in the earth; for Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (Jn.15:5). For God is not only Architect, Builder, and Artificer.. He is also Bridegroom, and Gardener. And so He tells us, "I am waiting for the precious fruit of the earth." He is not waiting around for the clock to strike the midnight hour. He is waiting for something that will be the fulfillment of His heart's desire, His holy Church, His spotless Bride, His Pearl of great price, His precious Fruit. And while He is waiting for that, He is diligently preparing His people for "the praise of His glory". And because He patiently waits for that, He admonishes us.."Be ye also patient; Establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James.5:8).

Concerning Times and Seasons

In this writing we are going to emphasize the Gardener aspect of His appearing. All evangelical Christians are assured that this is harvest time. And so we are going to speak about God's Garden.. particularly as we see it in harvest time. He wants us to understand clearly what He is after when He comes into His Garden in harvest time. If He visits His Garden in winter He doesn't expect to see much in the way of life. Nevertheless He does encourage us to walk in faithfulness.. in season, and out of season. He would encourage us to have hope. He would remind us that winter is a promise of spring and new life. When He comes in spring time, the waters begin to flow.. and we rejoice in the sense of His blessing. God delights in blessing His people. It's spring time!

The long dreary days of winter are past, and the expectation of new life is present everywhere. When He comes in summer, there is heat and dryness; but mingled here and there He gives showers of blessing, and lots of sunshine; for He knows this is what we need for our maturing. But when He comes in harvest time He looks for one thing, and one thing only. He looks for "the precious fruit of the earth". And because I am assured this is harvest time, I believe God wants to emphasize what He is looking for in the time of harvest lest we become discouraged or perplexed because of our dryness. He knows all about that because it was He that caused it. He caused it! And why? Because He wants to bring forth good fruit in His Garden. And though we recognize there are different seasons we experience in our personal lives, we believe it is now harvest time historically as far as the corporate body of Christ is concerned. And so as we continue to praise Him for every season of refreshing He brings in our walk with Him, we must never forget God's intention in each and every season.

No matter what season we are in right now, we must remember that God's intention is to bring forth a harvest that will satisfy the desire of His own heart. There is a lot of confusion among God's people these days, as to what God may or may not be doing at this time. We hear questions like this: "Is this thing of God? Is this blessing from

God?" But let us become more acquainted with the heart of God, and we will discover what He is after. And then, if our hearts and minds are in tune with His heart and mind, questions like these will matter little or nothing. Of course He is blessing His people; but let us be so tuned in with Him that no matter how greatly He blesses us, our response to that blessing is simply this: "Thank you Lord for Thy blessings; but may I not fall short of the greatest blessing of all, to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, that I might become a 'vessel unto honour'. For I know if I fail to become the gold and silver Thou art looking for, all the blessings showered upon me will have been in vain. Guard my heart lest Thy blessings blind my eyes to Thy desire and intention in my life, that I might come forth in Thy image and likeness."

Truly the prophet tells us, "Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa.58:11). But if it is harvest time, then let us know for sure that the Gardener is looking for one thing in this great hour, and that is fruit.. fruit that is nothing less than the reproduction of His own character and nature in the hearts of His people. Anything less than this cannot delight the heart of the Gardener who planted the incorruptible seed of truth within His people, and is waiting patiently for that seed, through His own care and watchfulness, to bring forth "after its kind". It is the law of the old creation, and it is the law of the New Creation... the seed must bring forth "after its kind". Let us never forget that the Seed is Christ... and God cannot be satisfied with a harvest that does not eventually bring forth the character and quality and nature of Christ in His people.

The Invisible Things of God

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom.1:20).

What a tremendous thing is this! That in everything God made we have an expression of some particular aspect of God's glory and wisdom-- so man might see and hear and come to know God. And until the hearts of men became totally darkened through willful sin and disobedience, what God created became God's Word to them.

It was the only Bible men had in those early beginnings. The apostle tells us how man lost this capacity to know God: "When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened"(Rom.1:21). This started man on his long road to apostasy, from which he has never recovered. Instead of worshipping God, they began to worship the things He had created. Instead of thanking Him for the beautiful things He had given, they began to worship those beautiful things. They made much of the gifts He had given, but dishonored the Giver. And this is just as evident in so-called Christian nations as it is among the heathen.

When anything that God made comes between man and his Creator, it is idolatry. Materialism is idolatry. Humanism is idolatry. Adulating some great gift or some gifted minister that God set in the Church to edify the body of Christ, is idolatry. God has

created good things for man, and continues to give him wonderful gifts and blessings, that through these things he might discover God, and come to know Him better. "Hear ye Him" is the voice of scripture, as well as the voice of nature. What He made had its origin in the realm of the invisible, but it is not to be venerated as God. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb.11:3).

God did not create the universe out of nothing. He drew from the invisible realm-- attributes, qualities, areas of wisdom and knowledge, that are inherent in Himself. Christ is in reality that Word, the Logos...the One through whom God made all things (Jn.1:3; Heb.1:2). He is the ultimate expression of the heart and mind of God. Some boldly say, "The Bible is God's final revelation to men, and there is no revelation apart from the Word". This is true if we recognize that the writers of scripture point to the Word himself, the Logos, as the One who came into the world as the Ultimate Word of God. The scriptures were written by inspiration of the Spirit and can only be understood with the mind of the Spirit. And so the apostle Paul said, "...which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor.2:13).

I understand the thought is, "...combining spiritual things with spiritual". Paul was given the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that he was able to reach out in realms of the Spirit, and bring forth spiritual truths to those who had received a spiritual mind by new birth. We are utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for anything we receive from God, by way of knowing and understanding truth. And as our eyes are anointed with the eye-salve of the Spirit, and our ears are opened to hear His voice, only then do we hear the voice of Truth. Only then do we understand the "mysteries" of God.

We see the whole earth to be filled with His glory (Isa.6:3); for all things were created to be a praise and glory to God who created them.

Creation's Song of Praise

The prophet Isaiah was caught away in the Spirit and said "Holy, holy, holy, if the LORD of host: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa.6:3). And the Psalmist calls upon all creation to show forth the excellencies of their Creator--

"Praise ye him, all his angels:
Praise ye him, all his hosts.
Praise ye him, sun and moon:
Praise him, all ye stars of light.
Praise him, ye heavens of heavens,
And ye waters that be above the heavens.
Let them praise the name of the LORD:
For he commanded, and they were created.
He hath also established them for ever and ever:
He hath made a decree which shall not pass.
Praise the LORD from the earth,
Ye dragons, and all deeps:
Fire, and hail; snow and vapour;

Stormy wind fulfilling his word:
Mountains, and all hills;
Fruitful trees, and all cedars;
Beasts, and all cattle;
Creeping things, and flying fowl:
Kings of the earth, and all people;
Princes, and all judges of the earth:
Both young men, and maidens;
Old men, and children:
Let them praise the name of the LORD:
For his name alone is excellent;
His glory is above the earth and heaven"
(Ps.148:1-13).

We do not have to look far in this passage to see what God considers to be true praise. How can all created things praise Him? How can even inanimate things or impersonal things praise Him? Only as each creature in his own place and calling gives expression to that aspect of glory that God endowed him with in creation: the sun by shining; the moon by reflecting the glory of the sun; the stars by adorning the evening sky and giving direction and guidance to man; the fire by consuming; the wind by blowing; the tree by waving its leaves, and bringing forth its fruit for man, or in providing lumber for his home; the birds by singing; or the judge by executing justice in the earth; the young men and maidens, old men and children...each by exalting the Lord in word and in deed, in songs of praise-- and much more than that-- in their whole manner of life. We were created to manifest and show forth the living God in the earth, and if we are not doing that, we are not praising God. Praise in too many cases has become a ritual the people go through for a few moments as they gather together in church-- only to leave the place of assembly to go about their own selfish interests the rest of the week.

True praise is simply that manner of life one lives in union with his Lord, as he fulfills his God-ordained purpose for living. He is not emulating the other, or desiring the place occupied by another-- but simply giving expression to the created life and calling that God gives to every man. And so is fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah, "The people that shall be created shall praise the LORD" (Ps.102:18). According to the nature and character of the New Creation life God has given us, so let us live "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph.1:6,12).

Some are so intent upon emulating the ways of others that they fail to fulfill the specific purpose that God has in mind for them. The chirp of the sparrow is just as pleasing to God as the honk of the Canada goose, because it is fulfilling the purpose for which God created it. The robin or the lark would be entirely out of their element if they attempted to bark like the dog, or honk like the goose. He is humble who abides faithfully in his calling before the Lord, and proud if he attempts to portray himself as something other than God created him to be. The peacock has a name for being proud, when he spreads his feathers for all to admire.

If he had knowledge enough to know what people are thinking, he would wonder why they consider he is proud for having such gorgeous feathers. He sees nothing special about himself. There is no vainglory, no pride, no desire to emulate the eagle or the crane or the swallow...no attempt whatever to be a little prettier or a little more gorgeous than the way God made him. He simply spreads his feathers, and gives glory to the God who created him. But a proud-hearted man looks on and surmises: "See how proud he is!".

God Must Reveal Himself

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,...and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (pitched His tent) among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:1,14). Because He is God, He must make Himself known, He must reveal Himself. He is essentially Life, inherent Life, and Life must show itself to be alive. That Life is Light. Light must shine forth, for light is self-revealing. The Name of God speaks of all that He is in the nature of His being; but the Word speaks of this same God declared and spoken forth. And so we read, "For thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name"(Ps.138:2). Why is the Word above His Name?

Because God is more glorious in the expression of His being, than He is in secluding Himself from His creation. What is a word, but the declaration and unfolding of that which is in your heart and mind? Words fail us many times, because of our inadequacy to say clearly what we mean. But in Christ the Logos, the Word, the expression of God's heart and being was so complete that the Word was Himself God, shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ:

"The LORD possessed me in the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I was set up (anointed) from everlasting, From the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I set forth: While as yet He had not made the earth, Nor the fields, nor the highest part Of the dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there; When He set a compass upon the face of the depth; When He established the clouds above; When He strengthened the fountains of the deep: When He gave to the sea His decree, That the waters should not pass His commandment: When He appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; And my delights were with the sons of men" (Prov.8:22-31).

He was there, the Logos, the Word of the eternal God...yearning for expression, for manifestation, for the unfolding of the Father's heart. He was there in every phase of the creative work of God. "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (Jn.1:3). He was the Divine Artificer, seemingly separate from God because He proceeded from Him to live with men...But He was the Word of the Father in flesh. And so fully and completely did He reveal the Father

that there was nothing lacking of the character and nature of God in our Lord Jesus when He walked here in the earth.

Old Creation...The Seed Plot of the New

We have emphasized that God must fully reveal Himself to His creation, because of who He is. It was with purpose and design, therefore, that God did not annihilate the old creation and then begin to create a new one. He needed both creations...the one that fell into futility, and the one that He would raise to life and glory. The old creation became the fertile soil in which He would drop the seed which would bring forth the new. The old was to become the womb, out of which a New Creation would be born. And the old creation is even now in the bondage of corruption and decay, and travailing in birth-pangs, yearning for the deliverance that shall come with "the manifestation of the sons of God" (See Rom.8:19-21).

We may be inclined to look upon the outflow of God's love in Redemption merely as the divine remedy for the Fall. True, it is all of that, and we must forever praise Him for His glorious Redemption. But it is much more than a remedy. For the plan of Redemption preceded the creation of man, and the fall of man. God had an "eternal purpose" concerning His chosen ones, even "before the foundation of the world" (Rom.16:25; Eph.1:4; see ch 3:11). And in the Book of Revelation we see the Lamb as One "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev.13:8). God saw fit to use the old creation, and fallen man in particular, as the vessel through whom He would reveal the fulness and completeness of His glory. How shall we know the fulness of light, if we have not known the darkness?

How shall we know the greatness of God's longsuffering and patience, except he restrains Himself in painful forbearance during the reign of evil? How shall we know the infinite depths of His love, except through the revelation of the Cross, where God lavished His mercy and compassion on rebels such as you and me? God needed His infinite plan of Redemption for the full display of His own unsearchable attributes.

However, we had better not try to figure these things out with our natural mind. By faith we understand the mysteries of God...not because He gives the wisdom to reason it all out, but because we know there is a rest in God when we believe what He has spoken. And so the apostle tells us, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God..." (Heb.11:3). He goes on to tell us that the things we see were made from the realm of the invisible...and leaves it at that. With this kind of "faith understanding", if we may call it that, we "understand" what our greatest scientists cannot understand.

They are spending billions of dollars in the hope of making this discovery: How did the universe come into being? We know how; because God has given us a faculty that is beyond that possessed by any of earth's great intellectuals-- the faculty of faith. Where our minds can go no further, we can stop right there-- and faith becomes the reason we understand. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was

light"(Gen.1:3). Blessed are we if we can learn to stop right there, especially when we realize we are dealing with eternal things-- and find true rest and joy in believing what God has spoken.

We know that God allowed the old creation to sink into futility, in expectation of redemption (See Rom.8:19-21). He causes the Light to shine out of the darkness. Out of the depths of sin and depravity, the righteousness and holiness of God shine forth in amazing grace. In a world of hatred and rebellion against God, He shows forth mercy and compassion and love beyond all the confines of sin and darkness. In man's age-long and persistent rebellion against his Creator, God is showing forth the depths of His patience and longsuffering in a way He could never have done before the fall of man (Rom.9:22,23).

But let us beware lest in recognizing these principles we fall into the trap of calling evil good, and good evil. Lest we say that God cannot judge evil, because He designed that man should fall in order that He might redeem him. And lest we say that God made Satan just as he is now, in order to show forth His own glory. All such surmisings are not only vain, but they malign God; and the apostle tells us that those who say such things fall under God's righteous judgements. (See Rom.3:5-8). (Note: We have said more about The Origin of Evil in the writing, WHO ARE YOU?).

Redemption, God's Masterpiece

In the heart of the artist or musician or artificer-- someone with special creative talents-- there is always that inherent desire to bring forth their masterpiece. They try and try again, but remain unsatisfied. There is always that nagging sense of failure..."I haven't done it yet...I'm not satisfied...I cannot rest till I have done my very best...and this is not it!" And yet no matter how many times they try, they generally end up with the feeling, "It could have been better...I must try again".

Now God is the infinite Artist, and Builder, and Architect of all things. Unlike "masters" here is the earth He doesn't try, and try, and try again; but often it seems that way. And the evolutionist would like us to imagine that's the way it is. We might get the impression that God tried to make a perfect man when He made Adam...and failed. That He tried to bring forth a holy nation in Israel...and failed. That He tried to establish Aaron in a holy priesthood...and failed. That He tried to set up a powerful kingdom in David, or Solomon...and failed. But it was not that way. Rather He was demonstrating over and over again the futility of man, and the inability of man to maintain order and beauty in a fallen creation. But underlying all this was the scarlet thread of Redemption, while He waited in great patience and longsuffering for the day when He Himself would come on the scene, and bring forth the ultimate Masterpiece of His creative hands.

And so we have the story of Redemption. It is there that God paired everything He had into the creative work of His hands, and found rest and delight in a people whom He created for His glory. For the apostle Paul tells us that "We are His workmanship"

(Eph.2:10). To bring about our Redemption, God poured everything He had, everything He is... into the redemption of His people. So in reality "We are His Masterpiece!" It cost God everything He had...even His only Begotten Son. And we will never fully appreciate the glory of Redemption until we understand that it was God Most High who clothed Himself in flesh, and submitted Himself to the hatred and scoffing of His rebellious creatures for their redemption and transformation! And that it was in this great creative work that He found complete fulfillment and could stand back and say, "It is finished".

He made this declaration, first from the Cross, and will declare it yet again from His exalted throne in the heavens (Jn.17:4; 19:30; Rev.10:7). For what He accomplished at the Cross must yet be consummated in a people made complete in Christ, and conformed to His image. The old creation could manifest but the limited rays of His glory. It took the New Creation for God to manifest the full shining Light of His glory. And the redeemed ones of Adam's race are yet to be revealed to the highest of His celestial creatures, as His ultimate and perfect Masterpiece. No wonder we are told that the angels desire to peer into these things that pertain to our salvation! (1Pet.1:12). And so in redemption...

We behold God in His infinite depths, as well as God in His infinite heights.

We see Him stooping to lowest realms of darkness, to raise a people into the highest realms of light.

We see the glory of His condescension, as well as the glory of His ascension.

We see the glory of His weakness, as well as the glory of His power.

We see the glory of His emptiness, as well as the glory of His fulness.

We see the glory of His humility, as well as the glory of His exaltation.

We see Him stopping in His steps, to hear the cry of a blind Bartimaeus, And we see Him riding majestically in the heavens, as the One who has conquered over all the forces of evil.

We see Him ascending in clouds, with power and great glory.

We see a bleeding Lamb, slain for our redemption.

And we see the same Lamb, high and lifted up on the throne of Glory, with angels cherubim falling down before Him, and the redeemed of the earth crying out...

"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"(Rev.5:9)

And it is in and through this strange combination of the weakness of man and majesty of God Most High, that He is seen as the Master Workman of the New Creation. In a way that no artist or musician has ever been able to do, God has invested everything He has, everything He is, in the people whom He has redeemed for His glory. He can do no more for us-- other than to open our eyes and ears and hearts to receive and to perceive the fulness of His salvation. This is a great work, indeed; and for this we continue to cry out, and hope for, and expect. Then will He be fully satisfied. Then

will He "rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing"(Zeph.3:17).

But let us not think for a moment, having come into this fullness of glory, that we have come to the end. In this life, when we come to the end of a matter, or to the end of life...we face deterioration and decay. But in New Creation life-- how could we ever exhaust the riches of Him who is infinite and eternal? Even now as partakers of Eternal Life there is to be an expansion of His glory within us, and this must go on throughout eternal ages. Here in this brief period of our lives that we call "time" we can only pause for a moment, and faintly discern a new galaxy of truth and revelation far beyond the limits of our present spiritual constellation.

But as surely as we find ourselves caught up unto God and into His eternal purpose, the realms of eternity become more and more real to us. So we must continue to abide in Him, now and all our days, as we anticipate the glory that is yet to be revealed. For how can we know, except in the most incomplete and fragmentary way...what God means when He declares to us "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"(Eph.2:7)?

Nor do we say these things to encourage more research in those areas, for it is certain they will remain obscure to us until we become one with Him in His love. Rather, our hope is that He would bring us to greater humility and worship before Him, for knowledge can very easily blind our eyes to the more excellent way, and nurture pride in our hearts.

"Lord cause us to know Thee more and more, and to see Thee as Thou art...as we linger in this brief realm of time for but a moment. Yes, we want to know more about those eternal realms of glory...but help us to understand we will only achieve our goal as we come to know Thee better. Purge our hearts from thoughts of greatness, and cause us to learn patience and humility, and to walk in love here in a world of hatred and malice. For knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up. Grant that with all patience and longsuffering we may come to a place of maturity in this life, rather than seeking to pry open the flowers of grace that Thou hast promised for the ages to come. For as surely as we do that...we may indeed smell a little of its fragrance, but we will never see the glory of the flower in full bloom".

Chapter 2 WINTER...ASLEEP IN THE SNOW

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen.8:22)

This was God's covenant with Noah when he and his family came out of the ark. So God has ordained our seasons. In the next few chapters I want to talk about each of the seasons in turn... our emphasis being on harvest time, and what our Gardener is looking for in the day of harvest. And although there are many places in the earth where only two seasons are recognized (some places perhaps only one)... up here where

we live in the far North, we expect four seasons. Officially our winters are supposed to start about the third week of December, and spring is supposed to start about the third week of March. But winter is one visitor who will generally make his appearance before the due date in December, and he seems to linger around much longer than his scheduled departure date in March. He may leave for a brief time when he is reminded "spring time" has come.

But generally he will drop back several times in the next couple of months before he leaves the country... just to say "hello...and good bye". But we know God has ordained the seasons wherever we may be living on this planet; and He has made us hardy enough to survive the worst of winters. Not denying, of course, that many of our people will migrate to the deep South as December approaches. "Snowbirds" is what they are called by those who live in those warm climates. But come spring, and our "Snowbirds" are back again to enjoy our beautiful summers here in the far north. And so we will consider the seasons as four,...winter, spring, summer, and autumn... and in that order, for Jesus said, "the harvest is the end of the world".

Come into my garden when the snow is piled high, and underneath everything is frozen and lifeless. All you can see is a picture of death and coldness. There is no sign of life and nothing to delight the eye. All lays silent and bare beneath a blanket of snow. If anything ever grew there, no one would ever detect it now. It seems so tragic. What could have happened?

Of course we are quite familiar with the seasons, and we know it is just not the time for growth; and we are content to let nature take its course. But not so in the spiritual realm. We must never tolerate any negative thoughts of coldness and barrenness. In spite of the temperature or the snow or the season- we insist on sowing some seed, or reaping a harvest, or looking to the Lord for showers of blessing. I know we must be "always ready" to do the will of God. But Jesus said, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready" (Jn.7:6). Disciplined sons are not 'always ready' to do whatever they think has to be done. But they do stand ready to obey the voice of their Lord and Master at all times. They move in God's Spirit... not in their own.

In God's purpose there are seasons and times for opposite things. And God would have us know that the things that are contrary to us, even these things become part of God's plan, who knows how "to work all things together for good, to them that love God". Paul experienced these workings, and therefore could testify "that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil.1:12). He found himself "approved" as a minister of God, "By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor.6:7-10).

He knew there were opposite seasons in life, and that as he was faithful "in season, and out of season"... God would be glorified in his life and ministry. Let us not blame every uncomfortable situation on the Devil. It is God who sends the winter... for He ordained all the seasons. Or is it God who sends the south wind, and Satan who sends the north wind? No, it is God! "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden..." (Song.4:16). Is it God who sends the rain, and the Devil who sends the snow? No, it is God!

"He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth:
His word runneth very swiftly.
He giveth snow like wool:
He scattereth the hoar frost like ashes.
He casteth forth his ice like morsels:
Who can stand before his cold?"
(Ps.147:15-17)

It is God who "sends" it, and He wants us to know it is part of the cycle He ordained for the good of man. He wants us to know that under the cloak of snow and ice there is a promise of hope. Hope for the next season of spring! There can be no real spring if there is no real winter. They only enjoy real spring who have lived through the long dreary days and nights of our northern winters. Those who live in temperate climates the year round know little or nothing of the snow and the ice and the frost and the blizzards of the wintry north.

You cannot manufacture the true joy of the Lord. The joy of the Lord is born out of sorrow, and barrenness, and suffering. You do not send for the birds when the winter is over and gone; they just appear when the right season comes around. We enjoy hearing the chirp of the robin when the snow is still on the ground, and the days are cool. We know that spring time is not far away.

It is the "joy of the Lord" that comes with every measure of the Cross He places upon our shoulder. It is not our joy, but His... and ours as we become identified with Him in His sufferings... believing where we cannot see, and hoping in endurance for the fulfillment of the promise when all seems contrary to it. It is the joy that comes after the sacrificial life is poured out at His feet, and its fragrance fills the whole house where He is sitting. To that sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit, He Himself takes the pure anointing oil containing all the fragrance of myrrh and sweet cinnamon and sweet calamus and cassia... and pours it on His people. But this holy oil also contained ingredients of bitterness (Ex.30:23-33). For He is the great High Priest, who has been "anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows"; and He shares that anointing with them, as they come into union with Him.

It is His joy and gladness... and ours as we abide in Him and share His sufferings.

Joy...Even in Winter

"Praise the LORD from the earth... Fire, and hail; snow and vapor; stormy wind fulfilling his word" (Ps.148:7,8).

The weeping sisters said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died". But Jesus had already told His disciples that it was for the glory of God that He would not be there. Stormy wind fulfilling His word!

"Why are you sad-faced, and so dejected and disheartened?" said the Stranger to the disciples who were on the way to Emmaus. "O haven't you heard?" they replied. "Heard what?". "About Jesus of Nazareth the great Prophet, who did so many wonderful things. We were sure He was the Messiah, but they crucified Him three days ago. There are rumors He is alive again, but it's hard for us to believe it!" Stormy wind fulfilling His word!

Mary Magdalene stood at the sepulchre of Jesus weeping, and her eyes were so filled with tears she could not discern the face of the One she loved standing by her side. Stormy wind fulfilling His word!

Hear Jacob's sad lament: "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and now ye will take Benjamin away... all these things are against me!" If only he knew! All these things were actually working together for his good, and for the glory of God who had taken Joseph from the prison to set him above princes. Stormy wind fulfilling His word! "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara..." said Naomi to her friends and relatives in Israel, when she had returned from the land of Moab: "For the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Little did she realize that God was working out in her life the secret of His own will, and preparing the way for the birth of David, and of David's Son and Lord in centuries to come! Stormy wind fulfilling His word!

Chapter 3 **SPRING...AWAKENING IN NEW LIFE**

"He sendeth out his word and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow" (Ps.147:18).

Winter is not tragedy... it is a promise of the coming hour of spring. The sorrows of His beloved ones are transformed by His love and grace into the joys of triumph. It is the purpose of God and our recognition of it that turns the tragedy into a promise, a dark cloud into a ray of hope. I said "our recognition of it" not our understanding of it. For faith is available in every hour of need to by-pass our understanding, and to impart the joy and assurance which a full and complete knowledge of the situation could not bring. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom.8:28).

Notice again, it is "according to His purpose". And the purpose of winter is to prepare the earth for spring. The snow and the ice are piled high on the hills and mountains so that in the hour of spring there may be a mighty flow of water to bless the land. There are "treasures of the snow" (Job 38:22). And the earth will discover it in the

time of spring... as the snow melts and the rivers are filled with water, and flow through the land.

But what makes the difference between winter and springtime? What makes the difference between the north wind and the south wind? Just the cycle of God's purpose. The sun is just as brilliant in winter as it is in summer. It is the season that accounts for the different climate. We feel the cold of the north wind; but when it completes the cycle it becomes the south wind. Coming from the north it is blighting, freezing, crippling, devastating. The green fields are frozen to desolation... the rivers and streams are stopped in their courses... nature seems to come to a complete standstill. Give it time, and when the north wind has fulfilled its purpose, God will send the south wind. It will break up the ice which covered the earth and the waters, and melt the snow which it had previously brought. Come spring time, and "He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow...(Ps.147:18).

We may be inclined to envy those who seem to have a consistent, unhindered, positive walk with the Lord... those who seem to have experienced little of devastation and frustration. But something is often lacking. You may not sense that outflow of gentleness and mercy and patience and longsuffering. Those who have known struggles and perplexities and barrenness and defeat and wintry seasons are the ones who discover peculiar and abundant joy when the winds begin to blow from the south. These are the ones who find it easy to melt in His presence in the wonderful hour of spring, and to flow together in the mighty river of God.

The Church may appear to be very impressive and mighty, but how cold and lifeless! The snow and the ice heaped up on the mountains present a beautiful, scenic picture... but each snow-capped mountain peak continues to maintain its own denominational status, and each little snow-flake its own selfish identity. God is going to cause a melting, and a flowing together... until every little snow-flake and every little crystal of ice loses its identity in the mighty River of God. Then it will be "full of water", as the Psalmist said... to bless the land through which it flows.

There can be no real unity apart from that vital union with Christ by the Holy Spirit... as God causes His people to melt under the gaze of the Sun of Righteousness, lose their identity as members of this church or that... and flow together in the River of God. We are not talking about "all the churches" flowing together in some kind of ecumenical union, organized and controlled by men who are building something for their own glory. But rather of those members of the body of Christ, who are washed in His blood and born of His Spirit.

The Bursting of Spring

Come into my Garden when spring bursts upon us. No longer is there any lamentation over the cold it suffered. No longer any condemnation upon others for having caused such a hard, cold winter. Nor do we even feel sorry for ourselves any more... but sorry only that we misunderstood God for the hours of winter's blight. Now we can

affirm with the apostle, "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom.5:3-5). Now we can say with the broken heart of Joseph, "therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen.45:5). Now we can say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5,6).

Before his trial he had a certain knowledge of God... a theological concept of God, but all this passes away in the manifestation of His presence. It was not easy to see the sun as you lay there under the snow, frozen and cold, unmoved and unresponsive. But it was there all along, shining as brilliantly as ever, and just as hot as ever. The same word of God that brought the winter... likewise brought the hour of spring. The same word that came to Joseph in dreams and revelations, likewise brought him into Egypt, and tested him in fetters of brass... and later released him to bring life and blessing to Egypt and Canaan and other nations who had experienced the famine. "Until the time that his word came (came to pass), the word of the LORD tried him" (Ps.105:19).

God does not love us any less when we lie frozen in the ground, nor any more when we begin to sprout and germinate in the warmth of spring. It's just that we feel His love more in spring time. But both conditions are necessary for the outworking of His own special purposes. The test of true love is not how good it feels. It is rather-- Are we walking in obedience to the Lord? "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (Jn.14:21). This is the thermometer that proves our love... are we doing what He wants us to do? Are we keeping His words... words that come from the heart of the Father? (Jn.14:23,24).

Man's Home is a Garden

The first man Adam was placed in a garden. All that was in it came forth from the Word, the Logos. Everything was "very good", and Adam was required to dress it, and keep it (Gen.2:15). So in the New Creation, God plants His people in a Garden. The River of Life flows through the midst of it, out from the throne of God. On the banks of the river there grows the Tree of Life, bearing all manner of fruit; "and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev.22:2). It is a heavenly realm we are looking at... but it is a heavenly realm here on earth.

Are we not going to live in Heaven? Of course! But the New Heavens and the New Earth are very much together... and the light and glory of Heaven will radiate throughout the earth. We will have free access to both realms. We may scarcely be able to distinguish the one from the other... the one is so immersed in the other. And we will experience "days of heaven upon the earth" far beyond anything Moses contemplated when he spoke of the land of Canaan (Deut.11:21). "There is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain... because the leaves of the Tree are "for the healing of the nations". In the beginning the first man chose to eat from the "tree

of the knowledge of good and evil"... and was barred from the Tree of Life. Now man eats of the Tree of Life... for his health and life. And though we see only "through a glass darkly" in these things let us understand that God is working in the heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven now, those qualities of life and grace that will cause them to be very much "at home" in the Garden of God. The riches of grace in Christ Jesus and the blessing of His Spirit are available to us now... as we partake of "the powers of the world to come" (Heb.6:5).

Let us not fear that we are imposing on God's grace when He introduces us into these realms of the Spirit that belong to the next age. Surely it is but the smallest fragment that we will ever know and experience in this life. Let us therefore be thankful for every good and perfect gift that He bestows upon us now... out from those realms of eternal life. And let us continue to pray: "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

David saw the River and the City in prophetic vision, and sang: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High" (Ps.46:4). Jesus may have been referring to this, or to what Joel said about a "fountain" flowing out of God's House... when He stood on the last day of the Feast "and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (Jn.7:37,38; see Joel 3:18).

Truth is that River of Life. Let us never get the notion that truth is some musty, age-worn system of creed and dogma which theologians have hammered out from the Bible, and argued over through the centuries. Or something to be avoided by spiritual people lest it bring strife and confusion and contention. The truth does just the opposite. O yes, it will cause contention among the contentious and the disobedient. But God's living truth will unite and edify the saints, and strengthen those who embrace it. It will be the Urim and Thummim in our breastplate of righteousness, illuminating our pathway wherever we go, guiding us aright in paths of darkness, and clearly indicating God's will for us in every moment of doubt and every parting of the ways.

"Let not mercy and truth forsake thee:
Bind them about thy neck;
Write them upon the table of thine heart:
So shalt thou find favour and good understanding
In the sight of God and man...
I have taught thee in the way of wisdom;
I have led thee in right paths.
When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened;
And when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.
Take fast hold of instruction;
Let her not go: keep her;
For she is thy life"
(Prov.3:3,4; 4:11-13)

Truth will make you beautiful... with the beauty of the Lord, with the beauty of holiness. Strange is it not, how we like the artificial so much, when God wants to clothe us with reality. I know the artificial can look very beautiful, by man's ingenious hands. But it is totally false... totally dead. (Just a few days ago it was my duty to water our plants, as my wife was away. I even watered a couple of artificial plants that were there with the real ones. I didn't know the difference-- till a couple of days later. They looked so real!).

There are many of God's people who do not know the difference. They go about the task of making artificial praise, and artificial worship, and carry on with artificial programs and artificial music in the House of God. Generally it looks so beautiful! But may the living Truth be a garland of grace about our neck, and a beautiful ornament upon our head. Let the Truth be our food and drink; for it is sweet as honey from the honeycomb... as water out of the rock.

It is bread to him that is hungry, healing to those who are sick... yea, health to those who embrace her. She will impart strength in the place of weakness, replace folly with wisdom, and give understanding and good discretion in the place of bewilderment and confusion. But you must embrace her. She will impart strength in the place of weakness, replace folly with wisdom, and give understanding and good discretion in the place of bewilderment and confusion. But you must embrace her... you must long for her more than any earthly treasure. You must acknowledge her beyond any concept of right and wrong that you have devised out of your own heart. "Let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life" (Prov.4:13). You do not become the judge of truth, just because you have come to know the Bible, or have experienced some wonderful blessings from God. Rather you must approach the truth...

Not to judge, but to be judged;
Not to confirm your way of life, but to change it;
Not to exonerate your actions,
but to lay them bare before the Judge of all the earth.

Then the truth will flow, and flow, and flow... and unfold, and unfold, and unfold; and you will hear the voice of truth wherever you go and whatever you are doing. As the truth cleanses you and purifies you, so the glory of the Lord shall become that much more brilliant. Your eyes will become illumined to see and behold wonderful things in the invisible realm. The pure in heart will see God. Your ears will become keen to hear sounds and voices of truth that you never knew were there. You will see Him in every rising of the sun, in the stars of the night, in the rainbow of the clouds. You will hear Him in every song of the bird.

But far beyond any of this-- you will see Him in your brother and sister in a way you never thought was possible... as you walk together in the fellowship of the Spirit and in the light which He sheds across your pathway.

We know we have all fallen short of this high ideal... but let it be our constant prayer and desire. For it is the desire of our Lord who redeemed us. He will not rest until He has found for Himself an abiding place in His people. He will not be satisfied until He comes into His Garden, and partakes of its precious fruit.

Preparation of the Soil

As we come to know the Lord a little more we look back and stand amazed how He led us and prepared our way, even before we knew Him or sought Him. Looking back later in life we realize there were so many accidental or incidental things that happened that the Lord ordained as a necessary preparation for the grace that He would reveal in the days to come. Many things that just happened often prove to have been providential. When our hearts turn to Him, only God in His grace and mercy knows how to take our mistakes and wanderings of the past and cause these to become stepping stones to glory. Suffering there must be for every act of disobedience and waywardness; but when He turns our hearts wholly unto Him, we discover that He has been preparing and disciplining His sons that He might have a fruitful Garden for His own delight.

Turning over the sod may seem to be a useless and aimless sort of thing. But the Gardener must do it if the soil is to receive the seed and the rain to cause it to germinate. Just why did this have to happen to me? I do not know, but I do know that the soil of the heart must be broken. Only the broken and contrite heart can receive the seed of truth that will germinate and take root and flourish. O yes, I might receive the truth with a fleeting joy when it comes to my unbroken heart. Jesus warns us that the stony soil actually receives the word with joy! but it is only for a season. When the tests of life come that kind of joy soon withers away... oftentimes leaving the heart barren and dry.

We have every reason to question just how much real good is accomplished in a lot of our church programs these days. There may be plenty of "blessing", and lots of artificial "joy", but we are not talking about that. Is God penetrating the hearts of His people? Are we satisfied with the pleasure of feeling good, and all the time caring less whether the Lord removes the bitterness, the hard feelings against God and our brother, and all those workings of the carnal mind?

Come, let us break up our fallow ground: "for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hos.10:12). Come, let us break the alabaster box at the feet of Jesus. Let us submit ourselves under His mighty hand, for He is the great Gardener who longs to plant a seed within us that will reproduce His very own image and nature and character. We want to be like Jesus. But we are just the earth, just the dirt of the old creation. How could we ever be like Him? **Only as we receive the Seed of life within our little earth, and allow Him to reproduce Himself in all His glorious likeness. And then, out from the dirt that we are, new life springs forth from His creative hand.** Paul said, "but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor.4:16).

Spring Time... The Sower goes Forth

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow..." (Matt. 13:3).

God's heritage is both Garden and Building, and much is written in the Word concerning both of these aspects of God's work in his people. "Ye are God's husbandry (Garden), ye are God's building" (1 Cor.3:9). God is building a Temple for His glory; and it seems the ministry has generally emphasized the "building program" of God, rather than the "planting" of the good seed, and the fruit that comes out of it. We need to see both sides of the picture. If what we are doing is not by the anointing and guidance of His Spirit, we labour in vain. "For we are labourers together with God" ...not "for God" (vs.9). We must never lose sight of the fact that only in abiding union with Christ are we going to bring forth the "good fruit" that He is looking for. And any kind of building we construct, if it is not according to the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus... it will go up in smoke on Judgment Day as "wood, hay, stubble" (vs.13).

In all we do, we must know that no man is anything except what God makes him to be by sovereign grace. We are still inclined to prefer one plant in God's Garden over another, one ministry over another; and **it is all totally carnal.** God sees no man as anything in His sight... except what He makes him to be by His own redemptive grace and mercy:

"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor.3:6,7).

And so the "sower" goes forth with his basket of seed, weeping as he goes. The ground does not always look that good... but He knows the Seed is good, and he hopes and trusts that most of it will fall into good soil, and spring up unto life eternal. He has this confidence, that if God gave him the seed to sow then the Gardener will make sure that the ground is prepared. Oh yes, He knows that some of it may be lost... if the heart is "by the wayside". It's just too close to the road, and the birds soon find it and devour it. And in the field itself there will be rocky patches... making for quick germination and growth; but having no depth of soil it soon withers away. And other parts of it will have its share of "thorns", which we hope and pray the Gardener will eradicate, as He deals with those who are deceived with riches, and cumbered with the cares of life. But He has promised there will be "good" harvest: "Some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt.13:23).

With this confidence we are sustained as we go forth with our basket of seed, knowing that "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps.126:6).

The Seed is Scattered

The seed is not all planted together in a heap... it is scattered. I know the good seed is the Word of God; but the good seed is also called "the children of the kingdom" (Matt.13:38). So let us not fear the scattering of "the children of the kingdom". O

yes, for a season the grain is stored in the grainary. And of course, we like this kind of unity: when multitudes of God's people are all together in one place. But it is only for a season. God's purpose for the seed is to scatter it, that it might reproduce its kind in the earth. Of course our Gardener has a wonderful design and purpose in all this... regardless how much we like this "togetherness". His plants are "the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified" (Isa.61:3). His Garden is beautiful according to His own design. He is not looking for a jungle, but for a fruitful Garden... every plant and tree and shrub in its place; yet with enough space between them that He will be able to deal with each plant according to the design of His heart.

But this is far from the modern concepts of Church growth. We must try to get all the people together, in one building if possible, in the name of unity. Plant the seed in bunches... and the more you can plant in one spot the better. But even as an amateur gardener I have discovered it is best to space the seed in a way that each plant will have room to grow. Sure, I want unity... but I want to leave room for individual growth. Sometimes I have inadvertently spilled too many carrot seeds in one place. I could leave it this way, and let them grow where they are. And when they burst forth above the ground I might say to myself, ...O what wonderful unity! But as they try to grow I will have nothing but a mess of twisted, gnarled, deformed, stringy, sickly carrots.

"The unity of the Spirit" has nothing to do with bunching God's people together. Yes, there is a purpose in our gathering together in His Name; and we are not to neglect that. And God does ordain large gatherings on occasion, for special purposes. But God's desire for His people is that they might have fellowship one with another. And what fellowship do you have sitting in a congregation of hundreds of people, looking at the backs of those in front of you? O I know, there's a minute or two when you turn around and shake their hands, and wish them the Lord's best. But then... every one is supposed to settle down to the general routine of a well organized meeting...

The early Church met very often in the homes of the believers. They would gather with their cares and problems... to be helped, or to help one another. Nowadays the "home church" concept is considered to be radical and new. So what if the home is crowded out? Other homes are made available... and the Church grows united and strong, and multiplied, until the whole city is saturated with the Gospel of Christ, and the Church is edified. I know this sounds very idealistic. And I know, it doesn't work... if it's just a concept we are trying to make happen.

People have to be hungry, open, and willing to show much grace and patience and love... and God, I believe, wants to bring us to that. And if we are not willing to come to that, then let men continue to build their own kingdoms. This does work real well... from a human standpoint. But **God alone will judge in the Day of Harvest how much "good fruit" comes out of it.**

Our purpose in gathering is not to conform ourselves one to another. It is rather that we might be "conformed to the image of His Son". So in what God calls "the unity of

the Spirit" there is a great degree of variance in God's design for each one of us, as "members in particular" in the body of Christ. Each member of the body, each plant in God's Garden... must find its own roots in Christ, and discover for himself his distinct calling and placement in God.

It was no tragic thing that happened when God "scattered" the saints in the early Church through persecution. God was behind it all. They had been taught the ways of the Lord. They no doubt had a lot of problems connected with community living, thousands of them being crowded together in the homes of the believers. But they loved one another, and they must have had tremendous fellowship as they walked in the fear of God, and gathered together in the little home churches scattered throughout the city. But it was only for a season. They had matured into "good seed", and Jesus said "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom" (Matt.13:38). The Sower wanted this precious seed to be reproduced in the earth; so He scattered them far and wide. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

I recall reading about the Church in China when it was subdued under communism. The people were taken from their homes and forced to live in communes that were organized by the government. But God, in all of man's arrangements, knows how to put everything together for His own glory. By His own design He purposed to have "good seed" in these communes. It wasn't long before there were other "good seeds" born into the Kingdom in these government-controlled communes. But if and when too many people were converted to Christ, the authorities ordered them to be "scattered" far and wide into other communes, so as to extinguish their faith, or at least stop them from propagating it. But this was exactly what the Sower wanted to do.

They were "good seed", and God wanted this "good seed" to be sown in other parts of that great country. God wants to fill the whole world with "the good seed" of the Kingdom; and He knows how to use even "the wrath of man" to fulfill His purposes! God may gather His people together in crowds for a certain time, for a certain purpose. But let us be sure of this. If "good seed" is forming in His people, in due course God is going to do some scattering.

The Seed begins to Germinate

"The sower soweth the word" (Mk.4:14)

"He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal.3:16).

The Christian life is not an imitation of Christ, it is rather Christ reproducing Himself in the hearts of men. There must be new birth and an ongoing unfolding of new creation life: "Not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet.1:23). As humans we are quick to put the stamp of

finality on anything God does, failing to realize that God is Life, and whatever proceeds from Him must be unfolding and progressive in its outworking. Certainly there are instantaneous experiences in our walk with the Lord, and in these we rejoice. But God desires a continual unfolding in our lives "from glory unto glory".

So that in all subsequent experiences that spring from our new life in Christ, there must be a strengthening and a deepening of our relationship with Him. Any experience that does not bring about this deepening of relationship with Him has fallen short of God's intention. There has been a lot of controversy over doctrines of moving on with God into new realms of grace and glory, day by day and year by year, is not generally understood as God's plan for His people. And so we have the "getting" and "losing" type of Christian... always getting and losing the blessing, instead of recognizing they are now "blessed... with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph.1:3).

On the other hand, many who know this to be their heritage are content to stop there with the knowledge of it. But God's provisions of grace are intended to bring us into greater and still greater dimensions of the knowledge of the Lord. It is not enough just to become that good seed, that good kernel, that good bulb -- no matter how holy we think we are. There must be a rending asunder, a breaking forth into new life. For He make us the kind of seed we are that when planted in His Garden we might come forth in new life, according to His own intention and design. He made us as we are, not so we would remain as we are, but that we might become what He wants us to become.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (Jn.12:24). God is looking for the increase and unfolding of the new life that is there. Planted in good ground that good seed will begin to crack and break open. And when this happens we are overwhelmed with a sense of weakness and frustration. You were getting it all together, and now what's happening? God wants us to discover a new center and source of being, ...even in Him. He wants the old shell to fall away, to give place to the new life into which we were born. We keep insisting that God take away the old nature.

"Draw it out of me Lord, -- take away that old nature, those desires." But His desire is to become so great, so big within us, that we simply break apart, and the old life falls away because it can't abide with the new. And then those very difficult commandments of the New Covenant, suddenly become the operation of the Spirit of Life within us. We strive to "put off the old man" and to "put on the new". But the "old man" was crucified with Jesus on the Cross; and we must take up our cross and follow Him if we are going to experience new life. Christ alone is pure and holy and undefiled. The old life was crucified at Calvary, and God wants the new life to grow and grow until there is no longer any place for the old. The old must simply disintegrate and fall away.

"Did you finally get through?" "O yes," says the little sprout as it pushes its head through the ground.. "I prayed through". I believe there is a very great need for

prevailing prayer. But let us be assured that every new experience in God is the beginning of a new time of God's dealings with us. And this must continue until we are conformed to the image of His Son. The new life is visible in the sprouting of the seed, but there is still a long way to go. When the Gardener walks into His Garden He is pleased to see new growth. But He is looking for something more... and He will wait for it.

Sunshine and Rain

"In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day" (Isa.27:2,3).

I am not at all discouraged because I fail to notice any fruit growing on my trees or shrubs in spring time. But I must give them proper care. I will water them because they need it, not because I can discern any fruit on the vine. God is blessing His people abundantly all over the land. God wants us to understand this. He doesn't bless us because we are so spiritual; but His hope is that in blessing us He might make us spiritual. His hope is that by showering us with good things, He might bring us to repentance (Rom.2:4).

The Gardener knows just how much those weak plants can stand... so if it gets real hot, He will bless them more than usual. Not because they are so spiritual... but because they are tender and weak, and need it. He is glad to do it because He wants a garden that is strong and healthy. Perhaps at times some of them feel a little superior because they get more rain than others. Perhaps their prayers are answered more readily... they know how to get things from God. They've got a lot of faith.

I feel a bit concerned at times when I hear some one boasting how God always hears and answers their prayers. **If they really love God, and if God has a special love for them, I know the time will come when their prayers may not be answered so readily...** at least not right at the time of asking, or in the way they expected. God will not allow any of the plants in His Garden to boast about how strong their prayers are, or how strong is their faith. He knows how to humble them in His sight, lest in blessing them too much they begin to assume they are more spiritual than the other plants growing by their side.

Some plants are more deeply rooted than others, and because of this they don't seem to need a blessing every day. Their roots go down far enough to get the moisture far below the surface. Some plants know that they are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." Others don't seem to know this, so they like to feel the rain falling on their head every day. But in either case, both are entirely dependent upon the Lord for their constant source of supply.

The Gardener knows just what we need, and He supplies accordingly. Like Boaz, He will leave "handfuls of purpose" for those who are in need. All these tokens of His love are very precious to us. But God's purpose is that one day Boaz will marry his begging

hand-maid, and make her to be joint-heir with him in all that he has. Yes, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes" (1 Sam.2:8). "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:3). I understand the word "poor" in this place and in many others, means "a beggar, a pauper"... one who is totally dependent on what another might dole out to him. Jesus was that way.

For he walked in total dependence upon the Father in His whole way of life and ministry. He took this position when He came to earth to redeem us, and to show us the Way of Life. It was for our sakes "he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor.8:9) -- "Rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5). God make us to be spiritual "paupers"... totally at the mercy of our Heavenly Father. For His mercies are great!

The Gardener blesses His Garden with purpose in mind. He gives a "measure" to every man according as He sees fit (Rom.12:3; 1 Cor.12:11). The measure is not according to the desire of the one who receives, but according to the plan and purpose of the One who gives. And that plan is consistent with His election and fore- ordination, that in the ultimate we might come forth "as trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified" (Isa.61:3). What should it matter to me whether He gives me one gift, or nine: because whatever He gives is not mine to possess, but mine to give away. And if He gives more, then He will require more.

We will be judged on that day -- not according to the gift He gave... whether it was little or much... but for our faithfulness in ministering the same to others, as "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1Pet.4:10). In whatever ministry or gift He gives, **God's purpose is that we pour it forth unto others, as He may lead and direct by His anointing.** It is not mine to waste on myself, but for the beautifying of the whole Garden. So what is the difference? And what is all this striving about getting gifts and blessings? It indicates a complete ignorance of God's purpose in His people.

He gives His blessings to whom He chooses, when and how He wills, **that these blessings might flow in His Garden, causing it to grow unto maturity,** even unto "a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph.4:13). "That ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet.1:8).

"Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary" (Ps.68:9). His Garden needs the rain because of the drought, and the heat of the sun. Not merely to protect the plant from the sun, but to enable the plant to receive the life and virtue of the sun. His plants are famishing, and they cry out for rain! But the Gardener has His own motives. He is "looking for the precious fruit" to come forth in due season. And it is in hope of this that He sends the Early and the Latter Rain upon His people: the Early Rain to cause the seed to sprout and grow... and the Latter Rain, just before the Harvest, to bring forth the fruit that the Gardener has been waiting for. God will be faithful to send the Rain...

because He must have a fruitful field. He must have "precious fruit" for His own pleasure.

Flourishing in Times of Famine

But there are others, just as needy, who dwell in dry places and yet seem to be flourishing and fruitful even in times of famine. Why? And why are they not travelling the world in order to find God? Because they have found their roots deep in Him... and they walk with Him, and know Him, and rejoice in His rest and in His love... even in times of drought and famine:

"His delight is in the law of the LORD;
And in his law doth he meditate day and night.
And he shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That bringeth forth his fruit in his season;
His leaf also shall not wither;
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps.1:2,3)

Let us dig deep, beloved! For there is a famine coming on the land! And I think it has already started. "Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). But in that day God will have a "fruitful bough" in Egypt (in the world, but not of it)... and this Joseph people will have bread to share with a world in need, and with the famishing people of God:

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hand were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob" (Gen.49:22-24).

A true disciple of the Lord Jesus is not a survivalist. God's agenda for a disciple is not to survive, but to lay down his life. He wants to bless us simply and only to make us a blessing. And this requires that we become "prisoners of the Lord" that others may go free... that we might be broken as bread, that others might eat... and poured out as wine, that others might drink and be blessed. For this is what the Love of God is all about; and it is this "pouring forth" that nurtures the true "joy of the Lord"... the joy of seeing many sons brought to glory.

The Weeding Process

"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud... so shdl my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth" (Isa.55:10,11). God never intended that the rain that He sends upon His Garden should be consumed by weeds and thorns and briars. His desire is that His plants absorb the rain into their innermost being... causing them to grow in grace, produce leaves and flowers, and finally bring forth fruit for His glory.

The fruit of our lives is the ultimate proof of the soundness of our doctrine. We must have good doctrine. But the ultimate of good doctrine is the fruit of the Spirit coming forth in the lives of His people. Good doctrine is not a stagnant pool of rules or theological concepts. Good doctrine is pregnant with life, and brings forth life.

There is no place in Christian growth for stagnation, where one feels "Finally I've found it..." First there is the planting of a good seed, then there is a sprout, then a bud, then the blooming of the flower... and finally the fruit. And God alone will decide in harvest time, whether you have borne good fruit. All along the way there is a growing process, and much blessing upon the plant, but if it doesn't come to the full intention of the Gardener, all that blessing has been for nought.

"For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb.6:7,8).

The very same rain that strengthens and nourishes the plant and causes it to flourish, will strengthen and nourish the thorns and briers and cause them to flourish. God knows this, and He cautions us about the weeds. If we are drinking God's rain let us be sure we are seeking Him to know how to eradicate the thorns and briers; because these will grow alongside your corn and tomatoes if you will let them. And they will flourish with the same rain that waters the corn.

When I built our home it was a part-time project, as I was working full time at my job. So I did not have the time to pull out the thistles that started to flourish in the back yard. Not many seasons went by till my Canada thistles were growing six feet tall; and when I started a garden some years later it took another couple of years to get the weeds under control. What caused all this? Well, those seeds were already there. The soil had been worked over during construction and this added to the problem. But it was the precious rain from heaven that caused them to flourish. Jesus warned us about the danger of "thorns" in our garden, which He describes as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, (which) choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matt.13:22).

Let us understand what God is showing us. Even His good rain will cause thorns and briers to grow in your heart, if not eradicated. God's blessing upon our lives will nurture pride, bitterness, strife, conceit, high-mindedness, covetousness... and all kinds of hurtful lusts, if we are not watchful. I didn't say God's blessing would cause it-- I said His blessing would nurture it. And all the while you may be rejoicing in the great things God is doing in your life and ministry. You and I had better understand that with every blessing He gives, the Gardener is seeking to reveal the "thoughts and intents of the heart". Paul admonishes us to look diligently "lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Heb.12:15).

"Lord, help us to understand that the further we go on with Thee, the greater is our responsibility. That the more we receive of Thee, the more dost Thou expect to receive from us, That the greater our capacity for truth and revelation, the greater likewise will be our capacity for pride and deception. That when the unclean spirit moves out, and the owner sweeps his house clean and beautifies it-- the evil spirit may come back with seven others more vile than he. If we do not ask the Lord earnestly to come and inhabit our house-- the Enemy will attempt a comeback, and the house will become seven-fold more evil than it was before. (See Matt.12:43-45).

That unless Thou dost become our habitation, our center and source of life, the more will we be filled with our own ways, And consequently the greater will be our own delusion. But may we always find grace to lose our lives, lay down our gifts, our blessings, our all-- that we may find true blessing and joy in the Fountain-head of Truth, even in Thee alone."

Rooted and Grounded in Him

Our Gardener desires that our roots be firmly grounded in Him, which means that we are to become totally dependent upon Him. We will only bear good fruit, much fruit, more fruit-- as we sink our roots deep in the soil of His love and truth. "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward (Isa.37:31). This relates to what the apostle Paul said, "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph.3:17-19).

So often I get the feeling that God's people hear and read these tremendous things in God's word-- and sort of pass them off with a shrug: "Yes, that's wonderful, isn't it?" But they go on their way pursuing religious programs, and magnifying the blessings in their midst, as if these were the ultimate issues of life. I think it is true in our day, as it was said of Ephraim through the prophet, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing. They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices... but the LORD accepteth them not..." Then he adds, "Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples" (Hos.8:12-14). They were very diligent in the religious ritual, which God didn't even want; and in doing all these things they forgot their Maker, and built temples!

These great and precious truths concerning a people coming into the exhaustless riches of Christ are considered to be far-out strange things. And they go their way offering sacrifices and building temples "for the glory of God". And yet in and through it all God is searching, yearning,... for the sacrifices of "a broken and a contrite heart". He is longing for a habitation in the hearts of His people. We must never despise the blessings, but He wants all these to give way to an "abiding" realm in Christ. While we do our part by walking in obedience, all the while He is faithfully doing His part... in weeding, and thinning, and transplanting, and cultivating, and turning over the sod. He

is faithfully exposing all our potential enemies to the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, so that they might wither away in His presence.

Many a weed, many a thorn and brier has been removed entirely from your life and mine without us even knowing it, because of His faithfulness. But let there be no self-confidence in any of us, for in our flesh there "dwelleth no good thing". Let there be no glorying in spiritual attainment-- in gifts, in ministries, in mighty operations of God... for such glorying has nurtured roots of pride and arrogance in many, and smothered them with leaves of self-righteousness.

God's Inheritance in His People

"Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance..."
(Ex.15:17).

It is by no means a comfortable feeling to be torn up from the roots, and planted in a brand new environment. It may seem a little cruel on the part of the Gardener, but He will take great care. When this happens, we can wilt quite easily. But as some one has pointed out, God will leave a bit of the old dirt there on the roots, till the plant is able to take root in the new soil. We may have felt quite comfortable in our little church, in our home fellowship, in our denomination, in our world of religious activity.

And I don't think we should despise "the sincere milk of the word" that God fed us with in former days... nor assume that we are more mature than we really are. For the Bible tells us: "Despise not thy mother when she is old" (Prov.23:22). But neither are we supposed to be tied to our dear mother's apron strings the rest of our lives. God had planned from the beginning to plant us "in the mountain of His inheritance". It was never His intention that we should take firm root, and flourish, and die in Egypt... nor yet in the wilderness... not even in Elim, refreshing as it was for a season; "where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees" (Ex.15:27).

It seems strange that God's people who are generally ready to expand their horizons for temporal gain in business or education, so often seem to have no vision for progress and enlargement beyond their circle of religious activity, no yearning to explore "the deep things of God". It is considered to be too far-out... one of those strange things. God never brought us where we are now, to leave us here the rest of our days, going through the routine of religious services.

His intention is to plant us in the mountain of His inheritance "in the place , O LORD, which thy hands have established" (Ex.15:17). You mean He wants to plant us in His own home, in His own inheritance, in His own Garden? Exactly. A Garden to beautify His own inheritance? A Garden that will provide fruit to satisfy His own hunger? Yes, He longs for that. But He is not hungering for sacrifice and offering, nor for the beasts of the field, as Israel thought. Not for ceremony and ritual. Not for the temples men are building for His glory. Not for our natural resources and wealth. He

has no delight in any of these things. What then is He hungering for? He wants to come in and sit at our table, and eat with us.

Standing at the Door of Laodicea

I see our Lord still standing there, outside the door of the Laodicean Church, knocking and hoping that someone would let Him in. There on the inside there is plenty of joy, good music, and lots of action. There are programs for everybody, ministrations for every good cause, but not much for Him. There is good preaching, nice choir singing, wonderful orchestras, and the beat of the drums and cymbals to keep every one in the proper mood. There is beautiful worship with all the frills of banners and ribbons. Lots of color... gold and purple and silver. There is jubilation among the young people... and passive forbearance on the part of the old. There are even prophetic utterances from time to time, generally reminding them how much the Lord loves them and how God is using them for His glory. But generally no one listens too much, because they have heard all that before.

But while all this is going on the Holy One of Israel stands outside the door, knocking, and asking if He might come in. He is outside, because they crowded Him out... with many strange things that grieved His heart. Or He may simply have just walked out when He realized nobody wanted to hear what He had to say. He had no right to dictate the order of worship and ministry, or to lead the people by waters still, or in pastures green... because the order of the meeting had already been arranged. He came to be Lord in their hearts, and Lord in their gatherings... and He will not serve at the altar as long as antichrist sits on the throne of their hearts. He will be Lord in their midst, or He will take His place quietly outside the door.

But He will continue to knock. He will continue to cry out to those who are hungry and thirsty, asking if He might come in. Too long has He been the Great Benefactor, the Santa Claus of every selfish heart crying out for blessings, and healings, and prosperity. Sure, they want everything God has for them. They want healing and blessing and prosperity. They want His enabling wisdom to operate a successful business. They need His help to increase their church attendance, enlarge their Sunday Schools, finance the building of their temples, enlarge their missionary programs, or their TV programs. They want Him to put His stamp of approval upon their wonderful projects.

But He wants to be the Lord in their midst, as surely as He is in Heaven... and not just the silent listener to every conversation. So we see Him outside the door, because He was crowded out; and we hear Him calling:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"(Rev.3:20).

"I want to have supper with you," He says. We think we are the needy ones, not He. What can I give Him, that He would want to have supper at my house? First of all, we

must know what He wants to eat. Jesus said He found something to eat when the disciples went away into the city to buy food. Did someone give Him food while they were away? "Yes," He said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of... My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn.4:32,34).

But where did He get this food? From a poor devastated woman from Samaria, who came to Jacob's well to draw water. And in giving to her the water of life and the bread of life, He Himself was fed by her. Jesus was not out there in some kind of religious activity to promote His Messianic ministry in the earth. His agenda was very simple: "Lo I come to do thy will O God"... and this became his daily bread. Therefore His hunger was satisfied when others would eat of the bread that He gave them. His thirst was quenched, when He was able to pour into their lives the living waters.

But how can this be? We will only understand this when we learn the truth of what He taught: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). God is Love. That is His very nature, to love... and therefore to give. He gave His Son at Calvary, because He is love. God was greatly "blessed" in giving His Son, because "Love" is only satisfied when others are helped and blessed. How we rejoice in a God who loved so much, that He gave!

But now He gives Himself again by His Spirit, that He might indwell us through and through... and that we might find our habitation in Him. And we draw back. We spurn His giving, and call it heresy. O yes, we want to receive His great salvation... His healing, His gifts and blessings. We want to see His mighty workings in the earth. But He wants a people who will receive Him into their lives as Lord. He wants to possess us, and fill every area of our being. And we draw back. We think we are being wholehearted and open before the Lord when we pray, "Yes, Lord, I want everything You have for me". But God says, "Child of Mine, I want everything you have for Me. I want to give you Myself... not just things that you may enjoy. And I can only give you all of Me, when you give Me all of you."

"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1Jn.4:16). God is greatly dishonoured when we desire everything He has for us, but hesitate to give Him everything we have for Him. He wants us to present ourselves at His altar, as a "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom.12:1).

Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you". I fear I have only waded through the shallows of this. I have never been able to fathom the depths of this beautiful statement. So simple.. so plain... so clear. But so measureless... so boundless... so exhaustless. You mean He wants to make His home in me? And He wants me to make my home in God? It is as simple as that. Yet so far beyond our comprehension. Abiding with Him in the place of God's Inheritance. And where is His inheritance?

In the hearts of those who love Him, and desire to obey Him and walk with Him. For this is the true measure of our love: **"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him"**

(Jn.14:23). He wants to transplant us, out and away from the barren and empty wastes of our wilderness, and into the Garden of His own inheritance.

The Pruning Process

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth (pruneth) it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (Jn.15:2). When God takes His pruning knife in hand and begins to strip the unnecessary twigs and branches from His chosen ones, the result of it all appears to be total devastation.

We are always happy, of course, when He cuts away something we know is harmful to our well being... some carnal habit or worldly desire that we know is hindering the joy of Christian living. Or even some religious enterprise that we thought was for His glory... but which turned out to be empty and void and unsatisfying. But generally our Gardener will cut much deeper than we expected.

I am not the judge as to how much of your work for God was carnal to begin with. But God will often dissolve certain religious activities even if it was right for a season. And the reason we are troubled about it is because we do not understand what God considers to be vital for bearing good fruit. We must come to the renewed mind, and love Him more, before we will understand what is well pleasing in His sight. With the carnal mind we are quick to presume that if the church is thriving and the crowds are straining the facilities...

God wants us to expand in order to keep up with it. He may allow you to do that, but His desire may be that you separate it into smaller groups... that He might discover more and better fruit in harvest time. The apple tree and the pear, and the peach... are much more beautiful before the pruning, than they are after. But the fruit farmer is looking only for the fruit; and the beautiful tree in his eyes is the tree that has been trimmed down in a way that will cause it to produce more and better fruit in harvest time.

Are we afraid to ask the Lord to prune us down to the shape and size that He has in mind? Or will we continue to go our own way, hoping some how that He might spare the knife because of our achievements, or because of our ambition to be successful in the work of the Master? Once we catch sight of the "more excellent way" we will sincerely ask Him to strip away every little twig and branch, every carnal desire, every bit of highmindedness and selfish ambition... if so be He might come and make His habitation in His inheritance that He has redeemed for His own pleasure. We need much pruning in our lives, to bring us to the place where we sincerely, and out from hearts of love and gratitude, are desirous of one thing, and one thing only... that God alone might be glorified in all that we are doing.

Chapter 4 SUMMER...WARM AND BEAUTIFUL

"The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,
and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song 2:13).

This is the most beautiful time of the year. You could scarcely long for anything better. Every plant, every flower, every shrub flourishing in its place, spreading forth their leaves and branches, buds bursting into bloom and displaying such an array of beauty and such a riot of color that the pure in heart can only say, "O God how great Thou art". Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matt.6:28). But it was in the context of saying God wanted a people who would simply abide in Him and let the heavenly Father be their life, and bring forth the beauty that He has in mind. Solomon built a gorgeous temple, and brought forth many wonderful works, through the wisdom and understanding God had given Him. But in this passage the Lord is reminding us, in the secret language of the parable, that God is more glorified in the life He puts within us, than He is in the works that we perform by His enabling power and wisdom. It amazes me how God's people will lavish money upon projects in the Church to beautify the choir or the orchestra, or the drama team,... with ribbons and banners and other kinds of tinsel... and think it relates in any way to what God calls "the beauty of Holiness".

New Garments for the Old

Surely we can see in the lily what God means by the beauty that surpasses the glory of Solomon. How did it acquire such gorgeous raiment? What did it do to weave such exquisite garments for itself? Really, it was not its working at all, but the work of the heavenly Father. He planted the seed in the earth, and watered it when it needed water, then sent the sunshine to warm the soil and cause it to spring forth and bud.

It was His working all the way through. And it was by the law of natural life. How much more beautiful then is the Life that is hid with Christ in God, that springs forth from the soil of our hearts, and finds itself in God's Garden, dressed in garments of grace and beauty! How dare we insult God by bringing trash into His holy Temple, in an attempt to imitate the worship of His temple, and call it 'worshipping God in the beauty of holiness'? But He with consuming "eyes of fire" looks upon us to see if there is a humble heart.

He listens when one of His beloved priests, knowing his unworthiness, cries unto God --

"Lord, take away these filthy garments, and clothe me with change of raiment. Lord remove from my head the carnal mind, and put a fair mitre on my brow, that I might think as you think, and know how to walk in the more excellent way. Anoint my eyes to see and my ears to hear beautiful things proceeding out of your heart and mind.

Beautify Thy servant with garments of the new man, and renew my mind after the image of Him that created me, till I come forth in Thy image and likeness. Clothe my inner man with bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness,

longsuffering. And above all these things, show me how to put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (See Zech.3:3-5; Col.3:10-14).

What has the lily done, or the rose, or the daffodil -- or the myriads of other gorgeous flowers that grow in your garden... what have they done to produce such wonderful raiment? Nothing really... it just submits itself to the spirit of life within. It is the imparted life of God that causes the seed or the bulb to break open, take root downward, and push its way upward. It is simply by the operation of life that it unfolds itself in the atmosphere and draws moisture from the ground in which it is rooted, and the virtues of the sun that shines upon it. Then suddenly it breaks forth into a garment of unspeakable glory.

It is the life that causes it to happen. It is a bursting forth of new life, out from the old shell. It is actually this new life that shatters the shell of former bondage, because the old cannot contain the new. That old garment has served its purpose and must now make way for a new garment, the garment of New Creation life, which is secretly being woven in the skillful hands of the Weaver. It is not seen as yet by the eyes of men, because we are woven in the secret looms of God.

David meditated on this when he said, "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" (Ps.139:15). The word "curious" in this passage is the same word that is used for the intricate workmanship of fine needlework of the embroiderer, as the men and women in Israel, filled with the wisdom of God, prepared the beautiful garments of the priesthood... garments which God said were "for glory and for beauty" (Ex.28:39,40; 35:25-35).

Let us not fear when we see the old garments of the world... or the old wineskins and patterns of Church life, starting to crumble and disintegrate. Let us rather ask the Lord to take away the scales from our eyes that we might see the beauty of the Life of Jesus bursting forth in His redeemed. All nations must yet see the glory of the Lamb, and the beauty of His handiwork, revealed in the sons of the Kingdom. "For the Gentiles (the nations) shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name" (Isa.62:2).

A New Law of Life

We reverse God's order so readily. We say we've got to eat to live. But Jesus tells us: the life is more important than the food. The life comes first; then because of the life we are able to gather the food that sustains the life. "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matt.6:26). Jesus is not encouraging laziness, but He is encouraging trust and confidence in the heavenly Father. There's nothing lazy about the birds of the air that come into my garden. Up where we live, we may have 18 hours of daylight during our short summers, and the birds are up and around early in the morning before I am,

and I often hear them still chirping after I have gone to bed. How can they do that? Because of the tremendous law of the spirit of life the God put within them when he created them. Is not "the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus much greater, much higher, much more powerful than the spirit of life in a plant or animal?

Especially as we consider that the natural law of life is in the process of decay and death? We, as well as all lesser creatures, are subject to the law of death the moment we are born. The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus is the Law of the New Creation, that makes free from the old law of sin and death. We must seek Him earnestly that He might activate once again in His Church, the glorious functioning of the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

The Struggle to Emerge in New Life

We speak much of the rest that remains for the people of God. And rightly so. But right in the same context we read these words: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (or disobedience)" (Heb.4:11). What's this all about? Labour in order to find rest? But I think the context makes it clear: if we fail in our quest for true rest, it is because of disobedience. And the reference ("after the same example") takes us back to Israel in the wilderness, and what happened there. Briefly the story is this: they had finally reached the land of promise, and the word from God was this: "Go in now, and possess the land". And their reaction to that was... "We can't".

The choice was very clear. Caleb and Joshua who had a different spirit, a spirit of "faith" said, "If God delight in us He will bring us in". Their ability to enter in depended entirely on doing what God said... "Go in, and I will drive out the enemy".

It's not our faith that we try to generate, but it is a faith that springs from obedience to the word of God, when He specifically shows us what to do. Paul tells us that they could not enter in because of unbelief, which he enlarges upon by saying that they did not mix the word with faith... they did not obey God when there was clear word from His mouth to move forward. They were not ready to go God's way.

Counsel, for the Hurt and the Bruised

I know there are a lot of bondages in the lives of God's people, but an awful lot of it is there because they are not shown God's way; and if they are, perhaps they are looking for an easier way out. And in the end this always turns out to be more difficult than God's way, without bringing forth the good fruit that God intended. A good counsellor will show the troubled one God's way according to His Word: the more excellent way of love and forgiveness for those who hurt them. But sad to say very often the counsellor (even the Christian counsellor) will look for an aunt or uncle or a father or mother or a brother or sister, or a grandparent... who may be at fault.

And we are not denying in some cases this may be true; but bringing back those old feelings of resentment and hatred will not heal anybody. All it can do is feed and

magnify the problem still further. God will deal with all that according to His own righteous judgments. In the meantime the hurting ones must know God's way of healing: they must learn to extend mercy and forgiveness to the one who hurt them. They must be shown how to return good for evil, love for hate, mercy for cruelty, kindness for unkindness, forgiveness for injury. This is God's way, and it works. It is the Way of Christ... the Way of the Cross.

It heals and restores and removes the roots of bitterness that may have lain there from early childhood, dormant in their hearts, but very much alive. If we could tie together all the threads of injuries that have come down to us from relatives of the past, we would find ourselves linked up with our first parents in the garden, who introduced "the law of sin and death" into the human family.

And so having come to the very root of the matter, let us now turn to the scriptures and make this wonderful discovery:"... God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom.8:3,4).

Only the new Law of Life can rid us from the old law of sin and death.

And so yes, there is a struggle to enter into rest, but the struggle is one of Spirit against flesh, and flesh against Spirit: and as we yield to the Spirit, we come forth in victory. God has shown us how to deal a death-blow to our carnal mind if we will walk in obedience, and look for grace to show love and patience and mercy and kindness and longsuffering and forgiveness. Our lives by birth and by nature are a howling wilderness. And God shows us the way out. As long as we cling to the old law of hate, and enmity, and resentment, and unforgiveness-- we make no room for the new law of Life and Liberty and Love to flow. There is nothing more powerful in this world of hate and malice, than the Law of the Spirit of Life that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Growing in Grace and in Knowledge

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"(2 Pet.3:18).

The faith that is once-for-all-delivered-unto-the-saints was not given to bog us down once-for-all in the mire of creed and dogma. The true doctrine of the Lord will lift us higher and higher into realms of grace and truth and revelation. Because the doctrine of the Lord will bring words of Spirit, and Life, and Healing.

I am not disappointed if my flowers and plants fail to absorb all the water I pour on my garden, or all the rain that falls from heaven. I did not expect they would. But a healthy plant will absorb what it needs for that day. And the moisture along with the minerals in the soil, and the sunlight from heaven, will be transformed within, and become part of the very life of the plant. I do not understand how all this works; but I know that if these mysterious processes of nature fail to transpire in the plant, the plant will die.

I mentioned that a lot of our problems remain as a heavy weight upon us, because very often we are not prepared to go God's way. We want an easy way out. God wants us to feed upon His living Word, and walk in obedience before Him. God reminded Ezekiel that His people enjoyed listening to the prophetic utterances, but they had no intention of doing what He said. "And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezek.33:32).

God wants to nurture us with His living Word. Of course we like the musical concerts, and the beautiful singing... and we enjoy hearing the tapes. We would travel hundreds of miles to get this kind of blessing. But is there any real desire to do what God wants us to do? God intends that His love "constrain us". He wants us to know Him in a greater fullness. He wants us to experience "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings..." He wants us to add to our faith: "virtue, knowledge, temperance (control over our spirits), patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love" (2 Pet.1:5-7).

Reaching upward, and upward... yes. But with every measure of growth upward there must be a corresponding measure of growth downward. The higher we ascend in the school of wisdom and knowledge and revelation, the deeper we must descend into the hidden realms of the sufferings of the Cross. Wisdom and knowledge without the workings of grace in our lives can become perverted, as the prophet said: "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee" (Isa.47:10). No amount of groping in the dark can bring us into the light. We must walk in the Spirit if we would walk in the light of the knowledge of the Lord.

Fruit has Seed in Itself

"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself; after his kind..." (Gen.1:11). In Christ there is an equal sharing of His life, and equal place in the design of His will... but there is a very specific calling for each of us. And for this reason, though we are "members of one body", God is very particular in His dealings with us as individuals. He wants a people for His praise... for the extolling of His own excellencies and greatness.

"A peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises (the virtues, the excellencies) of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet.2:9). In the people whom He created for His praise and glory, there is no imitation one of the other, because He has a specific design for each. You do not find the canary trying to praise God like the lark, or the cow trying to mimic the crow. The rose or the carnation feel no shame for not being able to chirp like the sparrow. Each is beautiful in its own right... its own created right... "after his kind". I do not compare the apple tree with the orange tree... because you do not compare one with the other if God has intended a particular design for each. And if we try to change God's order there will be bondage and confusion instead of the freedom and liberty

that God intended. There is no true liberty apart from law. And he only knows true liberty who knows what it is to come under the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. If "the liberty of the Spirit" that we profess to have does not bring us into a more confined and more separated life in union with Christ, and into a walk of true holiness... we had better change the name to "the liberty of the flesh". There are not two areas in which we are to walk... the area of the Word and the area of the Spirit.

Chapter 5 AUTUMN... BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shal doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps.126:6)

"Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe (or dried). And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped" (Rev.14:15,16)

This is the "precious fruit of the earth" that God has been waiting for. But there is another harvest that is also "fully ripe"... and this harvest consists of the "vine of the earth" which is cast into "the great winepress of the wrath of God" (Rev.14:18,19). There are two kinds of harvest, and both must come to fullness of maturity. There is the "mystery of iniquity" and there is the "mystery of Christ". Generally the Church has no problem believing that the working of evil in the sons of disobedience will come to complete fullness; because we see it happening before our eyes. We see the Devil fashioning his people into his own likeness.

But somehow most of God's people seem to think "the mystery of Christ" cannot come to fullness till we get to Heaven. I am confident if the Devil can bring the seed of evil to a ripe harvest of sin and iniquity... surely our Lord Jesus who died to redeem us, and who overcame Satan by dying on the Cross... surely He is able to bring His people to ripeness... even "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ". Or do you think, perhaps, that the Devil has greater authority and power over his people that our Lord Jesus has over His?

This is what harvest time is all about: the seed that is planted must come to fruition... and ripeness. God's harvest is said to be "ripe", and the word means "dried", "shriveled", "withered". We don't like the feeling. We seem to be dead... and often we feel that way. But it must be this way in harvest-time. The "green" of former times has turned to brown. Many have become discouraged because they feel so dry. I am not saying God's Garden had received the full measure of the Early and Latter rain that Joel talked about. For even now in harvest-time we know there is a generation of God's people who must experience "the early and the latter rain" in their season.

But we must be very close to the harvest that Jesus spoke about when He said, "the harvest is the end of the world". And in harvest time the Gardener will bring His fields to dryness, so the grain can be threshed and separated from the chaff. Harvest time

is separation time. God will separate the wheat from the tares; but He will also separate the wheat from the chaff. God says, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt.13:30).

In this hour of consummation the Gardener comes into our midst looking for one thing, fruit... the precious fruit of the earth. Failing to recognize the season in which we live, and "the hope of His calling" in our lives, can only lead to frustration and bewilderment in this hour when nothing seems to be moving in the direction we had hoped or planned or sought to achieve. For certainly if God has apprehended you, you are going to discover that He is blasting away your every attempt to restore some of the good old days of the past. Perhaps the Lord is cutting you down so small that you are beginning to wonder if you have lived your whole life in vain.

After all, could it possibly be God's will that you have flowed in successful service for the Lord in years past, only to find yourself at the end of the way almost alone, and with very little meaningful fellowship in the body of Christ? Or perhaps ministering to the ones or twos?... Or not ministering at all? Yet are these any evidence whatever of God's displeasure? Not at all, if we know a little about God's ways. God's pleasure in His people is determined by the quality of our love for Him, and not by the gifts He has showered upon us, or in the service we offer Him.

Does He not say, "Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity (love), I am nothing" (1 Cor.13:2)? We all know that scripture well, but I fear most of us cannot bring ourselves to the place where we esteem God's love working in us to be His highest desire. We fail to recognize that "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 Jn.4:16). And that when we come into Love, there is nothing more that can be added... except more of the quality and attribute of LOVE.

The Church abounds with great and successful ministries whose real concern is to "get the job done" rather than to pursue this high and holy calling where we dwell in God, and God dwells in us. God is waiting patiently for this precious fruit to come forth in His people. And blessed are we if we are waiting for it too. May we understand what this means: that God is "waiting" while tenderly caring for His Garden; and we are "waiting" while responding to His blessings, and allowing His Word to penetrate our hearts and change us.

Our Lord Jesus was faithful as the Seed to go into the earth and die. And therefore the Father will be faithful to ensure that this "precious fruit" will come forth right here in the earth where the Seed was planted. We know "the blade" and the "ear" are forming here in the earth. Then should it seem strange that "the full corn in the ear" should also take form here in the earth? This is where God desires the full measure of LOVE to be manifested... right here in this world of sin and hatred and malice, where His love is needed... far more than it is needed up there in Heaven! It was right there in Egypt that God had Joseph ready... prepared for the hour of

famine... to feed not only the Egyptians, but also the people of God in the land of Canaan.

The Color of the Fields is Changing

My garden takes on a wholly new character and color when the time of harvest draws nigh. The beautiful flowers wither away and die. The leaves fade, turn color, and drop off. The stalks of grain turn yellow, and lose all their natural vitality. The color changes from green to brown, or yellow.

This is what confuses and frustrates most of us when harvest time draws nigh. And unless we understand the Gardener's design in it all, we are apt to condemn ourselves or others for the deathly state we are in. And so perhaps we go looking for something to revive us again... something that will restore the joy that we feel should be there. And if we discover the joy, perhaps we will be satisfied for another short season. May God help us all to know that the true "joy of the LORD" is one of the signs of harvest time... and that it is not like the "joy" of the world about us. It is "the joy of the Lord"....

...The joy that comes when we know God has been working all through our days, even when we thought He had deserted us.

...The joy we discover in harvest time, when all along we thought He had stripped us down to zero because of our failure, rather than because of His design.

...The joy we know when He shows us that He used the pruning knife, not to destroy us, but to bring forth more and better fruit.

...The joy of knowing the Potter had crumbled the vessel that was marred in His hands, not to cast it away, but to make a new vessel that would be "approved" in His sight.

...The joy that comes after many nights of failure and disappointment, when we discover that God's intention all along was to bring us to ashes, to cause the leaves to fall, to cause the flowers to fade away and be trampled in the mud... because He was looking for the fruit.

...The joy we experience, when He comes "to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, and He might be glorified".
(Isa.61:2,3).

Think of that! That God can actually bring a people to the place where their supreme joy and delight is not to get everything God has for them, but to give themselves wholly unto Him, "that He might be glorified".

The Firstfruits

"Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes" (Num.13:20).

"My soul desired the firstripe fruit" (Mic.7:1).

"These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Rev.14:4).

God's prophets spoke as they were moved along in the Spirit... so I know it is God that is saying, "My soul is desiring the firstripe fruit". God loves all His family. He loves the whole world. But there is a certain reward of His love that His people draw from His heart when they do those things that please Him. God tells us that He takes special delight in those who "fear the LORD", and "speak often one to another" and "think upon His name". The Bible says He is attracted by that, and He listens in, and commands a book to be written about it. They are so special that He says, "They shall be mine... in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal.3:16,17).

But be assured of this, God's special ones are not aware that they are "special". They "fear the LORD" so much, that if such a thought comes to their mind they ask the Lord to purify their hearts from all such defilement, because they want to walk close by His side. They know their God will not walk with the proud or the scornful! They know that except they take their place as the servants of all, and the least of all... they are not true disciples. They know that only those who suffer with Him in His rejection and cross... will reign with Him in glory. The Gardener alone will decide what fruits He will pick as "first fruits unto God". Our Lord Jesus Christ has become, preeminently, "the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor.15:20). But He is joining a people unto Himself, making them to be members of the same body with Him, as "a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

Our fellowship with God and with one another is based on "walking in the light" (1 Jn.1:7). It would be wrong to base our fellowship on what kind of a "message" we have: Kingdom Message, End-Time Message, ...and all the different titles that we hear these days by people who have left the traditional church. We only have true fellowship when we "walk in the Light" ...not just in knowing about the Light. We must walk in abiding fellowship with the King, rather than just learning the Kingdom Message. Are we following in the steps of Him who is poor in spirit? The One who mourns over His people? The One who is meek and lowly in heart. We must respond to His call: "I want you to give yourself wholly unto Me... to be separated entirely unto Me, that I might do with you as I will".

What is the Chaff?

"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the tree; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his (threshing) floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt.3:10-12).

This message is clear: In harvest time the ax is laid to the root of the corrupt tree. And the chaff of the grain fields is to be consumed in fire, or blown away with His winds. Now the chaff was once a part of the stalk of grain as it grew there in the field. It was a green stalk, full of life, and a channel of life to convey the nutrients of the soil into the head that was forming on the stalk. But in harvest time it turns yellow and brown, and dies.

I do not know what kind of channel God may have used in your life to bring forth the fruit. But we must not continue to give life supports to that which once served God's purpose, and now is no longer valid if it has fulfilled God's intention. The chaff does not grow out from some evil thing that plagues the inner man. The chaff is that which God used for a season to bring life to you or to others... but in harvest time it is no longer necessary. And because it is no longer necessary or useful to God, He will consume it in the fires of harvest time. The green has turned to dryness... and harvest time is threshing time, to remove from the grain everything that is no longer necessary to God and His purposes.

Already a fire is kindled to destroy the chaff from the threshing-floor. Already the threshing instruments of His judgments are being sharpened and made ready. Already the winnowing-fan is in His hand. Those beautiful tall stalks of grain, once absolutely essential for the growth and development of the plant, are beginning to feel the sharp teeth of His judgments, and are being reduced to chaff. Do we understand what God is saying? Not only your sins and your failures and your mistakes... but that which He Himself produced within you by His life and blessing. All this becomes chaff in the day of harvest. Why? Because all He is looking for now is the grain that has been reproduced after the likeness of the corn of wheat that fell into the ground and died.

What do we do then? As individuals and as assemblies who gather in His Name, His absolute Lordship must be established in every life that seeks to move with Him in this hour. Then He with eyes "as a flame of fire" will show us what He wants us to do. We must stop telling God what He must do, and "inquire of Him". But will this not cause a lot of divisions in the Church, if we change our direction too drastically? Very likely. For there can be no gathering of the wheat into the garner without a lot of separation of the wheat from the chaff. He must cut, and beat, and thresh so thoroughly that the winds of His judgments may sweep everything away except the pure grain.

With the grain in the garner all else out there is chaff, and He consumes it with His Holy fire. This is what the "baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire is all about". We are inclined to shrink from such devastating language as that. Some theologians tell us that this "baptism" has nothing to do with Christian experience, but that it refers to God's judgment on sinners. But not so, for Jesus prior to His departure told His disciples, "John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). Judgment? Yes. For God's judgments must first begin in His Sanctuary. He will judge the world with the same fire; but God's people need this mighty baptism of fire, to burn up all the chaff, and endue them with His glory and power. Do we wonder why there are multiplied millions of Christians who profess to

have been baptized in the Spirit... and yet fall so far short of what the early disciples experienced? I think it is because we have settled for much less than God intended. Do we gather together in His Name in "one accord" as those early disciples did? (Acts 2:1) Have we felt the blowing of those mighty winds of God, that He sent to sweep away the chaff? (Acts 2:2) Have we seen those holy tongues of fire, resting upon us and consuming us with His presence (Acts 2:3).

...Not to mention that in many cases God's people have been taught how to speak in tongues, instead of speaking under the unction and power of the Holy Spirit. For these reasons I am afraid our "Acts 2:4" experience in most cases is sadly lacking those ingredients of grace and truth and love that characterized the anointed people of the early Church. We need to continue seeking God that we might be swept clean with those holy winds of God, and be baptized in that holy cleansing fire of the Holy Ghost.

What we need today is a baptism of "weakness" ...a baptism that consumes the dross of pride and arrogance, with refiner's fire. And surely this is what John the Baptist proclaimed when He said of Jesus, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" ...fire to consume the chaff of the harvest threshing floor, fire to consume the dross from the gold, fire to burn out every trace of sin and carnality.

It is the Dawn of a New Day

A new Day is dawning upon God's people. Already some are beginning to sense the Day Star arising in their hearts... and we know this is but the prelude to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings. Many are aware that a change is taking place in their lives, "from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord". Already there is a breaking and a melting of the ice and snow on the mountains, and streams are beginning to flow in the Garden of the Lord. Winter is giving way to spring time in this hour when God is doing a quick work in the earth. And spring is merging into summer. And summer into autumn. God is saying to His people, "Seek ye my face", and with David they respond, "Thy face, O Lord, will I seek". They do not argue the matter with the Lord, "But Lord, You know I can't see Your face until You come again, and I am waiting for that". They want to see His face before that day, and walk in the light of His countenance today.

Do you think this yearning for resurrection life, this deep travail and groaning for full redemption, is just a repetition of false birth-pangs? Do you think it is just a historical event that is to take place, rather than the groaning of the Spirit to bring forth a people from the womb of a groaning creation? A creation that has been groaning these thousands of years since the Fall? (See Rom.8:19-23).

The caterpillar has lain still and dormant these many days, wrapped up and confined in a cocoon of his own making... yet not his own, but rather according to the spirit of life within him. He is not concerned about time tables and dates like the other worms that are crawling around. When his hour has come he struggles and yearns to come forth... yet not he, but the spirit of life within him. And suddenly that cocoon burst

open... not because he kept watchng the calendar, but because the pressure of new life within him could no longer be restrained by the cocoon that kept him in bondage. The cocoon bursts open, because of his struggling... yet not his, but the struggle of the spirit of life within him, and he finds his new element in the atmosphere above. And all the while the other worms are reproving him, for thay just know for sure that worms do not sprout wings and fly.

Behold the Fig Tree, and All the Trees

"Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand" (Lk.21:29,30).

Now if the fig tree is the nation of Israel, it follows that "all the trees" are the other nations. What does this mean, the trees "shooting forth"? Jesus tells us clearly what it means. "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (vs 31). "These things..." What things? Let's just refer to them briefly: Jerusalem compassed about with armies. Great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. Signs in the sun, moon, and stars. Distress of nations, with perplexity. The sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts failing them for fear. The powers of heaven shaken. And finally, the revelation of the Son of Man from heaven, in power and great glory.

Much of this "distress" took place in AD 70, as the Romans sacked Jerusalem and the temple. But the distress of "the fig tree and all the trees" continues to intensify, and will come to fullness.

We do not rejoice in the destruction that is coming, but there is a sense of expectation in knowing that God is going to deal with the horrible violence that covers the earth, as He did in the days of Noah. The apostle Paul likens these judgments to the "travail" that comes on a woman with child (1 Thess.5:3). Why? Because there is new life that will come forth out of His judgments. For in the time of the "seven last plagues" of the wrath of God, the over-comers are singing the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. Both these songs are songs of triumph. And we hear them singing, "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev.15:4). The wrath of God is a fearful thing. But "the fig tree and all the trees" are going to be humbled at His footstool, when God's judgments are in the earth. So we do not despair when we see racial tensions all over the earth, each killing his brother for the glory of his god; and each totally ignorant of the true riches of Christ. In the midst of it God is preparing the sons of the Kingdom to go to the nations with the "beautiful feet" of the Gospel of Peace.

Man... desperate, ambitious, self-seeking, proud, arrogant man is trying to maintain his own selfish identity through political maneuvering, and war, and uprising, and rebellion... and while all this is going on there are peace conferences, and overtures,

and peace pacts, and cease-fires, ...only to give way to more angry demonstrations of hate and violence...

SO MAKING TURMOIL.

But God comes on the scene, bringing the remnant of Israel, and all the trees, to brokenness and desolation, and finally to the foot of the Cross. The elect of Israel (the branches that were "broken off") are grafted back into the Olive Tree along with their Gentile neighbours (Rom.11:22-24). And then they make the amazing discovery that they are true blood-brothers because they are washed in the Blood of Christ, and are now members of the one Holy Nation. So why are we fighting against our brother, and against God? And then we read these beautiful words:

SO MAKING PEACE.

It was there at the Cross that God made peace: made peace with rebellious men of all nations. And no man is going to bring to nought that great Peace Pact, where God "hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; ...for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Eph.2:14,15).

This is the role of the sons of the Kingdom, to proclaim the Peace Pact that God made for all nations. Then is shall be said of them: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isa.52:7)

"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God... because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious incorruptable."

Chapter 6 THE GARDENER WAITS FOR THE FRUIT

In the lifelong process of seeking to walk with God there is of necessity a going back to first principles where we have let them slip away. God remembers our "first love" and He always seeks to bring us back to that. It is not a looking back for restoration of those precious experiences we knew in the past, to a delight in spiritual feelings and manifestations we used to have, or to some of those gracious workings in the Church that we saw in former days. But it is a coming back to "first love" and a "going forward" with God, into new dimensions of His love and truth. This of necessity requires a changing of our desires. He wants to bring us to the place where we "delight ourselves in the Lord" ...and in nothing else.

Very shortly after the flowers of grace fade away from our trees, and the petals fall to the ground... the Gardener comes to see if the fruit is forming. And strange to say, ...though we are wilting there on the ground and wondering what it is all about...

He is not the least disturbed about it. He looks and He sees the beginning of fruit, and He rejoices. He takes delight in those who continue to submit to His strange dealings, even though they do not understand. There is nothing strange about it as far as He is concerned... for He is working all things after the counsel of His own will. But

they are strange to us. We thought all along that He was looking for a zealous young man or woman who would be willing to travel the world preaching the gospel to the nations, with power and signs and wonders. And we never realized that His real intention was to conform us "to the image of His Son". And then we remember how our Lord Jesus had come to the place where He was totally approved of the Father, before He had been sent forth into His great Messianic ministry. Let us consider this thoughtfully...

Before Jesus did any mighty works...

Before He went out preaching or prophesying or teaching the people...

Before He healed any that were sick or raised any of the dead...

Before He gathered His disciples about Him and taught them the Gospel of the Kingdom, and sent them forth to preach...

Before He had done any of these wonderful works...

There came a voice from Heaven saying: "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased".

I always thought it was because He did all these things that God was so pleased with Him. But now I understand that all those wonderful works He performed were not the cause of the Father's approval but the result of it. And if we are persuaded this is truth, we will ask God to keep us hidden away under His mighty hand, rather than to send us forth in powerful ministry. We will pray, "Lord, make me to be a vessel approved unto God" rather than "Lord, use me... use me!" As a young man I remember thinking this might take another two or three years. Nevertheless I am thankful that He did not gratify my secret desire to do great things for Him, when He knew my heart was not prepared to withstand the pressures and temptations that come with an endowment of power that has not been refined with the fires of sanctifying grace.

True Fruit from the True Vine

We must know what God considers to be "good fruit". One of God's servants rejoices in some new thing they feel God is doing... and another runs from it. One says, "I know this is of God, because I see good fruit..." And another says, "I don't want it... because I see a lot of bad fruit". And each of them will quote the scripture: "Ye shall know them by their fruits". So it is very evident that we must know what God considers to be "good fruit" growing on a "good tree", if we are to judge by "their fruits".

First then, we must understand that our Lord Jesus is the Good Tree, the True Vine, and that there is no such thing as "good fruit" except it comes out of vital union with Him. He tells us very clearly, "Without me ye can do nothing". He is not saying we can't do anything without His help. He is telling us clearly that "apart from Him", if we are not a branch in the vine, drawing our life from Him... we can do nothing. (See Jn.15:1-16). We might be doing many wonderful things in the estimation of men, but if it does not spring out of our union with Him, God says it is nothing. Therefore only those who come to this abiding union with Him will know what He means by "good

fruit". It takes a great working of God in our hearts to bring us to this. Jesus tells us, "I am the Truth". He is clearly telling us: "Observe Me, look at Me, consider My ways, hear My voice... and you will discover the Truth, for I am the Truth". He preaches to all men the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven; but only as we walk with Him do we begin to understand that He Himself is the very embodiment of what He taught. We hear His beautiful "Sermon on the Mount", and are greatly fascinated with the simplicity of it all. Then suddenly we begin to realize He is just speaking out from His heart, ...out from what He is Himself.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," He said. Was He laying a heavy burden on us... telling us to do the impossible? No, He is seeking to change our desires and our goals. He was "poor in spirit" ...and if we would be like Him, He is showing us the way. Here was One who had nothing in Himself ...no agendas, no plans, no programs of His own to fulfill. He was "poor in spirit". He was always totally dependent upon the Father for His life and ministry in the earth. As He heard from the Father, so would He walk in those ways. As He know the desire of the Father, so would He move under the anointing that accomplished the desires of the Father.

"Blessed are they that mourn". We see Him as one that "mourned". Not for Himself, but for the grief of His people. True "joy" is not quenched when God's people mourn for the grief of Zion. It is this that nurtures the true joy of the Lord. For God gives "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness". Jesus was a "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa.53:3). But it was all because of "the joy" that was set before him that He "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb.12:2). His disciples saw Him mourning over the apostasy of His people, and weeping over the City of Jerusalem, as He foretold their inevitable doom. (Lk.19:41-44).

"Blessed are the meek". Jesus preached this to others, because He knew how "blessed" He was in being "meek and lowly in heart". He was not weak. He was strong in virtue and character, but meek and lowly in heart. Why? Because He was under the total discipline of the heavenly Father, and His only desire was "to do the will of Him that sent Me". We see Him fulfilling the prophesy that spoke of the King coming in meekness, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Matt.21:5). His disciples thought to themselves, "Finally it is happening... He is about to be revealed as Israel's Messiah!" And He was indeed.

But at that moment He was riding into Jerusalem, meek and lowly. The disciples rejoiced with the crowds, for they all thought He was on His way to take Herod's throne... when in fact He was on His way to the Cross. For this was to be the first phase of His coronation as King. To sit on Herod's throne, or on Caesar's throne, was far from His heart. He rode through the gates of Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing that shortly He would die "outside the camp" on a Cross... and rise again to sit on the highest throne in all the Universe, "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph.1:21).

We see a Man that "loved righteousness and hated iniquity". He hated iniquity with all that was within Him, yet how many knew His weeping heart? For even as He was lashing out against iniquity, He was grieving over the people who did not know the day of their visitation. Even His enemies knew this strange combination of His Love for God, and His hatred for iniquity. And so they devised an evil plot to catch Him in His words and actions. They brought to Him an adulterous woman, "taken in the very act".

His religious enemies knew He showed a lot of love and mercy. And they knew He stood for righteousness. Now they would test Him in such a subtle way that every one knew He would be caught in the trap they had devised against Him. How would Jesus avoid this trap? It seemed He would have to go one way or the other: either forgive the woman and despise Moses' Law; or accuse her, and make Him to be merciless like themselves. But Jesus stooped and wrote something on the ground. Twice He did this. I am reminded of a famous sermon by an old friend who has gone on. The sermon was called "Jesus stooped twice". He mentioned how God "stooped" down at Sinai to write His holy law on tables of stone, with a finger of fire... a law that brought judgment on the whole nation, and on all those who have tried to keep the law ever since that day.

Then in the fulness of time He "stooped" again, this time in great suffering and humiliation... to cancel out the sins of His people by becoming a curse for them, and taking their sin upon Himself... "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor.5:21). One word of wisdom from Him who is the very wisdom of God, was enough to cause the woman's accusers to squeeze their way out of the trap they has set for the Master, and was now springing shut on themselves. "He that is without sin among you," He said, "let him first cast a stone at her" (Jn.8:7). ...And silently her accusers crept away, convicted in their own conscience.

O the infinite heights and depths of our Redemption, that God Most High and Holy, who hates sin with every attribute of His Being... yet in the fulness of time "stooped" to our level of weakness, and died on the Cross as our Sin Offering, that we might rise with Him to walk in "newness of life": justified and cleansed through precious blood, and wrapped in His own garments of grace and truth and righteousness.

By Their Fruits ye Shall Know Them

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them..." But we had better learn more about the Good Tree and the Good Fruit as we see it in Jesus, or we will never know the good fruit from the bad... We will never know the difference between the Manna and the quail... We will never know what is Spirit, and what is flesh... We will never know what is Truth and what is error... We will never know what is "figs and grapes", and what is "thorns and thistles".

"Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matt.7:16). Certainly this is clear enough. But only as His disciples walked close with Him would they come to know

the difference between the good fruit and the bad. Their concepts had to be drastically changed, and the Lord was very patient with them, as He is with us.

Learning from Him

They must learn from Him. Then they would understand it was "bad fruit" when they wanted to call fire down from Heaven upon those wicked Samaritans who rejected Jesus. He told them they were motivated by a wrong spirit, to suggest things like that (Lk.9:55).

They must know it was a sign of "bad fruit" when they sent the mothers and their children away, while they were so busy "managing" the crusade of this great prophet of God. (Mk 10:14-16).

They must learn that it would be "bad fruit" if He were to set up a carnal Kingdom for Israel there in Jerusalem, and drive out the Romans who oppressed them... and all the while sin was reigning in their own hearts.

They were slow to comprehend that the Son, who was fully approved of the Father, must confront the people with the Truth and the Light of the gospel... and then die on a Cross, as their true Passover Lamb. And that out from this act of obedience, much good fruit would come forth.

They must learn that they were not called of God to win the popular support of the people, but to do the will of the Father. Our Lord knew how to handle the acclaim of a carnally-minded people. When they came "by force" to make Him their King, He simply walked away from it all. He left them to the delusion of their own hearts and "went into a mountain himself alone" (Jn.6:15). He knew God's agenda for Him, and it was to die on a Cross... not to exercise lordship over a wicked generation.

Jesus knew what "good fruit" was, because He did only those things that pleased the Father. He knew His death on the Cross would be a victory of such magnitude that He would crush the Serpent's head, and redeem the sons of Adam's race from the power and dominion of the Evil One. He knew that "the corn of wheat" would not bring forth any good fruit until it would "fall into the ground and die". We too must learn the secret of the Cross, if we are going to bring forth "good fruit".

Good Fruit... a Reproduction of His Life

It is harvest time and He comes into His Garden to see if His bountiful blessings upon us have brought forth something akin to Himself, something that would delight His own heart. Something other than He gave. He does not want to get back simply what He wants something like Himself that comes out of that Seed. We can scarcely comprehend this. How can we return anything to Him, except what He gave? Only when we begin to comprehend that the gifts and blessings He gives us are intended to

nurture us with grace and obedience, so that good fruit will issue forth from the heart.

Only as there is a reproduction of His own character and nature in us, in response to the many blessings He has poured into our lives. He does not come looking to see how blessed we are, how happy we are, how well His gifts are functioning in our lives, more of the beauty of Jesus. He goes from tree to tree looking for one thing only. He goes from vine to vine... and if He finds "leaves only", His heart is saddened. He is not looking to see if the ground is moist. He is not there to admire the flowers, or to see if the leaves are still green. He is looking for fruit. "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song 4:16). He looks for something that is akin to His own nature and character. Because it is only that which comes forth in His own image that can give Him rest, delight, and joy.

Good Fruit... Not in Wonderful Works

We are all familiar with the warning of Jesus that many in the day of judgment will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt.7:22). Some say these people were professing to have done these works, but were lying. But this has nothing to do with it. Notice the context in which Jesus spoke the words. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt.7:19). "You will know them by their fruits" is only meaningful if you know what God considers to be "fruit". It is not in the manifestation of gifts which God gives freely to all, but it is that which comes forth in the lives of those who "do the will of my Father which is in heaven"(Matt.7:21). **It's not in the signs and wonders. It's not in the miracles. It is not in the casting out of devils.**

The Lord makes it clear to them, and to us, that His righteous judgments will not be based on the performance of miraculous works, **but will be based entirely on whether it is "good fruit" from a "good tree".**

These are very solemn observations we are making. God said to His people of old, "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hos.10:1).

The Gardener looks down from Heaven and sees the fruits of human achievement, where men are glorifying themselves rather than the Lord. Israel went his own way, doing his own thing, bringing forth fruit for his own glory. And "according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the (idolatrous) altars" (Hos.10:1). We must walk close to the Lord and know His heart, or we are not going to know the difference between the good fruit and the corrupt fruit. I fear many of God's people are filling their baskets with thorns and thistles, and thinking they have gathered grapes and figs... because of the great works they see.

Approving Excellent Things

We hear this phrase a lot: "Don't judge!" But let us understand judgment in its proper perspective. I know Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Matt.7:1). We are not to be vindictive, but we are to exercise "good judgment" in our associations with men in the Church or in the world about us.

He said, "I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true" (Jn.8:16; also Jn.5:30). And to His disciples He said, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Jn.7:24). Surely it is evident from these and many other passages that God wants His people to "judge", in the sense of knowing what is right and what is wrong.. and then doing what He wants us to do about it, or leave it alone. We are to judge righteously, not according to appearance, and not as one who is condemning another. For as surely as we do that, we are leaving ourselves open to be judged in the same manner (see Matt.7:2).

We must come to know God so well that we will know what He approves, love what He loves, and so be able to discern what is good in His sight, and what is evil. And it is for the lack of this kind of judgment (or discernment) that so much pollution is sweeping through the Church. We do not go about pronouncing judgment against God's people.

We had better become merciful priests in His House before God will entrust us with authority to deal with the uncleanness that is there. I have seen a lot of cruelty in some of God's servants, who felt that because of their authority it was their responsibility to cast judgments on the erring ones, or whom they perceived to be in error.

A merciful priest in God's House will do a lot of heart-searching before He judges others... and will (like our Great High Priest) be willing to lay down his life for his erring brother. Let God's faithful priesthood reflect much on what Jesus said, "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt.7:2).

Certainly God will raise up a holy Zadok priesthood, whose judgment will be accurate, pure, and merciful. And they will judge righteously, because God said "they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me" (Ezek.44:15). It will be out from this beautiful priestly relationship with God that they will teach God's people "the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (vs 23).

This righteous priesthood will "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb.5:2). They will have learned "mercy" for they themselves have been hurt, wrongly judged,

misunderstood, and falsely accused. But it caused them to draw closer to God, and to minister unto Him, and to stand before Him.

The Fruit of Knowledge and Discernment

Now I recognize there is, in the gifts of the Spirit, words of knowledge given by God, and discerning of spirits. But many who are endued with this kind of gift and enablement have not known what it is to show mercy. If one's knowledge and discernment does not spring forth from a love relationship with God, his judgment is likely to be harsh and cruel and destructive. And so the apostle prayed for the Philippians that they would pursue a higher realm of judgment: "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment (or 'discernment')"

(Phil.1:9). He is talking about "the fruit" of discernment, a knowledge and discernment that springs from one's love relationship with God.

Do we understand what he is saying? "I want your love to increase more and more, so that out of a heart of love,...love for God and for God's people...your knowledge and discernment will be pure, and will spring from a pure heart." For you can be sure that the more we draw near to God and love Him, the more we will know His heart, and the more clearly will we understand what please Him. And so the apostle goes on to say: "that ye may approve things that are excellent" (Phil.1:10). As we know how to approve those things that are "excellent" in His sight, then we will be enlightened to avoid the evil way, or the way that is inferior... and walk in God's way.

First, our love must "abound yet more and more". Then in loving Him and walking in His way, we are able to discern and to judge righteously... and so come to the place where we know what is excellent and pleasing to God. We cannot discern the evil, except as we know what is good. We do not somehow stumble into the truth by studying the areas of falsehood. We do not walk in the light by searching out the realms of darkness.

And then as we abide in Love, and know what pleases the heart of God... "good fruit" is the end result. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (vs 11). God is looking for "fruits of righteousness". And when we understand that Christ alone is our "righteousness", then more and more must we confine ourselves to Him. For only in union with Christ will we bring forth in our lives the fruit the Gardener is looking for.

And then as we abide in Love, and know what pleases the heart of God... "good fruit" is the end result. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (vs 11). God is looking for "fruits of righteousness". And when we understand that Christ alone is our "righteousness", then more and more must we confine ourselves to Him. For only in union with Christ will we bring forth in our lives the fruit the Gardener is looking for.

Chapter 7 THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (Matt.13:24,25).

Now in the same context of this parable was another one, in which the Lord cautions us not to allow the "thorns" to choke out the Word. The Lord describes the "thorns" as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (vs.22). Paul also warns us about the "thorns and briers" that could infest our garden (Heb.6:8), and which we must seek to eradicate. But of "the tares" the Gardener says, "An enemy hath done this... **Let both grown together until the harvest**" (Matt.13:30). The farm-hands wanted to deal with it right away. They knew enough about "wheat" to discern the difference. But the farmer felt it would not be wise to root out the tares, **because in doing so they would very likely root up some of the tender roots of the wheat. And so he decided, "We will deal with the tares at harvest time".**

"Thorns and briers" are clearly identified as "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches". But Jesus cautions us that the "tares" are far more difficult to identify. Generally leaders in the Church do not concern themselves too much about "the thorns" because the Church needs the rich and prosperous to pay for her programs and build her temples. **But through the centuries God's people have been persecuted, mistreated, banished, tortured, burned at the stake, condemned to the guillotine, crucified... all in the name of eradicating "the tares" from the Church.**

Character of the Tares

God, because of His great patience and longsuffering, and by His own design, has continued to allow the false "anointed ones" to have their day in the Church. I know God wants His people to have discernment of "good and evil", and to deal with the evil that creeps into the Church, as He shows them the way to do it. But the fact remains there is an area of "the tares" that God will not deal with until "the time of harvest".

The Lord knew the heart of Judas all along. And as the disciples looked back after the fall of Judas, they remembered his covetous heart, and perhaps a few other things related to that. But in their time together he was simply "one of the twelve", and none of the eleven had a sneaky feeling that Judas had an evil heart. How do I know?

Because when Jesus announced, "One of you shall betray Me" there was total consternation and dismay. Each disciple in his turn said "Is it I?" And when Jesus said to Judas, "What thou doest, do quickly" ...even then they were totally ignorant of what Jesus meant (See Jn.13:28,29).

Unger's Bible Dictionary has this to say about "tares" in Bible times. **He says they are numerous in the grain fields, and are left in the ground until the stalks are well grown together.** And then not long before the harvest, the workers will walk carefully in the

fields and pull up everything but the wheat and barley. He tells us that **the most common of the different varieties of tares is poisonous**, and almost indistinguishable from the wheat in the early stages of growth; but when they come into ear, they can be separated without difficulty.

This description is well confirmed by what the farmer in the parable said. And because the real and the false seem to be so much alike, we do not always know for sure what is of Christ and what is antichrist.

But through it all God has given us a sure and positive way to follow after that which is good. Only our Lord Jesus is good, in the final analysis. **Only He is our righteousness and peace and joy.** God urges us to make Him to be our one and only desire... **to pursue Him, to follow after Him, to come to know Him, to speak of Him, to live in the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, to love Him, obey Him, and meditate upon Him night and day.** We cannot go wrong if the desires of our hearts are for Him and for Him only.

The Holy Spirit came to reveal Christ...and to exalt Him only (Jn.16:13,14). The shining forth of Christ in His servants will manifest Christ. And the true servants of Christ, who follow the Lamb, will recognize the spirit of the Lamb in those who profess to be His followers.

This is what our Gardener is saying, "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt.13:30).

I think we are assured we are very close to harvest time now, and **we know the Gardener has it all under control.** Jesus said, "The harvest is the end of the world; and **the reapers are the angels**" (Matt.13:39). And we are told the tares are to be gathered together into bundles first, before the wheat is gathered into the garner. In any Church of fellowship is the land where God's people are gathering together in His Name, you can be sure the Enemy will be looking for a place to sow the tares. **But if our hearts are right, and our pursuit is totally after Him, God will not let us become overwhelmed with the false.** Sometimes we may be fully aware of the false, and still not know what to do about it.

The tares are totally false, but they very much resemble the wheat, the true Christians, the Anointed Ones. There is nothing as false as a counterfeit \$20 bill. It has all the markings of a good piece of currency, but it is totally false. **And until we come to the place where we will not judge by what we see or what we hear... but rather by that inner sense of seeing and hearing (the same Spirit that Jesus moved in)...we are not going to judge with that refined quality of discernment that God wants us to have.** Our Lord Jesus did not judge by what He heard, or by what He saw, but His judgment was just, "Because" He said, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (Jn.5:30; Isa.11:3,4).

Discerning Both Good and Evil

"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb.5:14).

When a new bank employee came to the head banker and asked for some counterfeit currency, so he could study it, the banker replied: "You will not know the true currency by studying the false... **study what you know to be the true currency, then you will be able to detect the counterfeit**". God's antidote for the false, is the Truth.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn.8:12). God's remedy against antichrist, is the Christ, the Anointing, the Unction of God:

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One" (1 Jn.2:20).

This is God's provision for us. Now the Anointing is not just some kind of powerful sensation that one might feel (though I recognize one might feel the Anointing). The Anointing is that divine provision from God to cover us, to equip us for living the life of Jesus, and to enable us to minister Him to others. It is the shining forth of the Christ Himself, who is the Truth. And so John said, "But the anointing which ye have received of him... IS TRUTH..."(1 Jn.2:27).

Christ, the Anointed One is Himself the living Truth. As we walk in the Spirit, the Spirit is faithful to cause us to walk in Truth; for Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (Jn.6:63). As we walk in this Unction, and put on "the mind of Christ" we will be immune to antichrist and will know his number. Our "hands" will be free from his evil works; our "forehead" from his evil mind. How foolish to think that if we know a little arithmetic and can count up to 666, we have the wisdom of God to resist antichrist and overcome him! With the "seal of the living God" written in our foreheads, there is no "number of man" that can erase that indelible seal of the living God (Ezek.9:4; Rev.7:3; 14:1).

Antichrist in the Temple

What Jesus is telling us in the parable of the wheat and tares is simply this: there is an evil-working of the antichrist spirit **in the Church...** and it will not be clearly manifested to God's people until "harvest time". John recognized antichrist in his day. They claimed to be a part of the anointed people, but John said: "they went out from us" (1 Jn.2:19). It appears John did not have to deal with it because God's anointed ones had an "unction from the Holy One"... **and in due season, the antichrist company were no longer able to withstand the anointing that rested on them, and they walked out.**

But antichrist will not surrender easily. He will keep trying to get a place of lordship in the midst of God's people. In the time of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, there was a man by the name of **Tobiah who hated the Jews and did all he could to disrupt the work of God. But he managed to make a good name for himself among many of the nobles of Judah.** After all, his name means "Goodness of Jehovah". And "his good deeds" swayed the nobles, and they took his side. Somehow he arranged to find himself an apartment right in the temple of God (See Neh.6:1,17-19; 13:7,8). **He got in there to harm the people of God, not to help them.** Antichrist wants to get into the midst of God's people not to worship God, but to be worshipped. No longer is

he interested in a temple of wood and stone. He has already served at that altar, and was responsible for bringing it to desolation.

Now there is a new temple, the Church of the living God. And this is where he is seeking a place of lordship, right where God's "anointed ones" are. Not to worship God "in Spirit and in Truth" ...but to bring in whatever he can to corrupt true worship. But he will make it look good. And he will make a name for himself with "his good deeds" ...as he did in the former temple. He will settle for a little apartment to start with. He will steal his way in, and patiently wait for the opportunity to assert himself.

"Antichrist" means "against Christ", but it also means "instead of Christ", instead of the Anointing. It is unbelievable how many things have invaded the Church to take the place of the Anointing. "Every form of creeping thing" (like Ezekiel saw, Ch.8:10) has come in under the guise of "the anointing", to drive the Anointing out: ...wild music ...giddy laughter ...clowns and comedians ...magicians ...power teams ...you name it. Not to mention the many artificial gadgets and gimmicks, the stage effect, the color effect, that are used to beautify "the worship service". And then, of course, the "doctrines of men" that poison the heart and mind ...and the controlling spirit that keeps the people under captivity to the whole system.

Antichrist is working in God's Temple to crowd out the Christ, to crowd out the Anointing, and to occupy that place himself. "The Uncion of the Holy One" is God's provision for His people. So antichrist did not succeed too well in John's day, "They went out from us," he said. But in following generations he succeeded very well, until he had almost complete control in the House of God. And though he received what many in the Reformation hoped would be a "deadly wound", the wound is healing real well in our day. Now he is heavily involved in the whole ecumenical movement, which has for its intention the uniting of all "Christian" religions into one body under his control. He is finding a lot of success in all segments of the Christian Church including what many feel to be the most spiritual of all, ...the Charismatic Movement.

Antichrist is spoken of in the scriptures as singular and as many (1 Jn.2:18); because "the man of sin" is a corporate man ...even as Christ is union with His body is spoken of as a "perfect man" (Eph.4:13). There may be one "head" over this new false church that is emerging, or it could be a corporate headship, ...who knows? But antichrist is a movement, a spirit, a corporate body.

We will only see it clearly in the fullness of harvest time. But let us not be deceived into thinking that "antichrist" is lurking out there somewhere in a secret hiding place waiting for a temple to be built in Jerusalem, so he can take his throne in it. Right now he is very actively taking up strong positions in the Church, ...and crowding out the Christ, the Anointed One, and many of God's people do not know the difference.

Either God's people repent and come back to a simple gathering in the Name of the Lord Jesus, where He is there in the full exercise of His Lordship, or antichrist will come into their midst with a false anointing; and they will not know the difference.

And when "the mystery of iniquity" had come to fullness, then He will sit in the Temple, "shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess.2:4).

God wants to purge the hearts of His people from everything false, that they might become "a holy temple in the Lord ...an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph.2:21,22). And many of His people are longing for that, and preparing their hearts to be His habitation in the earth. But many others, by ignorance or neglect, are being subdued into silence and are going along with the antichrist movement. We have this confidence: "The Lord knoweth them that are his" ...and we know He will keep His own unto the end. But our responsibility is this: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ (The Anointed One) depart from iniquity" (2 Tim.2:19).

The Restraining Hand of God

Now God is still restraining the full manifestation of "the man of sin", as He has done from the beginning. But when His Lordship is denied, and the holy Anointing is replaced with the number of man (666 ...the apostate mind of man coming to fullness of maturity) ...they are going to bring more and more of these "creeping things" into the House of God. They must try to maintain "unity" in their midst. They must amuse the crowds to keep the people coming. They must keep the young people happy, and the older ones at least tolerant. Their investments are heavy, and heavy commercialism will continue to characterize the House of God in a manner that would have embarrassed the money-changers in Jesus' day. The leaders will continue to compromise their faith ...for unity at all costs. And as a result the Holy Spirit who came to manifest the Christ and to glorify Him only, is grieved and moves out. God has no choice in the matter. Little by little He withdraws His restraining hand and gives it over to abomination, as He did with the old temple in Jerusalem.

Antichrist will continue to have more and more ascendancy until the time of the end.

So the tares, those plants that very much resemble the wheat, have infested the fields in all parts of Christendom. But God has it all firmly under His control. He has "precious fruit" out there in the fields. First He is gathering "the tares" into bundles ...and then He will gather the wheat into His granary. We do not have to decide who are His. "The Lord knoweth them that are His". He is ordaining both harvests. He sends "strong delusion" upon those who "receive not the love of the truth" (2 Thess.2:10,11).

And He is bringing forth the wheat in the likeness of the Seed that was planted. It is a two-natured harvest. "The tares" are coming to fullness of fruition. And the good wheat is coming to "the full corn in the earth", by the shining forth of God's love and truth in the sons of the Kingdom. The Lord of Glory will consume "the man of sin" with the "spirit of His mouth ...and with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thess.2:8). And the bundles of tares are gathered into bundles for burning.

In all of these matters, we are to know that our victory comes in our defeat ...if you understand what we are saying. **Jesus was slain on the Cross at the hands of wicked men. But it was there He conquered over sin and death, because He went there in the**

will of God. He did not stumble His way to the Cross. He deliberately walked into it, in the full light of the day. He gave Himself out of love for His people. It was love that caused Him to choose the will of the Father, rather than His own will. He went back to Judea, knowing His enemies were waiting for Him. It was "through the eternal Spirit" that His Sacrifice was offered unto God, as a Lamb without blemish (See Jn.11:7-9; Heb.9:14). God wants us to follow the Lamb wherever He may lead us. And this requires that "we love not our lives unto the death", even as our Master. (Rev.14:1,4).

Chapter 8 VICTORY...AND TRAGEDY

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them (or, the most of them) God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (1 Cor.10:1-5).

After saying these things the apostle goes on to caution the Corinthians that these things happened to Israel as an example for us ...that we might learn from the failure of God's people in former times and avoid the pitfalls that brought a curse on them, instead of a blessing. Here the apostle shows us clearly how the blessing of God intended for their daily bread, and for their thirsty souls - became a curse...because their hearts were hardened against God. And lest the self-confident should shrug this off as an unnecessary warning to them, He admonishes us still further: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (vs.12). I want to speak of a few outstanding cases in the scriptures where God's blessings were followed by His judgments, because His people did not take it to heart.

The Snare of an Unprepared Heart

I would not want to call this "The snare of blessing" ...but it becomes that if the heart is not prepared. What God intended as a blessing to His people in the wilderness ...food and water to sustain their weary hearts and nourish their bodies ...this blessing became a curse because of their embittered hearts. Asaph tells us that it was "a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God" (Ps.78:8). God Himself laments over the rebellion of a people who witnessed miracles and wonderful works and blessings such as no nation before or since has witnessed ...yet in the aftermath of it all they hardened their hearts and failed to learn God's ways. (See Ps.95:7-11). This is no light thing ...that what God intended to nurture us, and feed us, and strengthen us, and bless us ...can actually become our downfall if the heart is not humbled and steadfastly fixed on Him. God's Word to you and me is this: "Today if ye hear his voice, Harden not your hearts." (See Heb.3:8-15; 4:7).

Strange Fire in the Holy Place

One day there in the wilderness Moses told the priests to offer up certain sacrifices before the LORD because God was going to visit them that very day. "Today the LORD will appear unto you" (Lev.9:4).

Messiah wasn't due to appear for hundreds of years yet ...but the Lord of Glory appeared to His people many times before His first coming. Why then should God's people get disturbed when we talk about the Lord of Glory coming into the midst of His Church before His "second coming"? And insist that whenever the writers of the New Testament talk about the Lord's "Appearing" ...that it can't happen till the "second coming"?

Anyway, He came to them. He came in the awesomeness of His Glory away back there in the wilderness. It wasn't just some kind of a vision. Moses said, "Today the LORD will appear unto you" ...and after the people had humbled themselves in sacrifice and offering, the LORD "appeared" to them. "And there came a fire out from before the LORD ...which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces" (Lev.9:24). When people "fell on their faces" in the scriptures, it was in deep fear and repentance and worship, as they humbled themselves before the Lord. I think we are going to see God's people "fall on their faces" again, when His holy Presence comes into our midst.

But in the wake of that, **two of the priests whose hearts had not been changed by this awesome revelation of God's glory decided they would light their own fire.** One day they were diligently following the instructions of the Lord in preparing the sacrifices. But a few day later they are blatantly doing their own thing! God deal with our hearts in this awesome hour, lest we busy ourselves doing our own thing, lighting our own artificial fires, and all the while enjoying His manifold blessings and ministrations of the Spirit. Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not, and there went out fire before the LORD, and devoured them" (Lev.10:1,2).

The Lord of Glory is going to appear in the midst of His people once again ... and you and I had better prepare our hearts now for the glory of His Appearing. He tells the Church of Ephesus, "I WILL COME unto thee" if you do not repent. He tells the Church of Pergamos, "I WILL COME unto thee" if you do not repent. He tells the Church of Sardis "I WILL COME on thee as a thief" if you do not repent. **Why must we argue whether or not this is "the second coming" if we know it is the Lord of Glory coming to His Temple, to deal with the iniquity that is in His Church?**

Quail Instead of Manna

The people of God were on their way to Canaan. Even in their much murmuring and complaining God had been faithfully making every provision for them: manna from heaven that provided absolutely every nutrient that they needed for physical health and strength. Water out of the Rock ...pure and fresh, and so mingled with the life

of God that it was called "spiritual drink". The Cloud of His presence overshadowed them by day and by night. Briefly stated, Moses declared: "Thou hast lacked nothing".

But they got tired of it all. The vision of Canaan became something far-out and strange. This precious food God gave them became something they loathed. It didn't satisfy their fleshly appetites anymore. It didn't seem to fill them up. (We have dealt with all this at some length in the writing "Beauty for Ashes II").

They complained to Moses, and Moses told God about it ...and God said **"I will send them flesh to satisfy the lusts of their hearts ...I will send so much of it they will not know how to handle it".** What a strong warning to us in this day! If we forsake the vision of those "far-out" fruits of Canaan land, and continue crying out for temporal blessings ...God might listen to our cries! God send them so much fleshly blessing it seemed to fall like rain from the sky, --**but it was a blessing that became a curse.** The prophet Malachi said, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart ...**I will curse your blessings**" (Mal.2:2).

Even while God was blessing them and answering their prayers, they were "sinning against Him" ..."provoking Him" ..."tempting Him" ..."speaking against Him" ..."limiting Him". (See Ps.78).

I know God is blessing His people today in copious showers everywhere. But in many cases there are resentments and murmurings against God and man, hard-feelings, unforgiving attitudes of the heart. And perhaps most of this stems from lack of vision for the true riches. The deeper life that comes in abiding union with Christ is set at nought for the enjoyment of temporary blessings that soon wither away.

In the morning God "rained" manna on them from heaven. And at eventide He "rained" flesh on them by an east wind. (**In the scriptures the "east wind" speaks of blight, and drought, and judgment**). And while He was answering their prayer His anger was kindled against them.

He "opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them ...He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls as the sand of the sea" (Ps.78:21-27). It wasn't something the Devil sent. **God sent it ...because they insisted they were starving to death with that loathsome manna.** Actually they were never so healthy in their lives. **There was not one "feeble one among them"** as they walked with God, and partook of His provision with thankful hearts. The leanness they thought they had, kept them in good health and strength. **They thought they were too "lean" by eating the manna; but when they ate the quail, God "sent leanness into their soul"** (Ps.106:15).

Notice this very awesome fact: While they were chewing on the food that God sent them, "The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them" (Ps.78:31). Now if all this sounds strange and perplexing it is because we do not understand God's righteous judgments. We can see an enactment of this same story right in our midst today. Once again in the midst of the Church we have "a mixed multitude" who have "mixed desires" (See Num.11:4). We better seek the Lord earnestly that He would purge from our hearts ever desire that is not from Him. Because if we want God, but

want carnal blessings along with it -- God may send the manna in the morning, and the quail in the evening. "Purge our hearts, Lord, from evil desire, that we might delight ourselves only in Thee."

Revival in the Midst of Rebellion

Right in the midst of the mixed multitude ...where the vast majority were lusting after flesh ...God sent a revival.

At least there was a genuine prophetic movement that went through the camp on the very same day the people were lusting after the flesh. I think this was the first prophetic movement mentioned in scripture. The prophets were men of God. Moses had come to such frustration, He called on the LORD for help. He told the Lord the burden he was carrying was too much for him. So the LORD came down and took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and distributed this power and anointing upon 70 elders in Israel. Prophecy came upon them in great anointing ...even upon two of the men who had not come to the tabernacle.

This bothered Joshua and he ran to Moses to have him put a stop to it. The very idea of men prophesying there in their tents, with no official prophet there to judge what was going on! Moses' simple reply was, "Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets..." (Num.11:29). Moses was happy to have this reinforcement of the 70 elders, and rejoiced in the new anointing that came upon them. Yet on this very same day the quail blew in from the east ...hordes and hordes of them ... and every man gathered as much as he could ...much more that he could handle. They even worked through the night, there was such a bountiful supply of flesh.

Who sent the revival of prophesy? It was God. Who sent the manna in the morning? It was God. And who sent the abundance of quail in the evening? It was God. It was "a wind from the LORD" that brought the quail. The same God who brought a revival of prophesy, and who sent the manna, in the same day He sent the quail.

There is a "mixed multitude" in the Church today, and they have "mixed desires". And we better ask God to purify our hearts and minds that our desires might be for Him, and for Him only. God is blessing His people whose hearts are hungry for Him. And at the same time He is blessing the people who are tired of the manna, weary of listening to His Word, and are craving the excitement of carnal desire. In the midst of all this strange mixture we hear these words:

"The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel" (Ps.78:31). Do I hear someone arguing ..."But God, it was You that rained flesh upon them!"? And God's simple reply to that is this: "If my people refuse to go My way, I will bless them according to the desires of their hearts. But if My words do not penetrate their hearts, and bring obedience and humility and meekness and the fruit that I desire, ...my blessings will end in My holy judgments." God slew "the fattest of them". They didn't need that flesh. None of Israel really needed it, and certainly not those who were flourishing. The manna was God's total

provision for their every need. Moses makes that very clear: **He sent the manna "to humble thee, and to prove thee, ...that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut.8:2,3).**

God knew it would seem like "lean fare"; but He also knew that if they received it as the bread of Heaven they would discover this very precious truth: that their life and strength depended far more on hearing every Word from His mouth, that on the bread He gave them to eat ...and this was why He made the manna seem like lean fare. It was intended as the appetizer that would increase their hunger for more of His living Word.

These are solemn instructions to us in this hour when people are saying, "I used to come to Church to hear sermons, ect. etc... **but now I come to Church to have fun**". O how we need that heavenly food from the heart of God! How we need to partake of those riches of glory that are in Christ Jesus. "Lord, we pray, evermore feed us with Thy living bread."

What was the conclusion of this mixed blessing, poured out on a mixed multitude, followed by the wrath of God? **The place where the Cloud of Glory had rested ...the place that God intended as a resting place in the wilderness ...became a huge graveyard. So they called it Kibroth-hattaavah ...which in plain language means, The Graves of Lust, or The Graves of Carnal Desire...**"Because there they buried the people that lusted" (Num.11:34).

Before leaving this thought, I feel I have to say this: God is sending forth a Word from His heart this day that is sufficient to cause His people to come to the full measure of "the stature of Christ". He has made every provision for us "to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". But this Word carries with it a great responsibility ...to walk with Him, to know His will and do it, and to rid the House of God of all these fleshly adornments of worship, and this strange fire that He commanded not. He wants us to take very seriously this matter of hearing the voice of God and doing His will. But many of God's people are saying, "We don't want that far-out stuff ...Give us flesh! Give us power and wisdom and money to embellish Your house with beautiful extravaganza for praise and worship ...something that will attract the crowds." Of course they wouldn't say that, in so many words. But this is what God is hearing! And in many cases it seems God is answering their prayers!

Give us a King...Instead of the Lord God

Of course, nobody would say that either ...not out loud! But that is what God heard ...for He alone can hear the unspoken thoughts of the heart. God had faithfully spoken His Word to His people through Samuel, and protected them from their enemies ...and they knew it. But Samuel was getting old, and it didn't appear there was another prophet to take his place, and they were getting fearful. They asked Samuel for a king, and Samuel asked God about it. And God said, "They haven't rejected you,

Samuel, they have rejected Me ...Go ahead and make them a king ...give them what they want".

And when the king was anointed by the prophet and set before the people ...Samuel asked God for a miracle ...and it was a miracle that would startle them. It was the time of wheat harvest. Every one knows that rain is not something to be desired in harvest time. It is then we need dry weather and lots of sunshine. But Samuel said "I am going to ask God to send you thunder and rain ...and this will confirm your wickedness in asking for a king." A great rain fell that very day, in harvest-time, when the last thing they needed was rain. "And all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel" (1 Sam.12:18).

Yes, we need God's rain in due season, but not at harvest time. I believe we are yet to see a mighty deluge of "the early and the latter rain", but let us understand what it is for. The Early Rain is the Seed Rain to start growth in the fields, and the Latter Rain is the Harvest rain ...to bring the field to fruition. We have had a portion of the Latter Rain in this century. But there is a whole new generation in the land that greatly needs the rain. As the Rain falls let us understand it is for a short season. God's purpose in the rain is to bring the "good fruit" to ripeness. Then the rains will stop. The Sun of Righteousness will arise, with light and with heat. The harvest of the earth will become ripe and dry. And then the sickle will be thrust in to gather the fruit. If there is both Early Rain and Latter Rain in the same season ...then we can be sure there is going to be a sowing of the good seed, and a reaping of the same, in quick succession. For God indeed will do "a quick work in the earth, and cut it short in righteousness".

An Idol...from the Spoils of Victory

Perhaps there is nothing more subtle than the idolatrous spirit that secretly creeps its way into the hearts of God's people. When Gideon was apprehended of the Lord one of the first things he did was to throw down the altar of Baal in his father's home, and cut down the grove. And then after the tremendous victory God had given him, the people wanted him to be their king ...and he humbly replied, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you" (See Judg.6:27,28; 8:23). But shortly after this we hear him asking the people to bring some of the spoils of battle. I wonder what he had in mind? They willingly brought gold, and ornaments and beautiful raiment. Now what was he going to do with all that? Maybe it was just a very innocent request, so they could glory in the great victory God had given them. But he took the spoils of battle and made the most beautiful priestly garment you could imagine, a gorgeous looking "ephod". "And all Israel went thither a whoring after it". The fruit of his tremendous victory "became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house" (Judg.8:27).

I recall hearing of things like this happening in the Church. In one church that became world-famous they had a room packed with wheel-chairs, and crutches ...and other relics of the mighty healings that had taken place. People would come and look upon it

in wonder and amazement. I am not judging, I am only asking: "Were they saying, O Lord how great Thou art"? Or were they idolizing this wonderful person that God had used to perform these healings?" God longs to bring forth rivers of healing water. But O how He longs to prepare the hearts of His people with grace, lest His blessings are turned into idols.

We simply do not know the inherent craving within to take glory to ourselves, if God does not reveal "the thoughts and the intents of the heart". Only the quickening Word of God that goes forth as a sharp two-edged sword can cut and divide asunder, and reveal what God sees buried deep within the hearts of His people with grace, lest His blessings are turned into idols.

A Man of Great Wisdom Turns to Idolatry

This is perhaps one of the most tragic stories in the Bible ...the story of Solomon, a man who came to the throne in great humility, and built a temple for the name of God ...and later turned to idolatry. (See 1 Kings 11:5,6). God knows the subtlety of the human heart far better than we do. And may we pray earnestly, "O Lord, Thou who alone knowest the hearts of all men, search me and know me, try me and know my thoughts, ...see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting". God warned Israel what could happen when they came

Chapter 9 IN PURSUIT OF ONE THING

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple" (Ps.27:4).

This was the total focus of his desire. He wanted to dwell in God's house, but his purpose was not to see the beauty of the house, but "to behold the beauty of the LORD" ...and then in seeing Him, to "inquire" of Him.

"But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Lk.10:42).

Is your heart fixed? Are you really confident you are looking for "one thing"? Our Lord gives us many good and precious gifts and blessings. And we thank Him for all of that.

But what are we really looking for? God forbid that we should be searching for any treasure, any blessing, other than the blessings of clear eyes to see Him, hearing ears to hear Him, and a good heart to bring forth good fruit. "Lord may our eyes be transfixed at the sight of Thy glory; because we know that this, and this alone, will bring about that transfromation of heart and mind that we long for."

I've tried the broken cisterns, Lord;
But Oh, the waters failed;
E'en as I stooped to drink they fled,
And mocked me as I wailed...
Now none but Christ can satisfy...

Is He not enough? Let us not go looking for more blessing, or more of His gifts, but for more of Him. We thank Him for His gifts, but let us keep seeking the Giver, the One who is the Fountain-head of every good and perfect gift. Let us not go about seeking more power...except that endowment of power that will invade our being with the character and beauty of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Unlimited Power in the Depths of His Love

"According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him..." (2 Pet.1:3). What kind of power does the Lord want us to be looking for? The quality of power that gives us everything we need to come to "life and godliness". Why need we pursue other aspects of power? Other realms of power? Power to do wonderful things for God? Power so great that others will recognize how great we are? It is in these realms of power that God wants to weaken us; because these areas of power are fertile soil for pride and haughtiness. And so in this passage the apostle Peter is encouraging us to pursue God's "divine power" that ministers all we need for "life and godliness":

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance (self restraint); and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Pet.1:5-7).

If we find grace to come to this stature, the apostle tells us, we "shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs 8). We will become that "good tree" that Jesus talked about, "the good tree" that brings forth "good fruit". On the other hand, no matter how great and powerful a man might become in gift and ministry..."he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (vs 9). Let us ponder this well: if we lack these ingredients of grace -- we are blind, and lacking in spiritual vision, and have lost sight of God's purpose of redemption, in purging us from the old ways of our former life.

People keep saying, "Don't you know ...there is a world out there in great need, and we've got to do the best we can to help them..." But don't they know there is only one way to do this, and that is to flow in the rivers of perfect love? Only then are we going to make a vital impact on a world that hates God. And so Paul prayed for the Church at Ephesus that they would be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph.3:16-19).

When God's people come into these immeasurable depths and heights of God's love there is no limit to the mighty workings of God in them. And so he adds, right in the same context: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we

ask or think, according to power that worketh in us..." (vs.20). This kind of power cannot lead to pride and haughtiness, because it is power that works "by his Spirit in the inner man". This kind of power flows from the love of God. Here is a dimension of LOVE that is builded into His people by the workings of His grace. It is not a transient "love" that ebbs and flows with the tide.

It is a quality of "love" that becomes a vital part of those who "grow up into Him in all things" (vs.15). This kind of love -- or should I say, this quality and dimension of love, is the fruit of God's love that grows from the Tree of Life into which we are grafted, and not just the "blessing" of love that we experience in times of special devotion. Those who come to "perfect love" are those who come into abiding union with the Lord Jesus, and therefore they live and move in the humility and grace of Jesus. It is the same love that was in Jesus, and is now in them, even as He prayed: "...that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn.17:26).

I know I speak of a very "high calling". But the words really means an "upward calling". We may look at how high it is and say..."it is too high for me". But if we know it is an "upward way" ...then we simply follow our Lord one step at a time ...and He will lead us there. God's desire is to bring us to the reservoir of the unsearchable riches of Christ. In that realm of the love of God there is power to do "exceeding and abundantly above all that we ask or think".

I know sometimes we feel we are getting a little far-out; and I think the apostle Paul must have felt that way as He wrote about these things. For indeed it is far, far out in the oceans of His love. But He would take us there, if we will remain "rooted and grounded in love" and move forward into this mighty ocean of God. Let us hear it again: "that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (vs.18,19).

Distractions Along the Way

"And Elijah said to Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel" (2 Kgs.2:2)

I am not saying that Elijah was trying to distract Elisha from his vision. I am sure the Lord prompted him to say this to his servant Elisha, not that he would distract the one who was to take up his mantle, but to test him in this matter of obedience and commitment. We must remember this. There are many thing that God causes to happen in our lives that we question, and wonder about. But God is simply trying our faith and proving our confidence in Him. God is searching out a people for Himself who only have one thing they are pursuing. A people who keep looking unto Jesus, that they might grow in grace, and come into the full measure of "the stature of Christ".

Elisha had been chosen to take Elijah's place when Elijah would be taken away. Elisha knew that ...and he would not be turned aside from his vision ...not even by a word

from the man of God. Here was a word from the prophet ...but it was more of a request than a command. "Tarry here, I pray thee". But Elisha's heart was fixed: "I will not leave thee". And the two men continued to walk together. The same test was repeated again and again; and each time Elisha's answer was the same: "I will not leave thee". As the time drew near when Elijah was to be taken up, he turned to the young prophet and asked, "What shall I do for thee before I be taken away?" Elisha's answer was ready: "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me". His heart was fixed. The prophet answered, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so" (2 Kgs.2:10).

I believe the test is that simple for every one of us. But our hearts must be fixed ...otherwise the test that come might cause our hearts to waver. We must be assured in our hearts as to what we are really looking for. If we have settled on this, then no matter what comes ...our hearts are fixed. We must desire the Lord so much that no glittering thing in our pathway will divert our attention away from Him. For if our hearts are not truly "fixed" it might be very easy to settle for something that is good, but not the best.

So what happened? As they walked along talking with each other there appeared a chariot of fire, that came blazing at them from Heaven and went right between them, pushing the two men apart. "and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven". Elisha felt the wind, and saw the chariot, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kgs.2:11,12). But in the presence of this great phenomena he didn't take his eyes off Elijah. He didn't look to the right hand nor to the left to see where the chariot was going. He could have gazed and gazed at it in wonderment ...and had he done so he would have missed the ascension of Elijah. Elijah did not step into the chariot, but he was caught up "by a whirlwind into heaven". Elisha saw it happen, and picked up the mantle that fell from his master's shoulders. His heart was fixed, and he received the double portion.

I don't think any of us can boast about how well our hearts are fixed on the Lord Jesus. I am confident we are going to see miracles like this today ...and even greater. And I wonder how many will turn their eyes away from the face of Jesus, to admire the miracles. Only one thing will keep us from doing that: Our delight in the Lord must become so great that not even a chariot of fire will be able to divert our attention away from the glory of His countenance.

Why then did God send the chariot of fire? God does not tell us why. God might have set it to thrust the two men apart by way of testing the steadfastness of Elisha's heart. For God will not hesitate to test our hearts, whether our delight is totally fixed on Him. What do we desire the most? To see a display of His mighty works? Or to see the glorious shining forth of His face?

"Lord purge our hearts from every evil desire, and from every good desire, that might cause us to fall short of "the more excellent way."

The Desire of the Humble

God knows the desires of our hearts. And as we are seeking to walk in His ways, and to walk in humbleness of heart and mind, He will prepare our hearts, and bring us to steadfastness of vision. David said, "LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear" (Ps.10:17). But even as we seek to walk in His ways, we must learn through many strange experiences that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways, God's ways (Isa.55:8). Knowing that it is God's will that we prosper in His ways, we look for it -- and like His servant Joseph we find ourselves prospering ...but in a prison house that we did not choose. And yet we are free. For who is more free, or prosperous, than one who is a bond-slave of the Lord? (Gen.39:3; 1 Cor.7:22; Eph.4:1).

Knowing that He would make us to be co-heirs with Him in His everlasting Kingdom, we ask to know the way, and He makes us to be the least of all, and the servants of all. For He who is King of kings became a bond-slave, that He might show us the way to the throne. (Matt.23:11; Phil.2:7-9).

We ask Him to make us loving and kind and patient with others -- and He brings across our pathway those who are embittered with life, unloving and uncaring, that the springs of love and charity might be able to flow forth in healing streams. For charity suffereth long, and is kind ...charity never faileth...(1 Cor.13:4-8).

We ask that we might bear abundant fruit for the Kingdom of God, and He lays us low in the dust; for He knows that except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. (Jn.12:24).

We ask for true peace and rest ...and He sends us into a world where all is turmoil and confusion, that we might know His peace in the midst of the storm. And He bids us to take His yoke upon us, that as we labour with Him we might know His rest. (Jn.16:33; Matt.11:29).

We ask for a forgiving spirit, and we find even our loved ones may turn against us, that the forgiving virtue we desire might be nurtured and released. And in the flow of forgiveness we ourselves are inwardly healed and liberated, even before they have felt the pain of their wrong, or the joy of forgiveness.

We ask for a lowly and humble heart -- so He leads us into valleys of great weakness and disappointment, that the lowliness of the Lamb might subdue the proud and haughty lion within, and beautify the meek with His own nature.

We ask that we might hear His voice more clearly in a world filled with so many confusing sounds -- and He leads us into a wilderness, and feeds us with manna from heaven, that we might hear His voice, and know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. (Deut.8:2,3).

We ask for His abiding presence ...for a closer walk with Him ...and He sends trouble. He causes His billows to overwhelm us, so that He might draw us closer, still closer to Himself; that in the billows of God we might discover the depths of His love and truth and faithfulness. "Deep calleth unto deep" as we are overwhelmed in the cataracts of distress, and we cry unto Him who is looking for an abiding place in the broken and the contrite heart. (Ps.42:7; Isa.57:15).

We ask for enlargement in God, and He confines us and restrict us and closes us in on every side. And sometimes we ourselves may wonder if others are right when they judge we are wasting our time, and wasting our efforts, and accomplishing nothing of profit to God or to man. (Isa.49:4).

For He knows that it is only as we are restricted in our ways, and confined to His will, and reduced to God, that we will know the enlargements and the depths that are in Him, and an open door into the Heavens...

For those who draw nigh to God in priestly service can find no pleasure in anything this life has to offer, nor even in the gifts He has given them. Their true delight is only in Him, and in doing what He shows them to do. Therefore the Lord reminds His priestly people, "Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land ...I am thine inheritance". Those who are looking for the City where the Lamb is the Light, can never be satisfied with any other inheritance. (Num.18:20; Phil.3:8).

And so if we truly desire to be clothed upon with these virtues of Christ, no matter how feebly we may have tried to frame our desires into an effectual prayer, if the desire is there for Him and for Him alone, to know Him, to walk with Him, and to abide in Him ...He sees that desire, He hears that desire as though it were a fervent prayer from the heart and lips. And He will be faithful to prepare our hearts and lead us in the right way, strange though it may seem to be in our own eyes, or in the eyes of those who do not understand the ways of the Lord.

"LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear" (Ps.10:17).

George H. Warnock