

The Word, The Spirit And The Substance

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A Sermon By Dr Charles S. Price

I wonder if you are hungry. I wonder if you would like a little meat. I feel that I am entering into one of the most glorious and beautiful spiritual experiences of my entire Christian life. It may be you have noticed the trend in the writing of my sermons and in the spoken word from behind the sacred desk. I have been emphasizing the gospel of *progressive revelation!* I have been emphasizing the glorious truth that no Christian should confine himself to a spiritual life within the boundaries of the walls of traditional beliefs and standardized theologies. It is one of the most dangerous things which can happen to a man or a woman who is following Jesus. For, thereby, we limit the operation of the Spirit.

We confine God and His operation in human life to boundaries which our own thoughts have erected. It is not that we lose our salvation by so doing, but we lose the blessing, the life, and the power that such salvation should bring to us with each passing hour and each succeeding day. If God demands perfection of us, it is only the perfection of that day. And that is a relative perfection.

A little baby is perfect. There are no scars on hands or feet and out of the little blue eyes there shines the gleam of health. We look at that new-born bundle of pink humanity and declare it to be a perfect child! But its perfection is only relative. It does not mean that there is no possibility of growth either in understanding or in physical characteristic. That little child has to take food and grow physically unto the perfect man until it comes to the fullness of the stature of its parents. So Christians are admonished to grow in grace and in knowledge. They are to partake of the meat of the Word. They are instructed to assimilate and digest the things which the Lord imparts to them until they come to the position of people who have attained spiritual maturity.

Near our home there is a playground. More than once I have stopped my car to watch the children at play. I have seen the exuberant expression on their countenances and have heard the joyful cries that have come from happy hearts and throats in the recess period. I have looked at that effervescence of childhood with its manifestation of complete satisfaction and have said in my heart: "They have no care in all the world; they are perfectly contented and supremely happy." Could I but look down the corridor of the years, I would see that little freckled-faced boy, grown to manhood, in a machine-shop, confronted with the

responsibilities of life. Perhaps that tall, slender lad would be seated behind the desk as an executive. Perchance that other youngster would be the busy proprietor of a store; and still another preaching the eternal Word from behind some sacred desk. The point I wish to make is this: the fact that they were supremely happy did not preclude them from assuming the responsibilities of life and growing into maturity of manhood and womanhood.

So it is in our Christian walk. We get so exuberantly happy and so contented with conditions as they are that we imagine we have reached the end of the trail of God's saving grace; and settle down to lives of happy contentment within the boundaries of prescribed theologies and church traditions.

Awake Awake!

From this dangerous anesthesia of self-satisfaction, we must awake! Over and over again, the Bible admonishes us to realize that the time of slumber is past and the moment for alertness, wakefulness, and watchfulness is at hand. Forget not the parable of the virgins! Let its eternal truth sound upon your mind, with the ring of the hammer on the anvil, that they all slumbered and slept. Wise and foolish alike! They were all asleep! That is the danger of this day, the tragedy of this hour. We have gone to sleep in smug complacency and self-satisfaction over our past spiritual attainments. God has blessed. What more is there for us?

We are like the children in the schoolyard, happy and contented with conditions as they are, instead of maturing into the fullness of our relationship with our Heavenly Father and enjoying, as we should, the communion and the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ!

God has always worked along the paths of an unfolding, upward progression! Very briefly, let me call your attention to the Word. There it was, stamped indelibly upon the parchments in the days of old. It was the revealed will of God! Sometimes it was traced in tablets of stone by the Finger divine! Sometimes it thundered from the heavens. Sometimes it was heard through various manifestations of nature, for with the voice of Wind, Ocean, and Thunder, as well as the still small voice, did the Lord Himself speak.

Can any one of us today say that it was God's perfect plan? Did He impart to a lost race a method or system by which it could ultimately work out its salvation? Did He outline certain processes of conduct which were to be the legalized standards by which to govern human life and open, eventually, the portals of an eternity to be spent in His adorable Presence?

The patriarchs and sages of old, who contacted God in the glorious methods of

His manifestation and revelation must have thrilled beyond any word of mine to describe. But still I insist, it is not God's best. It was not the perfect plan. The very fact that the miracle of the Incarnation took place, proves that. The old legalism was merely one rung in the ladder up which mankind was to climb nearer to the heart of God, and closer to an understanding of the Divine Person and Purposes!

Jacob's Dream Ladder

I presume that the few on earth to whom the Incarnation was revealed in bygone days must have said within themselves: "This is the ultimate of God's great plan, the fulfillment of the eternal purpose, conceived in the mind of a merciful God!" But we, today, know that glorious and stupendous as was the miracle of the Incarnation, it was not the last rung of the ladder up which God was to lead humanity. The light of another day would discover that the end of the ladder which leaned against the gate that led to the streets of the Eternal City was not made with human hands. It was Jacob's dream ladder which was but a type of a spiritual ladder that no power on earth or in hell could ever destroy. So it was in the very technique of God's program, the Word which was in the beginning became flesh! That Word was not abrogated. It merged into an unfolding revelation of the purpose that was in the heart of our Heavenly Father from the very beginning. The Word that was with God actually dwelt among men! The Word that was God, was made manifest, full of grace and truth! We beheld His glory, the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father! Whenever we mention the doctrine of the Incarnation, our hearts reach out in gratitude to the Christ, as well they should.

We must remember that there could not have been Incarnation without renunciation. In the Second Chapter of Philippians, the fifth through the eighth verse, we read: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

He reached down to lift us up. The reason He descended to our level was that we might be lifted to His, and that this mind could be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. It was not to establish His own Divine Sonship that He did this. But it was to make possible our divine sonship that His renunciation was followed by the Incarnation and that, having climbed down the ladder, He would not return empty-handed. Rather would He take redeemed humanity with Him and present them as an Eternal Gift before the Throne of His Heavenly Father. In the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle sets forth seven proofs of His

divine Sonship, and immediately follows in the next chapter with the seven points of His identification with man. He descended to man's level; He took man's nature; He endured man's temptations; died in man's place; conquered man's foe; achieved man's victory; and secured man's salvation!

No Stopping Place

But have we not stopped there!! Why have we not followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, whose ministry it is to unfold the super natural, to reveal things that the human understanding could never comprehend, and that human eyes alone could never see.

It is one thing to accept the Incarnation as a doctrine, but it is still another to appropriate it as a vital force in life and in heart. Let us never forget the eternal fact of the humanity of Jesus. To say that He was without sin does not detract from the reality of His identity with the human race. Rather, it establishes Him as the Perfect Man, a living example of what is possible in human life through complete obedience to the Father's Will and a complete surrender to His Eternal Purposes.

We need to emphasize again that there are available to every Child of Redemption the same divine resources which enabled the Man, Christ Jesus to live His life and fulfill His mission upon the earth. The powers by which He overcame temptation are those which are so freely offered to us all and which were not alone the peculiar and exclusive heritage of Jesus. More than once He affirmed that the things which He did, were not done by His own power but by the Father who dwelt within Him.

Let us be reminded that this identical power is available to all those who will travel with Jesus along the pathway of Christian progression. Is it not evident that the day is not far off when the full sweep of this manifestation of the Divine Presence, with all its attendant glory, will be revealed in the ministries of those who have gone on to the fullness of the stature of Christ. This is no idle dream. The Gospel pulsates with it. The Epistles declare it. Never forget that Acts 10:38 says: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him."

Let us remember that what the Father gave to the Son, the Son in His turn has offered to man. But instead of accepting it in the fullness of its reality, we have made a doctrine out of it. Instead of receiving it in obedience, we have been so afraid, that its potency has been lost in the doubts, fears and misunderstandings which have come from our unbelief or our criticism.

Outward Upward

Child of God, Redeemed of the Lord! have you not desired in your heart to break down the barriers which have bound you within the limitations of your circumscribed life? Have you not realized that even the coming of the Spirit into the life of a believer is but the beginning! We most assuredly and positively did not receive all when we were baptized with the Holy Ghost! What a tragedy it is that we have adopted the phrase "We are through." How much we have missed, if we have sought only manifestations and nothing more; if we have lived upon ecstasies and sought the soothing touch of emotion when we should have sought the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Baptized with the Holy Spirit~ and through Him reached outward and upward into the realms of eternal and infinite glory which God has been waiting to impart.

The very same Spirit which was in the Man~ Christ Jesus, is given to every man in Christ. The eternal Word throbs with the glorious truth that the Holy Ghost can be to you and to me all that He was to Jesus! In other words, the Master has no resources which He has not made available to every one of us. But, instead of reaching out after them, and possessing them by the grace of our Eternal God, we have been complacently satisfied with the "kindergarten," experience of life. We have been satisfied also, to live on the surface of things which fulfilled their initial purpose for the day in which they were given.

Now do not misunderstand. These things were in the Will of God for that day and for that time.. But the Spirit was given to lead and guide us into all truth and we are admonished, "therefore leaving elementary instruction about the Christ, let us advance to mature manhood (Weymouth, Hebrews 6:1). We would not deprecate these "first principles," neither would we detract from the blessing they brought, and the light and the understanding they imparted at that hour. The point is that they were merely rungs in the ladder which were to lead us onward and upward into greater revelation, and into a deeper and richer understanding of the Lord and His unfolding purposes.

Do we not glimpse the Divine Intention in the very economy of the Incarnation? If only we, like our Lord, would practice renunciation of the self life! Divinity identified itself with our humanity that humanity might be identified with Divinity.

When Jesus identified Himself with man, it was to enable man to identify himself with Jesus. That is admittedly a startling statement but there is no escape from it! He became in all things like unto His brethren, only that in all things His brethren might become like unto Him. It is a dual identification as complete on one side as it is on the other. What Jesus Christ was in God, man can become in

Christ Jesus.

Let us remember that if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation! The old nature is put off and the divine nature takes its place. The difficulty has been that we have failed to accept this in any other way than as a theology. We have believed it, but we have not received it, we have not appropriated it. We have merely seen it in the Bible and have done nothing about it. We have sung a lot of songs about the new Home and the new Name, but have done little or nothing about putting on the new nature. Unless we do get the new nature, however, we shall not enjoy very much the new Name in the new Home!

The Richer Way

We have seen the continuity of this divine line of progression: the Word of the Law, the Spirit, and now the Substance. The Word of the Law was admittedly weak. Indeed, on more than one occasion, Jesus pushed the Law aside and said, "Moses said unto you, but I say unto you . . ." something else. That was the difficulty He had with the religionists of the day in which He lived. They were hanging on to the thread-bare traditions of the past. They were maintaining things which had come and gone.

When John the Baptist came, he heralded the breaking of a New Day! He was telling of the dawning of another morning! A new Light was to break over the world! It would not abrogate all that had gone before; but it certainly would supersede it. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, proclaiming the coming of our Incarnate Lord who was the Express Image of the Father, and was full of grace and truth! But, they were afraid of the new. They did not want it, and because they did not want it, they rejected the Lord. How different would have been His reception if He had come merely to confirm the things which had happened in the past, if He had refused to become an iconoclast who smashed the idols of their traditions and their orthodoxy's. If He had come with a sword, they might have received Him with open arms.

When they said, "We are of our father Abraham," He looked at them and said, "Ye are of your father the devil." Now He was not calling Abraham a devil, but He was affirming the fact that their empty belief in Abraham did not, in any way, bring any transformation or change in them. Jesus said, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham; but ye do the works of your father. Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father, it is your will to do." Can you not see Jesus in all the beauty of His sinless Life? Can you not behold Him as the human medium through which the irresistible power of God's grace and glory flowed without the hindrance of a doubt, or the impediment of fear and misgiving to mar its onward course?

Spiritual Maturity

What a glorious picture of the life of a Man filled with God! What a revelation of the eternal possibilities of a life that knows nothing but the flow of the Life divine! We are reminded that men and women who walk after the flesh do still the works of the flesh. People who live in the Spirit, and who are led by the Spirit, will manifest the works of the Spirit. Jesus Himself said, "The works that I do shall ye do also." To Phillip He once said, "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I say unto you I speak not of Myself but the Father abiding in Me does His works."

When we actually accept the nature of Christ; when we grow into spiritual maturity, there will be three things manifested in experience and in life. First: Oneness of nature with Jesus will manifest itself in the fellowship of His sympathy and His suffering. Second: There will be divine cooperation in service and in the manifestation of the power of God. Third: There will be a correspondence in character with Him toward the maturity of which we shall grow as surely as children grow from babyhood to manhood. This is the eternal purpose of our God. It is the call for this hour, the program for this day. Redeemed of the Lord, break the bands which have bound you! Smash the chains and shackles that have fettered your souls. Reach out into the Eternal Infinity of our God and drink from the Life-giving Stream that flows from the throne of God.

As natural food is essential for the natural body, man cannot live by bread alone. Your spiritual nature craves the companionship of the Divine. Nothing but the nature which the Father gave to the Man, Christ Jesus, will meet the need of the spiritual entity which is you; nothing else in all the world can satisfy. Therefore, should we not contend for the clear-cut separation which is born of implicit obedience, and open our lives to the Eternal Flow of the Rivers of His grace and His glory!

In the beginning of this sermon we saw that the Incarnation was preceded by His renunciation of the glory that He had with the Father. He laid aside His glory! The miracle of the Incarnation was the work of God even as the ministry of renunciation was the work of the Son.

Available to Christ

In closing I would remind you of one very important thing. You cannot attain unto this Life of which I have spoken. You cannot reach up and take it in yourself, but you can make yourself available to Christ, for He is the Life! There

are things which you can and are privileged to do. You can resolve in Him to walk the paths of a perfect and a complete obedience; you can throw open the gates of your mind to the Word of the Lord; you can walk in obedience to the call Divine, and give your Heavenly Father the opportunity to speak to your listening ear.

When you completely surrender the right to the right of yourself unto God, and quietly wait in the holiness of His divine Presence; it will not be long before you will feel the moving of the waters and the surging of the Spirit of God through your heart and life. When this food divine is assimilated by you, and you become a partaker of the divine nature, you will lose your appetite for the things which are of this world. You will be pure, even as He is pure. You will be holy, for He is holy; and you will dwell in love, for God Himself is love. Around you will be an impenetrable armor-plate through which the darts of the devil, the rocks of criticism, and the cruelties of hatred will never pierce. You will be amenable to your surroundings; but you will never be the slave of environment or circumstance! You will then know of a certainty that your citizenship is in Heaven. This is our privilege!

This is our opportunity; and this is our duty! Can we do less than accept and appropriate what He has done for us? Dare we bring a pang of disappointment and shame to the Christ of the Cross, Who laid aside His glory to become like unto us in order that we might become like Him? Tell me not that these things are hard to grasp! Tell me not that they are too good to be true. They are wonderfully and eternally real; and, in amazement unbounded we behold the powers and glories, as well as the bounties, which await us in God's tomorrow!