

THE COVERING OF GOD'S BUILDING

Now the tabernacle you shall make with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet strands; you shall make them with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. (Exo. 26:1)

And you shall make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains you shall make in all...And you shall make a covering for the tent, of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of porpoise skins above it. (vv. 7, 14)

From the above passages we learn that there were four layers forming the covering of the tabernacle. The first layer consisted of ten curtains of fine linen, the second was composed of curtains of goats' hair, the third was a covering of rams' skins, and the fourth was the outside covering of porpoise skins. These four layers of coverings formed the roof of the tabernacle. Much has been written by others about the tabernacle and its coverings, but my burden is to point out how these coverings are related to the Lord's building.

THE CHURCH BUILT BY CHRIST AS LIFE

In the previous chapter we saw that the Lord's building is not merely a pattern but a matter of Christ being wrought into humanity. The building of the church cannot be manufactured with human hands, by imitating a pattern or by forming an organization. Of course, by the birth and growth of life a certain pattern will spontaneously come forth, just as the size and shape of a man evolve by his birth and growth in life. No one can manufacture or fashion a man to his present form. Even so, the building of the church is not a man-made pattern, not a manufactured imitation, but the spontaneous growth of Christ as our life.

Every part and every aspect of the tabernacle typify either the work or the person of Christ—it is much more than a pattern. The tabernacle shows that by means of His redemptive work Christ Himself must be wrought into us as everything.

The Lord must open our eyes and impress us with all these things. We cannot merely find a pattern from the book of Acts, set up elders and deacons, and call this the church. This is not the church; this is an imitation of the church. If we ask someone how he came into being and became such a tall person, he will tell us, "I was born of my mother, I have eaten a lot of nourishing food, and I have grown up to such a height." We can manufacture a toy or a doll, but there is no way for us to manufacture a man. The church is a real man; no one can make a church. It must be something of new birth in the Spirit and growth of life in Christ. We must say again and again, Brothers, we must keep our hands off. We should not try to form or organize anything.

THE CHURCH COVERED BY CHRIST AS THE EXPRESSION

But we must realize that even up to this stage the tabernacle is still without a roof to cover it. Regardless of the degree to which we have been wrought into Christ and Christ has been wrought into us, we are only the boards—none of us can become the covering. If we are the covering, the church will become the expression of man. Only Christ can be the covering, for the church must be the expression of only Christ Himself. In the type of the tabernacle, as we have seen, the roof consisted of four layers, and every layer is an aspect of Christ. The entire roof is the revelation of Christ as the only covering. The tabernacle thus becomes an expression of Christ by this covering, which completely covers it.

Now let us look into the four layers of the covering. From within is the first layer of the finest materials—curtains of fine twined linen with embroidery of cherubim and beautiful colors of blue, purple, and scarlet wrought into them. Blue refers to that which is heavenly, purple means royalty, and scarlet stands for redemption. The basic material, however, is the fine linen, which symbolizes the humanity of Christ with all His fine characteristics and behavior. The four Gospels give a record of a man with both His human nature and conduct exactly like the fine linen. The first layer is fine yet very strong, and because it is made of twined linen, it is doubled in strength. The Lord Jesus is so fine, yet He is so strong; there is nothing in Him that is crude or weak.

The embroidery of the cherubim means that God's glory is manifested in His creature. The cherubim typify God's glory, and the embroidered work of the cherubim on the fine linen means that God's glory has been wrought into humanity and into His creature. While Jesus was on this earth, we can realize that in this man with His fine human nature and character God's divine glory was wrought into His creature. He is a real man with a fine human nature and conduct, but He is also the embodiment of the glory of God wrought into His creature. He as man is the very effulgence of God's glory. In other words, upon Him are the embroidered cherubim. Can you follow this kind of language? He is not only human, but He is also divine. His human nature bears the divine glory. We cannot exhaust this matter, but we must go on.

The second layer consisted of goats' hair. In the types of the Scriptures, goats are figures of sinful men. Matthew 25:31-46 speaks of the division and difference between the sheep and the goats, and the goats are shown to be the sinful people. This corresponds exactly to 2 Corinthians 5:21—God made the One who knew no sin to be sin for us. Therefore, the layer of curtains made of goats' hair typifies Christ, who was made sin for us. Although He is the fine linen, He was made goats' hair: He had no sin and did not know sin, but He was made sin for us.

Following the layer of goats' hair was a layer of rams' skins dyed red. The color red refers to the shedding of blood in Christ's redemptive work. He was the sinless One, who was made sin for us to bear our sins. This simple sentence explains the first three layers. The first layer typifies Him as the sinless One, the second layer signifies that He was made sin for us, and the third layer signifies that He bore our sins and shed His blood to redeem us.

After the rams' skins dyed red, there was the fourth layer, which became the outer covering. This covering was formed of porpoise skins, which are very strong; it can stand against any kind of weather, any kind of attack. The outer covering was not attractive in appearance and was somewhat rough. Today Christ is not outwardly pleasant to the worldly people. He looks like the strong porpoise skin, unappealing in its outward appearance. Yet although He is not comely without, He is beautiful, wonderful, and heavenly within. He is not like today's Christianity with its huge, beautiful buildings—outwardly pretentious but inwardly and spiritually ugly, empty, and sometimes corrupted. The worldly Christian organizations are indeed ugly. Within the proper church, the building of God, there is something heavenly and beautiful, yet without it is humble and rough, having no comeliness or beauty.

Christ must be the expression of our testimony and the covering of the church. This is not man's opinion or thought; this is the picture shown by the Word of God. We must not put up anything else as an expression. We must lift up and exalt only our wonderful Christ as the covering of God's building—a Christ within who is full of divine comeliness, and a Christ without who is so simple and humble in the eyes of the world. It is such a church that can endure any assault and stand against any temptation. Once the attack of the enemy comes, those in the beautiful buildings of the so-called Christian churches will be the first to fall. Only those who do not bear any outward show but have the heavenly beauty and divine comeliness within them will endure to the end. Christ is their content and their covering. Nothing can damage or overcome the real building of the church covered with such a Christ.

Let us learn to put these things into practice and to seek Him in the spirit. Let us learn to discern our spirit and experience Him as everything to us. Then we will have the measure of the fullness of Christ and become available material to be built up with others as the building of God covered by Christ as the expression. Then there will be a proper, strong church that can withstand any attack, endure any trial, and overcome any temptation for the ultimate glory of God.