

A Short Sketch of Oswald Chambers



Oswald Chambers was not famous during his lifetime. At the time of his death in 1917 at the age of forty-three, only three books bearing his name had been published. Among a relatively small circle of Christians in Britain and the U.S., Chambers was much appreciated as a teacher of rare insight and expression, but he was not widely known.

Chambers was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1874, the youngest son of a Baptist minister. He spent his boyhood years in Perth, then his family moved to London when Oswald was fifteen. Shortly after the move to London, Oswald made his public profession of faith in Christ and became a member of Rye Lane Baptist Church. This marked a period of rapid spiritual growth, along with an intense struggle to find God's will and way for his life.

A gifted artist and musician, Chambers trained at London's Royal Academy of Art, sensing God's direction to be an ambassador for Christ in the world of art and aesthetics. While studying at the University of Edinburgh (1895–96), he decided, after an agonizing internal battle, to study for the ministry. He left the university and entered Dunoon College, near Glasgow, where he remained as a student, then a tutor for nine years.

In 1906, he traveled to the United States, spending six months teaching at God's Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. From there, he went to Japan, visiting the Tokyo Bible School, founded by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cowman. This journey around the world in 1906–7 marked his transition from Dunoon College to full-time work with the Pentecostal League of Prayer.

During the last decade of his life, Chambers served as:

- Traveling speaker and representative of the League of Prayer, 1907–10
- Principal and main teacher of the Bible Training College, London, 1911–15
- Y.M.C.A. chaplain to British Commonwealth soldiers in Egypt, 1915–17

He died in Cairo on November 15, 1917, of complications following an emergency appendectomy.

During the seven years of their marriage, his wife, Gertrude (Biddy) Hobbs, took verbatim shorthand notes of nearly all his lectures and sermons. After his death, she spent the rest of her life publishing her husband's spoken words. His best-known book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, has been continuously in print since it was first published in 1927.

How to Use This Bible

Full *My Utmost for His Highest*
devotional and reading plan

January 1

Let Us Keep to the Point

*I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed,
but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ
will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

Philippians 1:20

My utmost for his highest. To be all for God; to act with boldness, expressing Christ in every word and deed. This, Paul says, is how to walk through life unashamed.

The journey isn't a journey of reason or debate. We can't think or argue our way through it. It is a journey of surrender, of abandoning ourselves to God, absolutely and forever.

There will always be good reasons not to. We debate with God, telling him that we are concerned for others, that if we start on the journey, our loved ones will suffer. Really, we are worried for ourselves, for our own comfort and safety. We tell God he doesn't know what he's asking.

Keep to the point: he *does* know. Shut out your worries and stand before God with one thing only in your heart: *my utmost for his highest.*

Determine to be absolutely and entirely for him:

My best for his glory. At first, the call comes a

louder, until finally God produces a crisis in our

make a choice. For or against; yes or no; stay or go.

Has the crisis come to you? If it has, go. Paul, lit

nothing deter him, whether it meant life or death

let us embrace this same spirit, surrendering all

joy.

Read: Genesis 1–3; Matthew

Intercession

Genesis 18

We pray on the great fundamental basis of Redemption, and our prayers are made efficacious by the wonderful presence of the personal Holy Spirit in the world. Prayer is simple, prayer is supernatural, and to anyone not related to our Lord Jesus Christ, prayer is apt to look stupid. It does sound unreasonable to say that God will do things in answer to prayer, yet our Lord said that he would. Our Lord bases everything on prayer, then the key to all our work as Christians is, "Therefore, pray" (Lk 10:2).

When we pray for others, the Spirit of God works in the unconscious domain of their being that we know nothing about, and the one we are praying for knows nothing about, but after the passing of time the conscious life of the one prayed for begins to show signs of unrest and disquiet. We may have spoken until we are worn out but have never come anywhere near, and we have given up in despair. But if we have been praying, we find on meeting them one day that there is the beginning of a softening in an inquiry and a desire to know something. It is that kind of intercession that does most damage to Satan's kingdom. It is so slight, so feeble in its initial stages that if reason is not wedded to the light of the Holy Spirit, we will never obey it,

and yet it is that kind of intercession that the New Testament places most emphasis on, though it has so little to show for it. It seems stupid to think that we can pray and all that will happen, but remember to whom we pray: we pray to a God who understands the unconscious depths of personality about which we know nothing, and he has told us to pray. The great Master of the human heart said, "And he will do even greater works than these... If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (Jn 14:12–14).

There is only one field of service that has no shares, and that is the field of intercession. All other fields have the glorious but risky snare of publicity; prayer has not. The key to all our work for God is in that one word we are apt to despise—"Pray" (*Pray If Ye Shall Ask*, pp. 630–31).

I do believe that by intercessory prayer, as Jesus himself has told us, the great power of God works in ways we cannot conceive. I think sometimes we will be covered with shame when we meet the Lord Jesus and think how blind and ignorant we were when he brought people around us to pray for, or gave us opportunities of warning, and instead of praying we tried to find out what was wrong. We have no business to try and find out what is wrong; our business is to pray. *The Philosophy of Sin*, p. 117.

More than 30 topical articles
placed throughout

Book introductions with "Wisdom from Oswald Chambers"

Introduction

Genesis

Circumstances of Writing

Since pre-Christian times, authorship of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium BC with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah's author (Jos 8:35; 2Ch 23:18; Neh 8:1; Mk 12:26, 1k 2:22; Rm 10:5; Heb 11:3; time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to an...)

Contribution to the Bible

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in the Bible. Genesis understands where we came from, how we got in the fallen state of our beginnings of God's gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God's origin of humanity.

Genesis provides the foundation for which we understand God's covenant that was established with the giving of the law. For the Israelite community, it origins of humanity, sin, and the covenant relationship with God helped it why God gave them the law.

Structure

Genesis is chiefly a narrative. From a narrative standpoint, God is the only Bible, and the book of Genesis has the distinct privilege of introducing him subject of a verb in the book and is mentioned more frequently than any in the Bible. The content of the first eleven chapters is distinct from the rest in narrative 12-50. The primary literary device is the catchphrase "these records." The phrase is broader in meaning than simply "lists of general...")

Wisdom from Chambers

Jesus Christ, the last Adam, took on him our human form, and it is through human form that Satan is to be overcome. "The God of peace will soon crush the foe" (Rm 16:20). Everything that Satan and sin have marred, God holds in an i for every son of man who will come to him by the way back which Jesus (Our Portrait in Genesis, p. 96).

13 (Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning immensely) against the Lord.) 14 After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, "Look from the place where you are...")

Zebolim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and lined up for battle in the Siddim Valley against King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Golin, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Elam — four kings against five. 10 Now the Siddim Valley contained many asphalt pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, but the rest fled to the mountains. 11 The four kings took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food and went on. 12 They also took Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, for he was living in Sodom, and they went on.

13 One of the survivors came and told Abram the Hebrew, who lived near the oaks belonging to Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner. They were bound by a treaty with Abram. 14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 And he and his servants deployed against them by night, defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of Damascus. 16 He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the other people.

Melchizedek's Blessing

17 After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Shaveh Valley (that is, the King's Valley). 18 Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest to God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said: Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has handed over your enemies to you.

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. 20 Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself."

"Receive the Holy Spirit"; it is an invasion, one that cannot happen until we come to the end of ourselves. My Utmost for His Highest, January 5

Abram Rescues Lot

14 In those days King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Elam, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Golin, 2 waged war against King Berar of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, and King Shemeber of Zebolim, as well as the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All of these came as allies to the Siddim Valley (that is, the Dead Sea). 4 They were subject to Chedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. 5 In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Asheroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Elmim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in the mountains of Seir as far as El-paran by the wilderness. 7 Then they came back to invade Emishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they defeated the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar. 8 Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of

13:13 Lit evil and sinful 13:15 Lit seed 14:3 Lit nations 14:10 Sam, LXX, MT reads fell there 14:14 Sam, MT reads poured out 14:18 Jerusalem 14:19 Or Posses

15:6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. This is the act by which Abraham goes out of himself and relies upon God for righteousness and grace. Abraham had manifested many noble qualities of heart and many virtues in his walk of faith, but he is not made righteous before God by these. The lack in Abraham is supplied through his living confidence in God. The justification of every sinner is by faith and by faith alone, and when a man walks in that faith his justification appears in his flesh and justifies God (see Ps 51:4). This verse is the first germ of the great doctrine of "The Lord our Righteousness." Righteousness must never be made to mean less than a guileless position in the presence of justice and right. God justifies me by my supernatural faith in him, but it is my just walk that proves him just in saving me; if I do not walk in the life of faith, I am a slander to God. Not Knowing Whither, p. 876.

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Commentary from other select works by Oswald Chambers

Shut out your worries and stand before God with one thing only in your heart — my utmost for his highest.

Determine to be absolutely and entirely for him and him alone.

My Utmost for His Highest, January 1

365 callout quotes from My Utmost for His Highest placed throughout the Bible.

Genesis 2-3

Man and Woman in the Garden

"These are the records of the heavens and the earth, concerning their creation. At that time" that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. "An shrub of the field had yet grown on the land, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not made it rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground. "What mist would come up from the earth and water all the ground. "Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.

"The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the man he had formed. "The Lord God caused to grow out of the ground every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"A river went" out from Eden to water the garden. From there it divided and became the source of four rivers. "The name of the first is Pishon, which flows through the land of Havilah, where there is gold. "Gold from that land is pure; bdellium and onyx are also there. "The name of the second river is Gihon, which flows through the entire land of Cush. "The name of the third river is Tigris, which runs east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

"The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. "And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any of the garden, "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die."

"Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him. "The Lord God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. "The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal, but for the man no helper was found corresponding to him. "So the Lord God caused a

deep sleep to come on God took one of his ribs from the man, and he brought her to the man. This all had, and death of my sin one will be for the wife taken.

"This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. "Which the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.

Shut out your worries and stand before God with one thing only in your heart — my utmost for his highest. Determine to be absolutely and entirely for him and him alone. My Utmost for His Highest, January 1

The Preparation and the Fall 3 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that God had made. He was the craftiest of all the animals that God had made. He was the craftiest of all the animals that God had made.

2:4 Lit creation on the day 2:5 Lit north 2:90 Lit gave 2:91 Lit good 2:12 Lit wind from the south 2:16 Lit ground

2:4 You will certainly not die. See also what when Adam had been told that death would come from all eat trees, but he probably has eaten it (see 2:90-91). "For the serpent said all is death" (2:12); man has been deceived by death, and because he has been deceived by the serpent of sin, he has been deceived by death. As we have not touched sin, death is the inevitable result. It is the way God has constituted sin. When we are "born" into sin, we are "born" into death (2:12). Our Portrait in Genesis, p. 96.

Let Us Keep to the Point

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:20

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My best for his glory. At first, the call comes gently. Then it grows louder, until finally God produces a crisis in our lives that demands we make a choice. For or against; yes or no; stay or go.

Has the crisis come to you? If it has, *go*. Paul, like Christ, would let nothing deter him, whether it meant life or death. As a new year dawns, let us embrace this same spirit, surrendering all with boldness and with joy.

Read: Genesis 1–3; Matthew 1

Get a Move On

Remain in me, as I also remain in you.

John 15:4

The Spirit of Jesus has been put into me by the atonement. Now I must begin to construct, with patience and determination, a way of thinking that is exactly in line with my Lord's. God will not *make* me think like Jesus; I have to do it myself, bringing every thought into captivity for him. "Remain in me" means to abide in Jesus in intellectual matters, in money matters—in everything that makes human life what it is.

Am I preventing God from making changes to my circumstances because I think it will disrupt my communion with him? If so, I'm being impertinent. I don't need to carefully guard my schedule in order to spend time alone with God; I need to learn to abide in Jesus no matter the circumstance. It's as easy to commune in a kitchen as it is in a prayer meeting.

Our Lord had an inner abiding that was never disturbed. He was at home with God wherever he found himself. He never chose his own circumstances but was obedient to his Father's choices for him. Think of the amazing openness and acceptance with which our Lord met the events of his life! We come to the Father in a state of high excitement and anxiety, with none of the serenity of the life that is hid with Christ in God.

Consider the things that take you out of Christ. Are you always promising to start abiding in him *later*—once this or that crisis is resolved, once this or that task is completed? Get a move on! Begin to abide now. In the early stages, abiding requires continual effort, but eventually it becomes an unconscious habit. Decide to abide in Jesus now, wherever you are placed.

Read: Ezra 9–10; Acts 1

- the mountains quaked,
and their corpses were like garbage
in the streets.
In all this, his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is still raised to strike.
- 26 He raises a signal flag
for the distant nations
and whistles for them from the ends
of the earth.
Look — how quickly and swiftly
they come!
- 27 None of them grows weary or stumbles;
no one slumbers or sleeps.
No belt is loose
and no sandal strap broken.
- 28 Their arrows are sharpened,
and all their bows strung.
Their horses' hooves are like flint;
their chariot wheels are
like a whirlwind.
- 29 Their roaring is like a lion's;
they roar like young lions;
they growl and seize their prey
and carry it off,
and no one can rescue it.
- 30 On that day they will roar over it,
like the roaring of the sea.
When one looks at the land,
there will be darkness and distress;
light will be obscured by clouds.^A
- covered their faces, with two they covered
their feet, and with two they flew.³ And one
called to another:
Holy, holy, holy is
the LORD of Armies;
his glory fills the whole earth.
- ⁴The foundations of the doorways shook at
the sound of their voices, and the temple was
filled with smoke.
- ⁵Then I said:
Woe is me for I am ruined^C
because I am a man of unclean lips
and live among a people
of unclean lips,
and because my eyes have seen
the King,
the LORD of Armies.
- ⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and
in his hand was a glowing coal that he had tak-
en from the altar with tongs.⁷ He touched my
mouth with it and said:
Now that this has touched your lips,
your iniquity is removed
and your sin is atoned for.
- ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking:
Who will I send?
Who will go for us?
- I said:
Here I am. Send me.
- ⁹And he replied:
Go! Say to these people:
Keep listening,
but do not understand;
keep looking, but do not perceive.

Isaiah's Call and Mission

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw
the Lord seated on a high and lofty
throne, and the hem of his robe filled
the temple. ²Seraphim^B were standing above
him; they each had six wings: with two they

^A5:30 Lit *its clouds* ^B6:2 = heavenly beings ^C6:5 Or *I must be silent*

6:1 I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne. If my worship is consumed in the glory of the Lord till that is the one thing left in my mind, I have come to the right place of vision. In the Old Testament the idea of God's holiness is that of aloofness and separateness, the sublimity of God. No unholiness can ever stand before God; therefore if God is going to bring man into fellowship with himself, he has to reinstate him in every particular. Anything that belittles or obliterates the holiness of God by a false view of the love of God is untrue to the revelation given by Jesus Christ. In this prophet we have a marvelous picture of the atonement. *Notes on Isaiah*, p. 1372.

6:5 I am a man of unclean lips. Isaiah's words are a confession not of sin but of the sense of absolute grossness. "I was an unthinking animal toward you" [Ps 73:22] said the psalmist, not an immoral animal but—"What an incapacitated type of man I am! I have seen the Lord, but how am I going to come anywhere near his marvelous holiness?" Any man will go to God for deliverance from sin, but it is another thing to have this consciousness of grossness dealt with; it takes discipline and patience and concentration. Will I agree that I am gross: "Woe is me for I am ruined" [Is 6:5]? If so, I am coming slowly to the condition Isaiah was in. It was his consciousness of grossness that brought Isaiah into a right relationship to God; that is an illuminating point. It is never my sense of goodness that brings me into touch with God but my sense of unworthiness. *He Shall Glorify Me*, p. 508.

6:8. Isaiah's soul was so attuned to God by the tremendous crisis he had gone through that he recorded the call of God to his amazed soul. The majority of us have no ear for anything but ourselves; we cannot hear a thing God says. To be brought into the zone of the call of God is to be profoundly altered. *Called of God*, p. 246.

¹⁰ Make the minds^a of these people dull; deafen their ears and blind their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their minds, turn back, and be healed.

¹¹Then I said, “Until when, Lord?” And he replied:

Until cities lie in ruins
without inhabitants,
houses are without people,
the land is ruined and desolate,
¹²and the LORD drives the people far away,
leaving great emptiness in the land.
¹³Though a tenth will remain in the land,
it will be burned again.
Like the terebinth or the oak
that leaves a stump when felled,
the holy seed is the stump.

A mountaintop experience isn't meant to teach us anything; it's meant to make us something new. God wants our experiences to develop our character.

My Utmost for His Highest, September 29

The Message to Ahaz

7 This took place during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah king of Judah: Aram's King Rezin and Israel's King Pekah son of Remaliah went to fight against Jerusalem, but they were not able to conquer it.

²When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz^b and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.

³The LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out with your son Shear-jashub^c to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Launderer's Field. ⁴Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks, the

fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. ⁵For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, ⁶Let's go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel's son as king in it.’”

⁷This is what the Lord GOD says:

It will not happen; it will not occur.

⁸ The chief city of Aram is Damascus, the chief of Damascus is Rezin (within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people),

⁹ the chief city of Ephraim is Samaria, and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all.

The Immanuel Prophecy

¹⁰Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹“Ask for a sign from the LORD your God — it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.”

¹²But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.”

¹³Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God?

¹⁴Therefore, the Lord himself will give you^d a sign: See, the virgin will conceive,^e have a son, and name him Immanuel. ¹⁵By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating curds^g and honey.

¹⁶For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned. ¹⁷The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father's house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria.”

¹⁸ On that day the LORD will whistle to flies at the farthest streams of the Nile and to bees in the land of Assyria.

¹⁹ All of them will come and settle in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks,

^a6:10 Lit heart ^b7:2 Lit Aram has rested upon Ephraim, his heart ^c7:3 = A Remnant Will Return ^d7:14 In Hb, the word you is pl ^e7:14 Or virgin is pregnant, will ^f7:14 = God With Us ^g7:15 Or sour milk

6:10 Make the minds of these people dull. In a hardened heart there is no witness being crushed down; the heart is simply hard and untouched, and when God's love and God's works are abroad, it remains like ice. It may be smashed and broken by judgments, but it is simply breaking ice. The only way to alter the hardened heart is to melt it, and the only power that can melt it is the fire of the Holy Spirit. *Biblical Psychology*, p. 178.

7:14 See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. How much attention, think you, could the mighty Roman Empire, the tramp of whose legions shook the world and whose laws girdle it till now, pay to that little babe born of a Jewish peasant girl and laid in a cow's trough! It was beneath the possibility of that gigantic world power's notice. *Christian Disciplines, Volume 2*, p. 337.

1 Corinthians

Circumstances of Writing

Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter (1Co 1:1; 16:21), which almost all Bible scholars accept. He wrote it during the last year of his three-year ministry at Ephesus, probably a few weeks before Pentecost in the spring of AD 56 (15:32; 16:8; see Ac 20:31).

During Paul's second missionary journey, he had a vision at Troas; he heard a man call to him, "Cross over to Macedonia and help us!" (Ac 16:9). That change in plans led Paul to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and ultimately to Corinth (Ac 18:1). Paul ministered in Corinth for at least eighteen months (Ac 18:1–18). He left Corinth accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla (Ac 18:18), who stopped at Ephesus, where they met and instructed "an eloquent man" named Apollos (Ac 18:24–26). Apollos then went to Corinth, where he had a powerful ministry (Ac 18:27–19:1).

Paul mentions a previous letter he wrote to the Corinthian church, warning them not to mix with the sexually immoral (1Co 5:9). The writing of this second letter (1 Corinthians) was prompted by oral reports from Chloe's household about factional strife within the church (1:11). Paul had also received reports about an incestuous relationship there (5:1), factions that arose during observance of the Lord's Supper (11:18), and confusion over the resurrection of the dead (15:12). As a result, Paul addressed these issues in 1 Corinthians. Apparently, as he was writing the letter, he received a letter from the Corinthians asking his opinion on various issues (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). Therefore, he included his replies within this letter to the Corinthian believers.

Contribution to the Bible

First Corinthians contributes greatly to our understanding of Christian life, ministry, and relationships by showing us how the members of the church—Christ's body—are to function together. Problems can arise in any church because congregations are made up of redeemed but sinful people. Paul gave specific solutions to specific problems, but the underlying answer to all these problems is for the church and its members to live Christ-centered lives. It all comes down to living under the lordship and authority of Christ, the head of his body (the church).

Structure

Paul's writing is in the form of a letter, using the standard four parts of a first-century letter: salutation (1:1–3), thanksgiving (1:4–9), the main body (1:10–16:18), and a farewell (16:19–21). It is a pastoral letter, driven by the occasion and the present needs of the recipients.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of the way Paul structured his letter was his use of the word "about" to introduce a subject. It is apparent that "about" signals that Paul was responding to items on a list of questions that he had received—perhaps by way of a committee of men (16:17). These questions dealt with males and females in marriage (7:1); virgins (7:25); food offered to idols (8:1); spiritual gifts (12:1); the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (16:1); and Apollos (16:12).

Wisdom from Chambers

Never confuse the cross of Christ with the benefits that flow from it. For all Paul's doctrine, his one great passion was the cross of Christ, not salvation nor sanctification but the great truth that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. . . . He cared about nothing on earth except for one thing—the cross of Christ. That was the great passion of his preaching; he paid no attention to what it cost him. "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" [1Co 9:16]. *Approved unto God*, p. 18.

Discipleship

■ 2 Corinthians 5:21; see Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; John 20:21–23; 21:15–19

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?” . . . “Feed my sheep” [Jn 21:17]. Can you feed the lambs and the sheep? Do you, or are you in the show business? Listen to the voice of your Master: “As the Father has sent me, I also send you” [Jn 20:21]. Is it not time for you to present yourself before God and say, “Father, look at my hands, my heart, and my head: Jesus has cleansed me”? And he will answer, “Son, go work in the vineyard today” [Mt 21:28].

To make disciples, then, we must have been made disciples ourselves. There is no royal road to sainthood and discipleship. The way of the cross is the only way. We see God only from a pure heart, never from an able intellect. The elements in the lot of a workman for God are those that first make him a workman and then constitute him a toiler for God.

The workman for God in all probability will have to go the way his Lord and Master went. The first flush of the career of a workman for God may be in glory and acclaim, leading to blessed transfiguration; then there comes the descent into the valley, deeper and deeper, until in that lonely place, toiling unseen,

unknown, unmarked, he reaches in the spirit of travail that sublime agony of loneliness when “Father” seems frozen in his heart, and he cries out, “Why have you abandoned me?” [Ps 22:1]. It is not a cry of weakness, nor of imperfection; it is not a cry of doubt in God; it is a cry from the last touch of heroism on the workman for God who is being made conformable unto the death of Jesus, not for his own sake or his own perfecting but for the work of God. It takes him to the threshold of that awful abyss of the Master Workman himself, where he was left alone with death and became as lonely as sin, and amid the spiritual ramifications of that unshared, unfathomed experience, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” [Mt 27:46].

The workman for God dare not talk, he dare not speculate; but in wonder, love, and awe he thanks God for “the glory and the passion of this midnight,” because it has brought him to the threshold of an understanding of the loneliness of Jesus Christ who was made “to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” [2Co 5:21]. *Christian Discipleship, Volume 2*, p. 330.

Cross of Christ

📖 Galatians 6:14; see Matthew 16:24; John 12:32; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2; 6:19–20

We can understand the attributes of God in other ways, but we can only understand the Father's heart in the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is not the cross of a martyr . . . it is the revelation of redemption. The cross is the crystallized point in history where eternity merges with time. The cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" [Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34], is not the desolation of an isolated individual; it is the revelation of the heart of God face-to-face with the sin of man, and going deeper down than man's sin can ever go in inconceivable heartbreak in order that every sin-stained, hell-deserving sinner might be absolutely redeemed. If the redemption of Christ cannot go deeper down than hell, it is not redemption at all.

The great condemnation of much of our modern preaching is that it conveys no sense of the desperate tragedy of conviction of sin. When once the real touch of conviction of sin comes, it is hell on earth—there is no other word for it. One second of realizing ourselves in the light of God means unspeakable agony and distress; but the marvel is that when the conviction does come, there is God in the very center of the whole thing to save us from it. That is the meaning of the cross of Christ as experimentally applied to us. We have to face ourselves with the

revelation of the redemption, mirrored and concentrated in the cross of Jesus Christ as it is presented in the New Testament, before we get the shallow, pious nonsense shaken out of our religious beliefs. To be saved by God's grace is not a beautifully pathetic thing; it is a desperately tragic thing.

The evidence that I have accepted the cross of Christ as the revelation of redemption is that the regenerating life of God is manifested in my mortal flesh. Immediately [when] I accept the cross of Christ as the revelation of redemption I am not, I must not be, the same man, I must be another man, and I must take up my cross from my Lord. The cross is the gift of Jesus to his disciples, and it can only bear one aspect: "I am not my own" [see 1 Co 6:19–20]. The whole attitude of the life is that I have given up my right to myself. I live like a crucified man. Unless that crisis is reached it is perilously possible for my religious life to end as a sentimental fiasco. "I don't mind being saved from hell and receiving the Holy Spirit, but it is too much to expect me to give up my right to myself to Jesus Christ, to give up my manhood, my womanhood, all my ambitions." Jesus said, If any man will be my disciple, those are the conditions. *The Highest Good—Thy Great Redemption*, pp. 558–59.

A Glossary of Terms

Abandon, abandonment (to God). To fully give oneself over to God. In Chambers's usage, "abandon" and "abandonment" carry no negative connotation (in the sense of *being* abandoned or lost). Rather, "abandoning oneself to God" is an active, positive choice, freely undertaken by those who wish to commit themselves to the Lord. Abandonment brings with it the "glad, reckless joy" of allowing God to direct one's course.

Amateur providence. Generally used to describe a spiritual leader who is trying to place him- or herself at the center of another person's spiritual experience—right where Jesus Christ should be. Chambers writes that the amateur providence is "so noisy" in his or her "instruction of others that God cannot get anywhere near them."

Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Chambers defines this baptism, which is distinct from baptism by water, as "an invasion" by the Holy Spirit. He bases his understanding on the description of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13) and on Jesus's declaration in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you." To receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in Chambers's view, one must ask: "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

Born from above. Another term for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism that makes sanctification possible (see "sanctification"). It is distinct from both salvation and baptism by water.

Broken bread and poured-out wine. From the account of the Last Supper in Luke 22, Chambers uses this term to describe how the Christian disciple should allow him- or herself to be used in God's hands. Despite carrying the ritualistic overtones of the Eucharist, this phrase isn't strictly employed in that sense by Chambers, who belonged to no

specific denomination or theological tradition. Paul, Chambers writes, had "no other end and aim than that—to be broken bread and poured-out wine in the hands of God that others might be nourished and fed."

Disciple. A Christian who has answered a divine call to devote his or her life to following Christ and preaching the gospel. For Chambers, not every Christian receives the call to discipleship.

Disposition. An underlying nature or fundamental makeup acquired through inheritance or by heredity. Humans have inherited "the disposition of sin," but are able, through redemption, to acquire "the disposition of holiness" that is in Jesus Christ.

Educate (down) to the scruple. Chambers uses this phrase to mean that God inspects and brings to light every single aspect of our lives and personalities, no matter how small. "Notice in your own life how he works," Chambers writes. "He begins with the big general principles and then slowly educates you down to the scruple."

Intercession / Intervention. Used interchangeably to indicate the kind of prayer Chambers advocates: going to God on behalf of other people, in order to learn his will for them. Intercessory prayer is distinct from self-centered—and wrongful—prayer, in which we go to God "seeking blessings for ourselves."

Manifest. Drawn from 2 Corinthians 4:11 (KJV): "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." Chambers expands on this verse, using the verb "to manifest" to describe how Christians should relate to Jesus Christ in their everyday lives. Instead of simply, and passively, experiencing Jesus Christ as an indwelling presence (through the Holy Spirit), Christians are to manifest, or actively

bring out into the world, the new life God has put inside them.

Reality. Everything belonging to God and the spiritual realm, everything eternal and unchanging. Distinct from the material, earthly realm, which is temporary, and which Chambers often refers to as "actuality." Chambers uses "reality" as a descriptor for many different concepts, including the kingdom of God, personal redemption, the Holy Spirit, and God himself. "Once you are rooted in reality, nothing can shake you."

Redemption / The redemption. Chambers contrasts these two concepts. "The redemption" refers to a historical event: the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and everything which followed from that act (namely, the restoration of humanity's relationship with God). "Redemption" is used to describe an individual's personal rebirth in Christ. Christ *dealt* with sin in the redemption; he *deals* with sin in redemption.

Saint. Chambers uses this word to signify a Christian who has undergone the baptism of the Holy Spirit and has been sanctified (see "sanctification"), whose thinking and behavior clearly reflect this spiritual rebirth. Often used interchangeably with "disciple."

Salvation. For Chambers, this is the "first sovereign work of grace," accomplished for us by Jesus Christ on the cross. It is distinct from sanctification, the "second mighty work of grace" (see "sanctification"). All Christians, for Chambers, have undergone the experience of salvation, but not all have been sanctified.

Sanctification / Entire sanctification. A cornerstone of Chambers's theology, based primarily on 1 Thessalonians 4: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." Chambers's elaboration of the concept draws on the Holiness theology of John Wesley, one of Chambers's favorite thinkers.

For Wesley, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a second work of grace, following and distinct from salvation. In imparting the Holy Spirit, sanctification also imparted the ability to lead a sinless, “perfect” life. The doctrine has always been the subject of intense theological debate. Chambers embraced the idea of sanctification (see “baptism of the Holy Spirit”) but refused to get entangled in the perfectionism debate. For Chambers, sanctification wasn’t simply a single spiritual baptism; it was a way of living: “Sanctification is not *once for all*, but *once for always*. Sanctification is an

instantaneous, continuous work of grace. . . . Sanctification means we have the glorious opportunity of proving daily, hourly, momentarily, this identity with Jesus Christ” (from *The Moral Foundations of Life*).

Vision. Used to denote several different types of spiritual insight, all of them meaning, in essence, an idea of some future occurrence which God brings to a person’s mind. The vision might be of a future event; a purpose God wishes the person to fulfill; or something more vague, like a future state of being. Often,

Chambers declined to specify what type of vision he was talking about, leaving the interpretation up to the reader.

Will. What today we might refer to as “willpower.” For Chambers, “will” is less something you *have* than something you *are*. It is an essential element in God’s makeup of humanity, the element that enables us—and requires us—to decide for or against God and to put our decisions into action. “Never look upon will as something you possess as you do a watch,” Chambers warned. “Will is the whole person active.”