

The Beginning of a New Humanity

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Referring back to our original definition and reminding ourselves that the word 'horizon' is the English form of the Greek word *horizo*, and that it is applied to Christ twice in the book of the 'Acts' (10:42, 17:31), its definite meaning being: 'to mark out or off': horizon is the full range of vision, whether physical or mental. Everything is within its range and sphere. This is what the Bible teaches as to God's Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. When all these present things are dissolved (2 Peter 3:7,10,11 - a possibility so much more understandable in the atomic age than when it was written by Peter) and 'the new heavens and the new earth' take their place, then Christ will actually be the Horizon of all things. But He is that now in the mind of God, and in all His activities through the Holy Spirit.

In the earlier chapters we have been noting this feature of Christ in the universality of His person, spiritual history and work. It is now our purpose to say more about this in a particular connection. It is by no means a new truth that we are to consider, but, although well known, yet it is one, the implications of which have all too insufficiently been grasped. It is that the entrance of Jesus Christ into this creation meant

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In this meaning He is the Horizon of the race that is eventually to inhabit God's new Heaven and earth, and it is this that lies behind every Divine activity in this age, from new birth to spiritual perfection.

Into this are gathered the greatest magnitudes and mysteries: the greatness and the mystery of Christ's person; the profound meaning of the Holy Spirit's work in new birth, spiritual discipline, and sovereign ways, the evident supreme value of character above all else.

There are four major matters which everyone who takes life seriously must understand. And, sooner or later, this taking life seriously will be forced upon a vast number of people.

These four matters are:

1. The meaning of human history: past, present, and future.
2. The meaning of Christ and Christianity.
3. The meaning of the (true) Church of God.
4. The meaning of spiritual experience.

The Bible is the book which embodies God's revelation concerning these four things. The Bible centres in a person - God's Son, and it is one solid revelation of the fact that He is the explanation and interpretation of those four magnitudes.

This will become clear as to all four if we look into the first only.

The Meaning of Human History

We are living in one of the most significant phases of this world's history. It is nothing less than the final stages of a long-drawn-out working of the terrible permissive will of God, necessitated by man's deliberate and knowing wrong use of his greatest trust - free will. God hung everything for His own pleasure and satisfaction, and man's supreme blessedness, not upon compulsion, which for ever rules out love, but upon free will, voluntary choice. He made it quite clear that man's eternal good lay in the direction of his using that trust in humble, selfless obedience, in a spirit of dependence upon God. This is love! He, at the same time, let it be known that only dire consequences would follow in the train of a wrong use of that sacred trust.

When man chose to act in mistrust of God and independence of Him, God might have destroyed him there and then, and have started again. But could He? Could He morally do that in an act? To have done that would have meant two obvious things. It would have been to violate at once the principle of free-will and say that man could not do as he chose. Thus despotic compulsion would have set aside the possibility of love. Then, who was to say that - given the same liberty - the next man would not repeat the course of the first? Man is a moral creation or he differs not a whit from a beast, a plant, or a machine. That is, he has a sense of right and wrong, and is

thereby a responsible creature.

What then did God decide? It was, in some senses, a very grievous decision that He had to make, but it had two sides. On the one side He decided that history must bear its own testimony to the folly and evil of man's self-chosen way; that the nature and implications of that choice should work themselves out in history. But that line of independent action carried with it - and this had been the warning beforehand - something for which the Bible has three names - 'vanity', 'curse', 'death'.

In the Bible 'vanity' means much more than our modern usage means. It is not the superficial thing implied when we speak of a person's vanity; i.e., self-flattering conceit. It means, as does also the word 'curse', that nothing will reach finality. All will, in the end, be in vain. Indeed, everything will turn against man and ultimately meet him with a closed door. Our more modern word (and it is significant how much it is both being used, and is increasing in human experience) is the word 'frustration'. It is something that dogs the steps of human effort and takes the certainty out of every movement.

But we must go back a bit to get into line with the two-fold course which we are noting.

Man was made with immense possibilities and potentialities. When he was told to "have dominion", and when it is said, "thou madest him to [in order to] have dominion", no one but God knew the immensity of the kingdom in which he was intended to reign. Certainly man could never have imagined it. But, for all that to be for man's blessedness and ultimate glory, the law was humble, obedient, trustful dependence upon God and an unbroken fellowship with Him.

The violation of that law did not mean the cancellation of those potentialities, but the uniting with them of the element which brought - like a spectre - progressive and ultimate doom. Enmity had entered the very constitution of things, and every effort for peace would only result in more and greater wars. Dissatisfaction had entered the soul of man and, no matter how much he exploited his abilities, to reach satisfaction would only lead to greater discontent. Labour, toil, travail had come into the realm of work and no matter how exhaustive and abandoned in his search for rest man might be, unrest, restlessness, would grow upon him until he was worn out. Lawlessness had entered the creation, and however much he would work, organize, institute, use force or persuasion, all his restraints would be broken through and anarchy, rebellion, violence, delinquency would run side by side with what man calls 'progress' and would make nonsense of his 'education'. Lust had supplanted love, and hand in hand with what is called 'civilization' moral degeneration, passion, and cruelty would blight all refinements. Every amenity, discovery, and invention which promised full alleviation would but be followed by a new problem and complication.

And so, on it goes, until man's greatest of all 'achievements' - so far - the splitting of the atom, the production of the atom-bomb, has become his greatest-ever menace, constituting an imminent threat to his whole civilization, even to the human race, and putting into human hearts 'a fainting for fear'.

Fear lies behind every effort for security, appeasement, and 'safety by strength'. Never in this world's history, and in such a short period, has there been so much 'progress' and 'advance' (?) accompanied by so much wearing-out frustration and abortive effort. It is startling and bewildering. But of course man is blind to the real meaning of it all. It is a part of the 'curse' that, when his eyes were opened in one direction - his self-hood, they were made blind in another, the all-important other, to the doom of that self-hood out of relation to God.

This is what we mean when we say that we are living in the most significant phase of human history. With a speed which is the characteristic of everything in our age man is moving as never before to close the gap and bring in the 'superman' who will finally (?) abnegate God and proclaim the deity of man. Man already believes that he cannot realize himself and at the same time believe in - to say nothing of depend upon - God. As man becomes more God becomes less (to him).

The Bible has long ago told us all about this and what the issue will be, both as to man, the earth, and God's Son.

We spoke of another aspect of the course of history. God marked off a period, a dispensation, in history, and took a nation from the nations to demonstrate to the world this history. In that dispensation, faithfulness to God and dependence upon Him was rewarded in the most literal and practical ways by prosperity and ascendancy.

A people whose only strength and resource was in God was made the head of the nations, and endued with supernatural powers. Marks of the greatness intended for man, and his 'dominion' are clearly manifested in

Israel's faithful days. So God made them His object lesson. When they departed from Him, over a long period He allowed reverse after reverse, shame upon shame, and frustration to fall upon their way, and thus sought to teach the world this historic lesson. When, at length, they carried their rebellion to its consummation in the rejection and crucifixion of His Son, their doom was reached and for two thousand years they have been the most frustrated people on this earth. This story has been written in vivid and ghastly pages in recent years.

But a new age has been brought in. It is the age in which these historic principles are at work in a spiritual way. The true believer in God through Jesus Christ has peace within; has purpose over against the world's frustration; has assurance and security in an eternal sense; has hope where despair deepens in men's hearts; has life where 'death' is the frustrating power over all the world's efforts. This is but a hint at the so much more which could occupy all our space. But what is God doing in a hidden way in this dispensation?

He - as the Bible says - is 'taking out of the nations a people for His Name'. He is working in that people the power of a different humanity. He has introduced and instated the Pattern, the Archetype, the "last Adam", and is working according to Him. Those who have received this new life and are the subjects of the inward operation of the Spirit of the New Creation are to form together the "one new man", the "fullgrown man... of the stature of the fulness of Christ" of which the New Testament speaks (Eph. 2:15; 4:13). Christ is the Horizon of this new humanity.

We have just so lightly touched upon the meaning of history, but our object over all is to show that Christ Himself is the meaning of history on both of its sides. So He has been "ordained" (horizoned) to be from eternity to eternity.

But we have to come much closer to the meaning of this.

The Horizon of Spiritual Experience

Not only, does the New Testament reveal that in this dispensation God is taking out of the nations a people for His Name, but it is a solid mass of revelation that every additional member of that people becomes an object of deep - ever deepening - activity of God in terms of discipline, testing, emptying, breaking, and re-making on another pattern. A twofold process is being carried through to a point of finality. The old humanity with its mental, moral, and sometimes physical powers is being exhausted and proved impotent in the realm of spiritual things. A new kind of ability, not natural but extra-natural, or supernatural, is deeply - usually unconsciously - being instated. The subjects of this process, while very conscious of the former aspect, are often - we might say usually - only aware of the other supernatural side as they know that their very survival at all is a miracle, for naturally they had seen nothing but disaster facing them, and, like Paul, they felt that they had 'the sentence of death within themselves'.

There is a great difference between the work of Divine power in us, even "the exceeding greatness of his power", and our feeling it or being conscious of it. Yet, just as our 'translation into the kingdom of the Son of His love' was a supernatural thing, the expression of power more than all that is human, so is the keeping, maintaining, and ascendancy of those in that kingdom. What is true of the Divine power, is also true of understanding. That God's ways defeat and defy natural understanding is better known by those in His school than by all others. Spiritual understanding is not firstly intellectual, it is heart-assurance. We can be utterly bewildered in reason, but deeply assured in heart.

This is the very point to which we have now come in our consideration. The life, history, and experiences of a child and servant of God are an enigma to the world and to the natural man. And even to the unperfected child of God the word 'Why?' may often be his cry. That 'Why?' can be set over against so many perplexities and bewildering experiences. Is there a key, an answer, an explanation? Yes, there is, but it is no easier for the natural man in us to accept it when it is offered. Whether we like it or not, whether we accept it or reject it, the Bible comes down - so to speak - with both feet and there is overwhelming proof that God is far, far more concerned with a certain kind of manhood than with anything else. If this were not the case, then God would be involved in terrible contradictions. He would also be involved in terrible defeat. Work for God in this present world is fraught with many contradictions, defeats, and enigmas. But when God makes spiritual character and the measure of Christ His all-governing object, there is no defeat while man remains in faith and submission.

Here, for the moment, we break off, but let us - if necessary - adjust to this truth overwhelmingly revealed in the Bible, that God is supremely set upon a kind of Man, and that Man is "the image of his Son".