

Blackrock Lectures

The Church of God

Etc.

Second edition – Revised

Preface to the First Edition

The lectures in the reader's hands were delivered in the course of ordinary service in the ministry of the word. Some who heard them thought that they might be useful to others, and the notes of them were given to the writer, and form the basis of these papers.

That they may be a blessing to His people, is the earnest desire of the writer, and if so, they will bring glory to the name of the Lord.

Blackrock, September, 1870.

Note: The name "Blackrock Lectures" was the suggestion of a brother in communion, for the sake of distinction from others.

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Lecture 1:

Christ “Head over All the Assembly, Which Is His Body”

{ *Introduction* }

This evening, in the Lord’s mercy, I desire to bring before you, beloved friends, the great subject of the church of God, which, next to Christ Himself, is the center of all God’s counsels for His glory. It is very sweet, when we are in the consciousness of our relationship as sons -- children of God our Father -- to be assured of, and instructed in our relationship to Christ as “members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” He is never said to be “bone of our bone”; but we are said to be “of his flesh, and of his bones,” when He has gone on high, after His work on the cross by which we are saved.

The church is that wonderful structure in which God will display in all the ages, and throughout eternity, the “exceeding riches of his grace.” How rich He is and how far His grace could go, will be seen in “his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.”

The Bible is the history of two men -- the “first Adam,” the responsible, or created man; and the “last Adam,” the man of God’s purpose and counsel. The responsible man’s history closed in the cross. The “second Man” -- the “last Adam” -- came in, and, in blessed and holy love, took willingly the cup of wrath, and died, that God might be free, in righteousness, to let out the floodgates of His love. The stream took its rise in His heart, but needed a righteous channel in which to flow. It was pent up in the heart of Christ, little as we could have conceived it, when He said, “How am I straitened, till it be accomplished” (Luke 12). He poured out His soul unto death and the stream flowed on! God’s heart was thus set free to flow out to sinners -- the vilest -- the most abject; bearing them back by redemption on its mighty stream, to place them on high -- “seated in heavenly places in Christ.”

You do not find God’s *purposes* and *counsels* unfolded in scripture till the cross is past. It stands morally at the end of the world’s history. In God’s dealings previous to the cross, you have the responsible man tested and exposed. The Lord Jesus came down and brought out the fact that man was irrecoverably lost. If the world had received Him, it would have proved that there was some latent good in man’s heart which only needed this fresh culture to unfold. But no! Man had no heart for Jesus then, as now. We know this when we think how we desire naturally to live without Jesus. Men will talk of anything but Him. In religion he can clothe himself, and pride himself, because it gives him some importance in his own eyes; but the presentation of the Lord Jesus tests the heart which can thus deceive itself, when He has no place there.

On this side of the cross, historically, you have the purposed Man in glory -- the veil rent, and the grace of God preached “unto all,” and no further dealings of God, until His

long-suffering is exhausted, when the judgment of the living closes the scene, and introduces the millennial age. We have to do with Him either in grace or in judgment. To know Him in grace, we have passed from death to life; to know Him in judgment is eternal woe!

When the cross is thus passed, all God’s counsels which were before the foundation of the world, unfold themselves to us in the word, and that for the first time. It is exceedingly interesting to trace from scripture what does come out then -- when the Lord Jesus, the second Man, is in the glory of God.

I will draw your attention shortly to some of them. In Heb. 9:26 you read, “*Now* once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” This was accomplished by the suffering and death of the cross. I am going to point out all the “*nows*” of scripture as to these things.

1. In Rom. 3:21- 26. “But *now* the righteousness of God without the law is manifested”; again, “To declare at this time [*now*] his righteousness,” &c. The judgment that was needed to establish God’s righteousness against sin was poured out upon the head of Jesus; and God took Him up as Man, who had glorified Him by bearing all to His glory, and set Him on His own throne -- thus displaying His righteousness, His consistency with Himself in doing so. Thus the gospel is the revelation of God’s righteousness, because it is His own consistency with Himself in ministering His grace on the ground of the sacrifice of Christ. We are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” and God is just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” Instead of the demand for righteousness from man, there is the administration of it to him, and that of God’s righteousness instead of man’s, from the glory where Christ is. The saints of the Old Testament stood on the ground of the “*forbearance*” of God. We as Christians, stand on His *righteousness*, (cp. Rom. 3:25 with v. 26). There was “*the passing over*,” [see margin -- not “remission”] of sins that are past, i.e., of past ages. Forgiveness was *promised* (Jer. 32), but not *preached* or proclaimed (Acts 13:38). Suppose the case of a man who owed a debt, and whose creditor forbore with him because some rich man had gone security for his liability. The debt was there, but the creditor forbore to press his claim. But if this rich man came in later and discharged the whole amount, the debtor was free! So with us, in contrast with the saints of old with whom God forbore -- the cross now proves His righteousness in doing so -- we stand on the ground of God’s righteousness being

now gloriously manifested, because Christ is in heaven! (John 13:31, 32, 16:10, 17:4, 5). We who believe possess a purged conscience which no saint of OT times ever could, though he knew God in blessed confidence, and found Him a God of grace. The cross is now the proof of how righteous this forbearance of God was with them.

2. In 2 Tim. 1:9, 10. "Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. But *now* is made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and incorruptibility (*ἀφθαρσία*) to light through the gospel," &c. (See also Titus 1:1-3.)

3. Then in Eph. 3:10, "To the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by means of the church the manifold wisdom of God." (See also Rom. 16:25, 26, &c.)

Thus we find the closing up of the first man's history in responsibility in the cross, which stood morally at "the end of the world." In the cross man consummated his guilt, and there the blessed Son of God drank willingly the cup of wrath, and not only put away our sins, but the man that sinned by enduring the judgment of God that lay upon him. Then God took the man who so glorified Him, and put Him in glory in the display of righteousness. The promise of eternal life before the world was revealed, on the close of man's history in the death of Christ, he who had the power of death being also annulled; and the eternal purpose of God in the church is made known.

Thus you get all these "*nows*" of scripture when the cross is past, and Christ is in the glory of God, having accomplished redemption. Sin is put away for the believer; righteousness manifested; eternal life bestowed. There was one more thing that God's manifold wisdom might be known; namely, the church of God.

Let me remark as to the word "church." It has done more mischief, and created more misapprehension as to the divine purposes, than almost any other expression. Let us be clear at once as to it, that the word *is not in scripture!* No doubt you have it in our excellent (for the most part) Authorized Version. But it is not a true representation of the original. In all cases it should be translated "assembly." If we were to speak of the assembly of England, of Scotland, of Ireland, we would not understand what it meant. When we use the word church, it is a conventional word, conveying a human thought about a human institution.

For instance, take the well known passage in Matt. 18, "Tell it to the church"; read it, "Tell it to the assembly," and the thought of many of its being the teaching or priestly body, or other organization, is gone.

Now, the interval during which Christ is hidden in the heavens, and the Holy Ghost is *dwelling* on earth, in contradistinction to His *working* in other ages, has no computation in scripture. "Times and seasons" belong to the Jew and the earth. The present interval is not "time," properly speaking, at all. Time is counted when God has to do with earth

and earthly things.

What then, is the "assembly of God," looked upon in the truth of the expression? It is the body of a Head, who has gone on high; formed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, to be the vessel for the expression of Christ, while He is hidden from the world, and before He is revealed in glory. As we have in Eph. 1:22, 23: "And gave him to be head over all things to the assembly which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

In order to facilitate the unfolding of my subject, I have divided it into three heads.

I. Christ, "Head over all things."

The universal dominion over all the works of God is bestowed upon the man of God's counsel, as we find in Psa. 8. So the first Adam, the created man, was given a universal lordship over this scene, as it came from its Creator's hands. This he forfeited when he fell by sin. We read, "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Then, in Psa. 8, this is bestowed on the "Son of man" the man of God's counsel: "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hand: thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea; and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea."

I come now to examine how He takes possession of it all. He does so under four titles; namely, as God, Creator of them; as Son, and appointed Heir of them; as Son of man, according to Psa. 8, the Man of God's counsel; and as redeemer of His inheritance, which had fallen under Satan's power through the lusts of man when he fell.

In Col. 1:15, 16. "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him." This refers to all the works of His hands, for the creation of all things is always in scripture attributed to the Son of God.¹ When the persons of the Godhead are distinguished as to creation, He is always the actor. If we look at John 1:3 we find the strongest expression of this. Nothing came into being which ever did come into being, except by Him. "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." All things were made by Him and for Him, as we see by Col. 1.

1. No doubt it is written, "In the beginning *God* created," &c., but there the expression is general; it does not give details as to the activity of the persons of the Godhead. The New Testament brings out definitely the unity of the Godhead in the Trinity of the persons; and there we get details.

Strange that in the creed, called the "Apostles'," creation is attributed to the Father. Scripture uniformly attributes it to the Son, when it distinguishes the Persons in the Godhead. "I believe in God the *Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth*, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son," &c.

Then He is called the firstborn or Chief of all, not as to the point of time of His taking a place in creation; but because of the dignity of His person. If the Creator stoops to take a place in that which displayed His handiwork, He must necessarily be first and chief in it, even if He appeared last of all on the scene.

Now, if you turn to the first chapter of Hebrews and second verse, you will find the same truth, with another added, "God hath in the last of these days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, *by whom he made the worlds.*" Here again, creation is attributed to Him who is appointed *Heir* of all.

But there is a third point, which you will find in Psa. 8, "O Jehovah, our Adon, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens . . . What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or, the Son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet," &c.

Now, with regard to the question which you find in The fourth verse of this Psalm, "What is man?" You will find it asked three times in the Old Testament. In the seventh chapter of Job and seventeenth verse, "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment." The question in this chapter arises in this way. Job, like many, is struggling under the discipline of God's hand. God is holding Job under His hand for it! And Job is writhing under His dealings, imploring God to let him alone "till he swallow down his spittle!" He speaks in the anguish of his spirit, and asks, in the bitterness of his soul, "What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" He pours out his plaint to God, desiring to know how it was that the mighty God should set His heart on such a poor worm as man, "whose foundation is in the dust," and "who is crushed before the moth."

In Psa. 144 you have the same inquiry, "What is man?" Here it is the cry of Jehovah of the godly remnant of Israel in the last days, pleading the insignificance of man -- their foes -- as a ground for the speedy judgments of His hand and their deliverance from their oppressors, who are prospering around them. They cry to Him, "What is man?" Why spare them; why not execute judgment, and thus deliver the people of thy hand?

But when we come to Psa. 8, you find that it is the Spirit of Christ in the Psalmist, which asks the question "What is man?" &c. Put to shame and rejected of men -- and of Israel -- His plaint goes up to Jehovah, and He asks, from His lowly place of rejection, "What is man?" And we get grace's answer to it all, in man in Christ, according to the counsels of God; and we therefore have what God is as well, because we have God in grace revealed in Him -- going down into death, by the grace of God, to connect the creature with his Creator.

Christ was this Son of man -- set over all the works of God's hand -- as Adam, the created man, had been at the first, in the dominion of this scene which he lost, when he was drawn aside of Satan, and fell. Thus we find in this question asked three times, though in very different connection, in the Old

Testament; and the answer to the question in Psa. 8 is brought out in wonderful development, displacing the first man by the second, the first Adam by the last, three times in the New. (See Heb. 2; Eph. 1; 1 Cor. 15.)

In Heb. 2:6 you find the words of the Psalm quoted, as far as they are fulfilled -- the end of the Psalm has actually yet to come. It is touching, too, how the inspired writer of Hebrews will not say, *David* "in a certain place testified," &c. How well he knew that a greater than David was there! He writes, "*One* in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the Son of man, that thou visitest him. Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hand: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." Then he explains, "For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus [this "Son of man"], who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for *everything.*" This is the word; not merely "every man."

He has tasted death in all its bitterness, not only for the glory of God, which required it; and to destroy the power of Satan, who had gotten the power of death over man; and for the sins of His people, if He was to bring many souls to glory -- but also for the whole inheritance as His title to bless it. Every blade of grass, every leaf of the trees, He has died for! He takes His inheritance, with all its load of guilt, and dies to redeem it all -- tasting death for it, "by the grace of God." This is a far wider thought than the saints merely, though they are included in it.

The beautiful world, beautiful wherever man's hand has not marred it, or his foot has not trodden it down; that which came out of the hand of its Creator in all its variety of living beauty, displaying His handiwork in all its lights and shadows -- it has been purchased by the blood of Christ. Already redeemed by *blood* from the hands of the enemy, it has yet to be redeemed by *power*. The eye of faith turns on high and sees Him on the throne of God, the title to all things in His hand, as God their Creator, as Son and Heir of them, and as Man! Yet more, as the One who has "tasted death" for it! He took the curse that was on the scene; and the day is coming when not a vestige of that curse will remain. The thorns and thistles of Adam (Gen. 3:18), and the want of fruitfulness of Cain (Gen. 4:12), will give place to the earth yielding her increase (Psa. 67:6), and the thorn and thistle giving place to the myrtle and the fir tree (Isa. 55:13). He will inherit it as its Redeemer-Heir. He tastes death and then goes on high, where God has "crowned him with glory and honor."

Thus He is there, "Head over all things" in a fourfold title Creator, Son and Heir, Son of man, and Redeemer. There He awaits the joint-heirs (His bride for that day of glory), and when all are gathered, He will put forth His great power, and binding Satan, will possess all, and we shall be joint-heirs of it with Him. That interval is marked by the presence of the Holy Ghost dwelling here below.

II. "Head . . . to the Assembly."

The second point I desire to bring before you is, that Christ, as man in glory, is thus "Head over all things"; is Head, not *over*, but "to the assembly." You will mark strongly that He is never said to be Head over the church, but *to* it. We will look at it in its other aspect as "His body," again.

Now I may surprise some (who have grasped the truth of the church being the body of Christ, formed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven at Pentecost), by saying that the thought of the "assembly" was well known in the OT scriptures, and familiar to the order of things in Israel. Thus we find the word where it has perplexed some, in learning that the church, as we know it now from scripture, began its existence after the ascension of Christ and descent of the Holy Ghost. I refer to the passage in Acts 7, "The church [assembly] in the wilderness," referring to Israel in their Journey from Egypt to Canaan. The whole congregation of Israel as they came out of Egypt, in its corporate unity, as well as its gathering together, is treated as the assembly. In Ex. 22 we read of "the whole assembly of the congregation." In the expression "the tabernacle of the congregation," it is another word in the original, and should be rendered "tabernacle [or "tent"] of meeting," and signifies the place where they met Jehovah. I need hardly say that, comparatively, there were but few true saints of God amongst that great congregation.

But in its corporate unity as a nation come out of Egypt, and the assemblage of the people it was termed and treated as the "assembly" of Jehovah. You know how they defiled His dwelling-place; for He had brought them out of Egypt that He "might dwell among them" (Ex. 29:45, 46), so that finally He removed His glory or presence from their midst (Ezek. 8 - 11).

Let us carry the thought with us that Israel, as a nation, was the "assembly" of Jehovah. They corrupt themselves wholly in this position, and God has two great controversies with them in His dealings by-and-by, when He takes them up again.

Isa. 40 - 48 gives His first great controversy with them (especially Israel) for idolatry, ending with the words, "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, unto the wicked." The second is more specially with the Jews, than with Israel as a nation. It is from Isa. 49 to 57, and ends with the somewhat similar words, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." This is for the yet deeper guilt of the rejection of Jehovah-Messiah, come into their midst in grace. The general testimony of Isaiah, as of the other prophets, is that a remnant only would be spared and saved, when God would turn His hand to deal with them once more.

I may here mention, what has been noted, that the book of Isaiah, exclusive of the historic interlude in chapters 35-38, is divided into two great portions, chaps. 1-34 giving their *external* history in the midst of, and with relation to, the nations with whom they have to do (outside of those embraced in the Gentile empires, to whom the throne of the world was given, when God removed the glory from the earth; these we find in the book of Daniel). Then, after their external history (Isa. 1 - 34), and the historic interlude of parabolic significance (Isa. 35 - 39), we get their *internal* or *moral* history discussed (Isa. 40 - 56).

If we examine Isa. 8:12-18, we find only a remnant attached

to Christ, who becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel. In Isa. 5 Jehovah looks *back* on the nation as to how they answered to the culture bestowed upon them; they "brought forth wild grapes." In Isa. 6 He looks *forward*, and they are proved to be unfit for the glory of the Lord of Hosts: they are "undone"; Isaiah here representing the people before Jehovah.

What is now to be the remedy? Jehovah of Hosts will become a man! This was now the resource. The virgin would bear a Son (Isa. 7:14) and Jehovah of Sabaoth becomes Emmanuel -- God with us! In Isa. 8:12-18, He becomes a stumbling-stone and rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, and historically He was in the Gospels, (cp. Matt. 21:42-44, &c.), but a sanctuary to the remnant who attach themselves to Him. "He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel: for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken. Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (vv. 14-17).

Thus, we find that Christ became a stumbling stone to Israel, but a small remnant of the people attached themselves to Him -- who were "for signs and wonders "in Israel (cp. Heb. 2:13).

I will now trace shortly the history of this remnant, while Jehovah hides His face from Israel. You find it distinctly in Matthew's gospel. In Matt. 4 He goes out in Galilee, and calls around Him Peter and Andrew his brother; then James and John, and so the company of His disciples. Mark what Isa. 8:16 says, "Bind up the testimony, and seal the law amongst my disciples." He began to do that in the Sermon on the Mount; but when we go on to Matt. 16 Peter confesses Him "Son of the living God," and Jesus says, "On this rock I will build my *assembly*." Israel having nationally failed as the assembly of the Lord, He now unfolds that He would replace it by an assembly which He was about to build; which still was a future thing.

Now turn with me to Psalms 22 and you will find definitely the position in which this remnant is placed by redemption. You have there the great question of good and evil solved by Christ on the cross. All the evil that is in man's heart brought out; all the cup of divine and righteous wrath against sin poured out upon the devoted head of Jesus! The cross of Christ surpasses in moral glory all that this universe will ever behold! It is a necessity, because of a holy and righteous God, that sin must be judged. But what necessity was there that the holy, spotless Son of God should be treated as sin, and left to endure the judgment of God due to it? None, but that of His own sovereign grace "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." This the cross reveals. God whose holy nature cannot allow sin to remain unjudged, to spare the sinner, and give expression to all that was in His heart, did not spare His Son. He was left to be forsaken of God, as we learn from that solemn cry bursting forth from His heart at that surpassing "hour," "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There the great question of good and evil has found its eternal solution. Where man was, in evil at its culminating point

and sin receives its righteous judgment, there all that God was in goodness has found its infinite revelation in Him who devoted Himself for this to His glory at all cost to Himself. The turning point is reached in v. 21, “Yea, thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.” Then His first thought is, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the assembly [cp. Heb. 2:12] will I praise thee.”

Israel, as we saw, was originally the assembly of Jehovah. The whole thing fails, on the one hand sinking back into idolatry; on the other, rejecting Jehovah-Messiah, come in lowly grace. The remnant, which was to form the nucleus of the new assembly, is delivered and attached to Christ, and instructed by Him. It did not get the name “assembly” until His resurrection, save in the announcement of His yet future purpose to Peter; but when the Lord had passed through the judgment of the cross, as described in Psalm 22. and He is heard from the horns of the unicorns -- a figure of the transpiercing judgment of God -- His first thought is to declare the name of His deliverer -- God to His *brethren*, now owned thus for the first time; for divine love was free now, so to speak, to act according to its own dictates.

Historically this was fulfilled in John 20. The judgment of the cross was passed in John 19; and in chapter 20. He is standing forth in resurrection: the whole question of sin has been gone into and settled -- not a shadow of it left on our souls, who believe. The first man’s history is closed under God’s judgment fully executed. I thank God, every Christian here can say, and should without hesitation be able to say, there is not the weight of the smallest cloud on my soul, that Christ has not removed. The second Man is able to associate us with Himself in all the place He enters into as risen from the dead.

He turns to Mary (John 20:17) saying, “Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and unto my God, and your God.” That is, the Son of God places the disciples on the same platform as Himself by redemption: He is not ashamed to call them “brethren.” The finest message that ever passed through mortal lips is sent to them through a woman, who, ignorant if you please, could break her heart for Christ! The Son of God is not ashamed to call them “brethren” -- now named such for the first time -- because they stand in all His own acceptance before the Father! His Father is their Father; His God is their God! He thus declares His name, and pronounces “peace” twice; and breathes on them “life more abundantly,” as the last Adam -- a “quickening spirit.” “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” In *life* He had declared His Father to them: in *resurrection* He presents them to His Father as sons!

Thus, you have the “assembly,” now definitely in its place for the first time composed --of the same remnant of Israel, and Christ in their midst -- proclaiming peace and declaring His Father’s name.

Now mark, *all this is on earth, and Christ is still there.* Psa. 22 goes no further than resurrection. So that as yet we have no Holy Ghost come down from heaven, and consequently the “body of Christ” not yet formed.

Now, if we turn to Acts 1, another truth comes out. They were to remain in Jerusalem until they should be baptized with

the Holy Ghost, “not many days hence.” His earthly work of the cross was over; all its fruits will be accomplished in due time. His heavenly work of baptizing with the Holy Ghost -- so frequently spoken of in the Gospels -- was yet to come. He says, “For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” That of “fire” is omitted, because it is yet to come. The fire of judgment will yet cleanse His kingdom of every stumbling-block and them which do iniquity. It has nothing to do with the Holy Ghost’s appearance in tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost.

This baptism was to change the relationship of this “assembly” into one not yet revealed or accomplished. They are the “assembly,” but not yet “his body.” I wish to keep these two thoughts distinct in your mind, before they become interchangeable by the subsequent descent of the Holy Ghost, as in Eph. 1:22, 23.

In v. 9 the Lord ascends to heaven, and a cloud receives Him out of their sight. In ch. 2 the Holy Ghost personally² descends from heaven, and they were all baptized of Him. He sat upon each of them, and filled all the house -- dwelling thus “in them,” personally, and “with them,” collectively. This assembly is now God’s habitation through the Spirit. The one hundred and twenty disciples -- thus baptized -- are technically *named* the “assembly” from that moment (Acts 2:47).³ The Holy Ghost now *dwells* on earth for the first time, and consequent on redemption. He had *wrought* before He came to *dwell*, as in OT days.

The “temple” in Jerusalem was an empty house, and Israel

2. The reader will do well to consult John 14 - 16 as to the personal presence of the Holy Ghost upon earth, consequent on the work and departure of Christ. “The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). John 14:16, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you *for ever*”; not for a few years, as He who was then about to leave them. The world would not receive Him, but He would not be only “with them” as Jesus, but “in them.” Read the last clause of v. 17 thus, “For he shall dwell with you, and shall be in you.” Not only is this rendering correct, but the context proves it to be the thought. Then v. 26, the Father would send Him in the Son’s name; and in John 15:26, the Lord would (as gone on high) send Him from the Father.

John 16 shows the Comforter’s presence on earth, and what He would be when Christ was gone. It was expedient that He should go (v. 7); until then the Holy Ghost would not come; “If I depart I will send him unto you.” Vv. 8-15 show what He would be, and how He would act when come, with regard to the world and the disciples. He would glorify Jesus on earth (v. 14), as Jesus had glorified the Father on earth (John 17:4).

It is the unfolding of the actions of a divine Person on earth in company with the disciples.

In 1 Pet. 1:11-13 we find three steps of much moment, marking the presence of the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven as the special truth of Christianity. The Spirit of Christ in the prophets, *prophesied* of things not yet come, but to be ministered to us (v. 11). The glad tidings of the accomplishment of these things -- Christ having suffered and gone on high -- were *preached* to us by the Holy Ghost, *sent down* from heaven, a mediate thing between the sufferings and the glories that were to come (v. 12); and then these things were to be *brought* in at the revelation of Jesus Christ, now hidden in the heavens.

3. If the word “assembly” in v. 47 be questioned, we find that a separate and distinct company was formed and recognized (see Acts 4:20); and they are termed the “assembly” in Acts 5:11, before the breaking up of the whole thing externally in Acts 8.

an “untoward generation.” The “assembly” was now the “city of refuge” for the “slayer of blood,” where those who bowed to the guilt of their Messiah’s blood could flee.⁴

It was an analogous state of things, as in 2 Sam. 5, 6, when the ark was in delivering grace on mount Zion with David; and the tabernacle at Gibeon, with no ark or presence of Jehovah. Analogous, too, to the pitching of the tent outside the camp by Moses, (Ex. 33) and every one that sought the Lord went out to it.

Now, to this “assembly” the Lord added such as were being saved from the destructions about to fall on the nation of Israel. This is the force of Acts 2:47. It does not raise the question of their ultimate salvation; nor is it a description of their state as “saved ones,” but is rather the characteristic or technical name for a class of persons (the three thousand, for instance, on that day) which were being saved from the judgments about to fall on the nation. They were all Jews. See also Luke 13:22, 23.

In Acts 3⁵ Peter proposes that Christ would return and bring in all the blessings of the kingdom, as spoken of by the prophets, and thus all the kindreds of the earth -- the Gentiles -- would be blessed.

In Acts 4 you get the answer of Israel to the proposal. It was wholly refused! They put the two apostles, Peter and John, in prison; and in Acts 5 the whole twelve: then Stephen (Acts 6, 7) sums up their whole history in responsibility, from Abraham’s call till that moment. Despised promises; a broken law; slain prophets; a murdered Christ; and a resisted Spirit, is the terrible tale! (vv. 51-53). Stephen seals his testimony with his blood, and commits his spirit to the Lord, and all is over.

The “assembly” is scattered to the four winds; and Saul of Tarsus, the most determined of opponents, “made havoc of the assembly, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.” The whole external thing is dispersed, and Saul heads the persecution that brings it about.

The blessing goes down to Samaria in Acts 8. But in Acts 9 the man who was the most terrible opponent and leader in wasting the assembly, is converted. Called out by the mighty power of God -- apart from all earthly intervention, apart from the twelve apostles -- a heavenly light appears to him, “above the brightness of the sun”; and the first sentence spoken to him by the Lord of glory conveys the truth of the union of these scattered saints with Him in glory, as not now merely His

“brethren,” but “me!” “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” They are united by one Spirit to Christ in glory, and He owns it!

This bitter foe is taken up of God, and made the minister of the *gospel* to every creature which is under heaven, and of the “assembly” which he had wasted -- to fill up the word of God! (See, for the double character of Paul’s ministry, Eph. 3:8, 9; and Col. 1:23-26.)

This leads us now to the third point which I desire to bring before you, that is, The body of Christ.

III. “Which is His Body”

We have seen that the “assembly” in its external manifestation in Jerusalem was scattered abroad at the death of Stephen. Then the blessing flowed down to Samaria, and Saul of Tarsus, in the midst of his terrible career of sin and rebellion against a glorified Christ is called out to be the minister of that grace which called him, and of the assembly which he had persecuted, and of the faith which once he had destroyed! He is converted to the recognition of the union of those scattered saints with an ascended Christ. “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” This wonderful truth he ministers in Eph. 1, 2:1-10, both as it was in the counsels of God, and action to make it good. Everything in this scripture is looked upon as from God’s side -- even faith (Eph. 2:8) is the gift of God. He first shows the choice of the persons, before the foundation of the world; and as predestined to certain privileges. Individual relationship as men in Christ with God, and sons before the Father, first, fully settled. It is the highest of all our relationships; higher even than our being members of Christ’s body. To the praise of the glory of His grace they are accepted in the Beloved. Thus they have been brought by redemption, as we have seen, into the same place with Christ as man (Eph. 1:3-7). Then each has been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, having believed the Gospel of his salvation the seal of God marking us as His, as looking back at the perfection of the redemption which is past; as looking forward, an earnest of the inheritance that is before us, as joint-heirs with Christ in His headship over all things which is to come (Eph. 1:13, 14). The inheritance we have not yet actually received, nor could we till He receives it; the earnest of it we have, in the dwelling of the Holy Ghost.

The salvation, the glad tidings of which we have heard, is the deliverance or transfer of the person out of the old state and place in which we were in Adam into an entirely new place and relationship with God in Christ.

Then Christ is seen raised up as Man and gone on high, set at God’s right hand, Head over all things to the church which is His body, which is formed of Jew and Gentile, dead in sins, children of wrath, quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and seated, [not yet *with*, but] “*in*” Him in the heavenlies. Such is the revealed place of the assembly, “His body,” according to the counsels of God, and the work of God by which He effectuates them, during the interval while Christ is hidden in the heavens, and rejected by the world; and before He is *de facto* “Head over all things.” When all things are put under His feet in the age to -- come the “assembly,” in purpose and result is “his body,” the fulness of Him that dwelleth in all.”

4. The “assembly of God” is ever since, the “city of refuge” for the poor Jew -- guilty of His Messiah’s blood; and, fleeing to it, he is safe from the avenger of blood. When the death of the high priest, anointed with the holy oil, takes place; that is, in the antitype -- when the Lord Jesus finishes His present intercessional Priesthood on high; the poor Jew may then, and only then, return to the land of his inheritance (see Num. 35).

5. This is an interesting point. In Acts 3 you have nothing at all about the “assembly.” Peter goes back to the fathers of Israel, and proposes -- by the Holy Ghost come down, and in answer to the intercession of Jesus on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” -- that if they would bow and repent He would return, and the times of restitution, and all that the prophets had spoken, would ensue. Thus God was bringing in the *responsibility* of Israel; while His *purpose* was working under all for the “assembly.” The two principles of responsibility and purpose are worked out in the wisdom of God, as from the beginning.

Thus we have seen Christ -- "Head over all things," in three characters: God -- Creator of them; Son -- and appointed Heir of them; and as Man, according to Psa. 8, the Man of God's counsel and purpose. He takes it all by redemption, as by personal right. But an interval comes, while He is hidden in the heavens, and the Holy Ghost dwells on earth; during which He is seated on His Father's throne (Rev. 3:21), before He sits on His own -- as Son of man. "We see not yet all things put under him." Meanwhile, the "assembly" -- "his body" -- is formed; its members co-quickened with Him, co-raised, one with the other, and co-seated in the heavenlies in Christ.

Now if we had no more than this about the body of Christ, in scripture, we should have to accept what many, alas! have held from very early days in the history of the church, that this body is invisible, and only a thing of counsel and purpose in God's mind. This thought came from confounding the visible, external body, or house, with the true body of Christ. The not seeing what the body of Christ was, and the distinction between it and the visible assembly around, forced those who could not accept the visible corrupt thing as His body, to invent the terms "visible" and "invisible church."

But when we turn to the first epistle to the Corinthians, we find (1 Cor. 12:12-26) another thought than that in Eph. 1. There we have the body of Christ seen in God's purpose and counsel, as it will yet be manifested in glory, and those who compose it -- seated *in heavenly places in Christ*; that, which, when He is in possession of all His glory, as Son of man, in the coming age, is "his body." In 1 Cor. 12 we see the body of Christ as actually existing *upon earth*, maintained in unity by the power of the Holy Ghost. So much is the truth of its being here on earth before the mind of the apostle, that he says, in v. 26, "And whether one member suffer, *all* the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, *all* the members rejoice with it." Here *all* its members are seen on earth; this is plain, for the saints who have fallen asleep do not "suffer." It is those who are *on earth at any given time*, during the sojourn of the church on earth, who enter into the thought of this scripture; they are maintained in unity by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, who baptized them into "one body."

Here let me say, that an *individual* is not said to be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost in scripture. Not even our Lord Himself. Of the descent of the Holy Ghost on Him, as Man, in bodily shape as a dove, when He was about to enter upon His public ministry, He says Himself, "For him hath God the Father *sealed*" (John 6:27).

The baptism of the Holy Ghost is a corporate thing, forming the relationship of a body of people, as of the assembly on the day of Pentecost. The one hundred and twenty were corporately baptized of the Holy Ghost, and thus constituted "one body," not at that time, of course, for the truth of it was not revealed, for the faith of its members, but truly so before God. Afterwards, Gentiles were incorporated into this body, as in Acts 10, 11 (see especially Acts 11:15-17). Now, this baptism of the Holy Ghost having formed all those in whom He dwelt into "one body" at Pentecost, there was no need to *repeat* it from that time. Individual saints, members of the body of Christ, have died, and their spirits are with the Lord; their bodies -- the temples of the

Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19) dissolved in dust, and perhaps scattered to the four winds. They are of that body, and will be found in its unity in eternity, but have ceased to enter into account as of it here, as at present seen on earth, where it is maintained in its unity by the Spirit of God. Those who have ever since believed the glad tidings of their salvation have come into this body by the individual *sealing* of the Spirit of God; and thus it is true of believers now on earth, that "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body," because we have, by the sealing of the Spirit of God, come into that which was then formed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

How important, beloved friends, is it to see that this body of Christ is here upon earth now, as truly as on the day of Pentecost. Why? Because the Holy Ghost is here on earth, where, as to personal place, He maintains the body of Christ. All those who have died and passed away are *of* the body of Christ, as seen in Eph. 1; but it is only those alive, at this, or any given moment, on earth, who are seen and treated as the body of Christ, according to this chapter before us. So that here, at the close of nineteen centuries, the body of Christ is maintained in its unity as truly and perfectly as when it was at first constituted at the day of Pentecost. The external manifestation, alas, is gone; but the Holy Ghost, who came down and constituted it first, is here still; and the body of Christ is maintained, as then, by His presence and power.

Now, when we come to 1 Cor. 12:27, we find that Paul applies this truth to the assembly at Corinth: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." That is, in principle, as gathered together at Corinth, they were the body of Christ in Corinth: not, of course, separating them from the whole body here below, but as part of it, and according to the principle of their constitution; and so true of the whole complement of the saints in any other given place.

When we read the closing verses (1 Cor. 12:28-31), another and important thought comes in. He *changes* the language now from "*body*" to "*assembly*." In Eph. 1 we remember that "assembly" and "body" are used as *interchangeable* terms. Because the thing is there seen in its result, and according to the purpose of God. In 1 Corinthians he speaks of the "assembly," and speaks of the "body"; treating one *practically* and in *principle* as the other, because the truth of the "body" was to be worked out and expressed in the "assembly," but he does not use the words interchangeably. This is very striking, and shows the wisdom of God's Spirit in the choice of His words.

It draws forth the adoration of the heart of the renewed man, those wondrous touches of wisdom in the word of God. In what is only a stumbling-block at times to unbelief, faith finds a mine of divine wisdom and beauty. The Lord be praised for the opened eye to behold and profit by His words!

It is in this epistle that we find the responsibility of man coming in, and warnings to those who have Christ's name on them, as well as to those who were builders after the apostles (see 1 Cor. 3). Of this we shall speak in full on another occasion, as the Lord may direct. In these closing verses, then, of 1 Cor. 12, we find, after He has unfolded the body, as seen on earth, and spoken of the assembly in Corinth as being in principle the body, he then shows various members of the body of Christ,

gifts and the like, *set in the assembly*: members of the body, set in the assembly -- of course, looking at the latter, as the whole corporate profession of Christianity on earth. But while the "body" is spoken of, and the "assembly" is spoken of, one is not *said* to be the other (Eph. 1:22, 23), although treated as *practically* identified here below. It was the ruin of the assembly, when this ceased to be so.

This gives room for the working out in full result of the grace and work of God, in the truth and fact of the church as built by Him; while leaving room for man's responsibility to come in, and warnings to be given as needed here below, as to the responsible church built by man.

In 1 Cor. 10:16, 17, we have the Lord's table given us to be the symbol of the unity of this body of Christ upon earth, in partaking of the "one loaf." "For we being many, are one loaf, one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf."

We have seen then, I trust, dear friends, the body of Christ in its *two-fold* presentation, that is, first, as formed of saints seated in the heavenlies in Christ according to the purpose of God in eternity and His work in time, which gives it a wholly heavenly character. Secondly, upon earth maintained in unity by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the present interval, the faith of which is expressed in partaking of the "one loaf" in the Lord's supper. I turn now to another aspect of the church, as the "House or habitation of God" here below. This will come out as a separate subject.

Meanwhile, may the Lord bless His people fully. May each one's eye be single, that the whole body may be full of light, and that the truths we have sought to bring before them in some little measure, may, with all their sanctifying power, form our souls that He may be glorified, and that we may grow up to Him in all things, for His name's sake. *Amen.*

Note. It is of the deepest importance to apprehend that the body of Christ, as seen on earth, during the interval while Christ is hidden in the heavens, is only composed of those saints who at this moment are alive on earth. There is one scripture (Eph. 1:22) which looks at it in purpose and result as the entire gathering out of the saints from Pentecost till the Lord's coming for the saints. The others treat it as the complement of saints here, where, as to personal place, the Holy Ghost is, who constitutes, by His presence in the members, "one body."

In Rom. 12 it is seen in the activities of its members on earth.

In 1 Cor. 12 it is so fully seen on earth that "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." Those *here* are only those who are in the place of suffering; and gifts are not in heaven.

In Eph. 4 the ascended Christ has given gifts to His body, for the perfecting of the saints, and gathering and edification of *the body* as also seen on earth: for such ministry and edification is not in heaven but *here*; where it is said of it, "From which the *whole body* fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth," &c.

The apostles saw that before their eyes on earth which was the body. They never contemplated the church remaining here for long, but looked for the coming of the Lord. He did tarry, in

long-suffering love. Still the thing which is here before our eyes is the body, as before theirs. Just as the British army is the British army now, that is, the effective fighting men; and it was the British army at Waterloo also; and probably not a soldier remains in it that was in it then. They have, like the saints who have died, passed out into the reserve, or freedom from service, as Paul and the saints since then; and while all *of it*, do not enter into the count of the body as seen of God on earth to-day. They will be eventually, according to Eph. 1 the body when Christ is *de facto* Head over all things, and meanwhile, I am sure, suffer loss of no privileges whatever which they enjoyed when here.

Lecture 2:

“The House of God, Which Is The Assembly of the Living God.”

I come now, dear friends, to another side of the subject altogether -- that of the “house of God.” After we pass Eph. 1, we leave that portion of the Epistle which is occupied strictly with the purposes and counsels of God. -- “The purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” This sentence characterizes Eph. 1. Eph. 2 gives us generally His work in time to accomplish them; and from v. 11 we pass to the actually formed subsisting assembly on earth.

First he describes the condition of the Gentiles --

aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now, in Christ Jesus, ye who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.

Here Paul thinks of Gentiles and Jews -- both brought nigh to God, “*in Christ*,” by His blood. This could not be even during His lifetime, for none could be “*in Christ*” then. He sheds His blood -- lays down His life -- rises, and ascends on high, “our peace,” having borne the wrath, and reconciled both to God in one body by His cross, having slain the enmity thereby: preaching peace to those “afar off” -- the technical expression as to a Gentile -- and to the Jew, who was dispensationally “nigh.” Thus “we have access through Jesus (not “*in Christ*” as before) by one Spirit to the Father.” You notice that the language here is essentially different to the early part of Eph. Here are two sets of people brought in one body -- on one platform -- having access by one Spirit -- through Jesus (δι’ αὐτοῦ) to the Father (not ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, for here comes in mediation). Then we come to v. 19;

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, (πᾶσα ἡ οἰκοδομή) fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.

You will recall that in Matt. 16, the Lord said to Peter, when He had confessed Him to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” that the Father had revealed to Peter this truth as to the person of the Lord; and how the Lord tells Peter something about His

assembly, and then about himself. “And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He does not here tell what this assembly would be; but marks its still further construction and the foundation upon which it would stand. This foundation was the person of Christ as risen -- Son of the living God as confessed by Peter’s faith, just what we have in Eph. 2:20).⁶ The apostles and prophets doctrinally, were laid as the foundation and Jesus Christ personally, the chief corner stone. “The gates of hades” was the power of death wielded by Satan by the judgment of God; Christ had entered His dark domain, and broken asunder its bars, leading captivity captive, and had been proved Son of God in power, by resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:4). Death had prevailed over man once innocent, now fallen. Christ had annulled its power, and risen above it, “Son of the living God.” This would be the foundation of the assembly which He was about to build.

This evening I wish to distinguish, in some measure, two things which *are* distinguished very clearly in scripture, that is, the “assembly” which Christ builds by the Holy Ghost come down, according to Matt. 16, and into which no false material can enter;

and the assembly in which man has his responsible place as builder, into which “wood, hay, and stubble” enter⁷ -- in

6. The confession “Son of the living God” is so plainly the foundation of the church, as to need but few words. “Hades gates” is put in contrast to “Son of the living God,” who had gone down into the stronghold of death -- wielded by Satan’s power by the judgment of God (Heb. 2:14). He came up from that dark domain, bursting the bars of death, triumphing over it. Death had triumphed over an innocent Adam, and a fallen one. It “reigned from Adam to Moses.” It had triumphed over Israel under law. Now Jesus comes, and goes down into it, and conquers it, not by intercepting, but by defeating it. “Hades gates” could not prevail against what He would now build on that imperishable foundation, Himself in risen power -- “Son of the living God.” “Declared Son of God in power by resurrection of the dead” (Rom. 1:4). How well did Peter know its meaning when he said, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house,” &c. (1 Pet. 2). He had no thought here of the assembly being built on himself!

7. Men have confused the two wholly; attributing to the external church in which man builds immunity from the power of evil and judgment, which was only promised to the true church which Christ builds. “The gates of hades shall not prevail against it” is the promise to the church which *Christ* builds; not to (continued...)

other words, the house of God, where the Holy Ghost dwells.

When Christ builds, He does not commit it to man at all, and no responsibility of man comes in. He dies and rises again, and that which He builds on the imperishable foundation of faith in His person in resurrection is secured for ever! This building is brought before us in Eph. 2:20, 21 -- that which Christ builds, and which "*fitly framed together*" -- mark those words strongly -- "groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." This temple was begun when the Holy Ghost descended from heaven, and "groweth" till all is in glory, to the very end of the church's earthly sojourn, it is not yet complete. Now you will not find those words, "fitly framed together," when that which man builds comes before us.

But mark the difference between the temple of v. 21, and what you find in the last verse; "In whom ye also are built together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit." First he looks in v. 21, on the progressive work -- the *whole* temple, according to the mind and purpose of God to be His sanctuary, the home of the brightest manifestation of His glory for ever; and secondly (v. 22), he looks at the *present* aspect of the assembly, at this moment, an habitation, or dwelling-place of God by the Spirit, on earth -- in other words, the "house of God."

Now in this last verse we see that while he gives us the normal thought of the house or habitation of God, on earth in its existence here during the present interval, he does not say *who* is the builder. So that while this last verse gives you the normal thought of the house of God, as at Pentecost, or ever since, at any given moment, he leaves room for the bringing in of man's responsibility, and does not name the builder, as we shall see.

Let us now turn to the first epistle to the Corinthians, where we find that, speaking generally, the order of the house of God is the thought in the mind of the Spirit.

Let me say here, that God coming down and dwelling in something on earth is a very different thought from that which we saw in the early part of Ephesians. There it was God quickening members, and raising them up and uniting them to Christ in glory. In that thought we saw Christ, as Head of His body, seated in heavenly places, and His body united to Him in the same sphere. But in this truth of a "habitation of God," there is no thought of head, or body, or union at all. Of your body you say, it is myself -- as the Lord to Saul, "Why persecuted thou me?" Of my house I say, I dwell in it; but its walls are not united to me. This makes the two thoughts as distinct as possible; and you find in scripture the word "assembly" is sometimes used for the true body of Christ in purpose and result, as we have seen; and also, for the professing body, or house where the Holy Ghost dwells.

When the house or habitation of God was first constituted, at the day of Pentecost, by the descent of the Holy Ghost, all those of which it was composed were true believers. The Holy Ghost "sat upon each of them," and "filled all the house," thus

fulfilling the Lord's promise in John 14:17 (which read, "He shall dwell with you, and shall be in you"). The Holy Ghost was now *in* them, and *with* them; and collectively they were God's house on earth.

Man then began to carry on this work, and Peter receives by baptism⁸ into this house the three thousand Jews, &c., and so the house of God went on. They came in to partake of the privileges of that sphere, to which God had now confined His ordinary operations on earth. Soon those came in who were merely taking up the profession of Christianity (Simon the sorcerer, and the like), and the house began to enlarge its proportions beyond the limits of those who were really Christ's. Still the Holy Ghost was there, and He remains still, though the house has been so enlarged as to embrace a great baptized Christendom.

But to return to 1 Cor. 1:1, 2. In these verses you get the most comprehensive of all the addresses of the Epistles in the NT. No one can escape the breadth of the thought and persons embraced there. It addresses the assembly of God at Corinth, and is so framed that at no time can any one professing the Lord's name evade its responsibility. There is this remarkable difference between it and that to the Ephesians. In the Ephesians he calls them "saints and faithful"; or, as the word would convey, "believers" (πιστοῖς): "To the saints which are in Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." In Corinthians he says, "Unto the assembly of God which is at Corinth, to them which are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, *with all that in every place* call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." Nothing could be more comprehensive. But what says v. 9? "*God is faithful!*" that is the point here, for there are responsibility and warnings and the like. In Ephesians he calls *them* "saints" and "faithful"; in Corinthians he calls them "saints," but does not add the word faithful, but says *God* is so.

We have, therefore, before us a most comprehensive thought; and let me remark that, in itself, "calling upon the name of the Lord" in scripture, is merely profession. To be valid, of course, there must be life in our souls; but it is no more than this. A man might call on the Lord's name to dishonor it. See the people who did many wonderful works in Matt. 7:21-23, and said, "Lord, Lord"; He says of them, "I never knew you." This is very solemn.

When we turn to the third chapter of this Epistle we find instruction before us, founded on the responsibility of those professing Christ's name, and that of those who build the house

8. That baptism was the mode of admission or reception to it is clear from the fact that those who were constituted the house by the descent of the Holy Ghost, that is, the twelve apostles, and the company of disciples who were with them, were never baptized at all (I speak now not of John's baptism, but of Christian baptism). There was no one to baptize or receive them. They were already the house, by the descent of the Holy Ghost, and could not be brought in. Then, those who were received after Peter had addressed them had to pass into this new ground, and all the privileges belonging thereto, through baptism (Acts 2:37-47). They came into the house of God in order to receive, or "for (εἰς) remission of sins"; and besides, "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." They had neither yet; and baptism of water was the door of entrance for those who were being received. I may here remark that baptism is the sign of what one is about to receive: not of what one has received already. The baptism of the Holy Ghost, on the other hand, constitutes the body of Christ.

(...continued)

that which *man* builds (1 Cor. 3).

ministerially, here below.

For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God, which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall he made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man a work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,⁹ and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (1 Cor. 3:9-17).

In this scripture, dear friends, we have the other thought of the "house," or "temple of God." In Ephesians it was that building which is "fitly framed together." Here you will get no such words. You have Paul, the wise master builder, commencing the building -- laying the foundation in his doctrines and ministry. Then others follow. It is the question of ministerial labor and its results; "work," not works. Some have confounded this with the "works" of Christians; but it is "work," that for which those who have carried it on will have to answer to God. The teaching brought in souls according to its character, into the responsible house "God's building," responsibly before the world. It has been remarked that here we find three characters of builders engaged in the work. The good builder, who himself is saved, and whose work will stand (v. 14). Then the man who builds badly, himself saved, it is true, but his work burned up (v. 15). Thirdly, a bad builder -- a heretic -- whose work is not only burnt up, but he himself is also lost. That is the house, or temple of God, carried on by man's responsibility. Christ carries on *His* work all through, into which no responsibility of man enters, but there is that which is committed to the responsibility of *man's* hands, and which is thus spoken of.

Like all that has ever been committed to man, alas what a ruin it has become. This pressed upon the spirit of Paul, as he tells us "the mystery of lawlessness" was already at work, and the man of sin would arise (2 Thess. 2). It raised the warning voice of John, that the Antichrist would come, and even then there were many antichrists, "whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). Jude, too, and Peter add their evidence of the state of things that would be developed till judgment cleared the scene.

I will turn now to a word in the ninth chapter of this same

9. In Eph. 2:21, it is said to be a temple in *process* of building. Here, in 1 Cor. 3, it is said to be a temple *already*, as built of man, but ostensibly before the world, and responsibly "God's building." "Ye are the temple of God"; that is, the saints collectively. Unlike 1 Cor. 6:19, where it is your *body* which is said to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, as dwelling in the individual. It is in view of "God's building" being His *temple*, that the defilement of it becomes so serious, as in v. 17. Hence the added thought of the temple.

epistle for a moment, before passing on to the remarkable warnings of 1 Cor. 10. I allude to that in the last verse -- "castaway." Many have shrunk from this word in its full force, as utterly "reprobate," finding the apostle Paul using it of himself; and who so conscious of the fulness of redemption -- who so certain that the Paradise he had tasted of (2 Cor. 12) was to be his home for ever? He says,

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a *castaway* (ἀδοκιμός) {1 Cor. 9:27}.

He looks at himself as running in a race, responsibly here below, and, although he runs in no uncertainty of the final issue, he feels conscious that it is no imaginary foe with which he has to contend. He did not fight as "one who beat the air," that is, as if a fancied enemy was before him. But with all the energy of one who knew the terrible foe which he bore about in himself -- the "flesh" for which the Son of God had to endure the judgment of God in infinite suffering -- he kept under his body and led it captive, lest preaching to others, he himself might be a castaway. First a good Christian, then a good preacher! It does *not* suppose a child of God, yet to become a castaway. It does. suppose the possibility, of a *preacher* being lost!

He is putting a case of the most solemn character, needed because of the prominence given at Corinth to gift in which power was displayed, and he transfers it to himself for the sake of others; as he had said in an earlier part of the epistle, "These things have I transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes" (1 Cor. 4).

We find the word here translated "castaway" used eight times in the NT, and each time in the fullest force of the word as lost! In the passage we have touched upon. In Rom. 1:28, as to the heathen; "God gave them over to a *reprobate* (ἀδόκιμος) mind." In 2 Cor. 13:5, 6, 7; three times translated as "*reprobates*." In Titus 1:16; the unbeliever is "unto every good work *reprobate*." In 2 Tim. 3:8, the Jannes and Jambres resisters of the truth are "men of corrupt minds, *reprobate* concerning the faith." And in Heb. 6:6, "that which beareth thorns and briars is *rejected*, and nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." No one could have a second thought as to these passages; and, besides, Paul never was disapproved or castaway in his ministry; never was his ministry so wondrously blessed, or used of God, as when from the prison in Rome came forth many of the scriptures of God.

Now when we come, to 1 Cor. 10, we find he applies this principle of ch. 9 to others who might enjoy privileges such as those of the house of God, and rest in carnal security in its ordinances, without having part in the divine nature. Under the figure of "the things which happened" to Israel in the desert, using those incidents as types, and as "written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages are come," he warns against resting in a mere outward profession such as was to be found in the responsible house as the result of man's failure in building.

Persons might enjoy an ordinancial relationship with Christ (that is, by baptism and the Lord's supper) as constituting the

external church built by man, and after all be lost! They were to be warned by what happened to Israel, with many of whom God was not well pleased, and who were overthrown in the wilderness. The order in which he puts together these incidents in their wilderness history is truly worthy of our notice. How often it may have appeared to us as a number of incidents strung together, without apparent connection or order, except the fact of their being striking moments in the wanderings of this stiff-necked people.

For ¹⁰ (γάρ) 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 to 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 God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our ensamples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted {1 Cor. 10:1-6}.

Here, we are shown that, although they all partook in common of these privileges as associated under the leadership of Moses, their privileged position did not secure them. In the passage the historical incidents are given us symbolically, and put together in a *moral* order, quite away from the *historic* order, in which they occurred; and in them we find set forth in principle what the history of the professing church has been, and will be until her end.

In 1 Cor. 10:6 he begins by what happened some two years after they left Egypt. If we examine Num. 11 we find that at that solemn juncture in their history, they loathed the pure manna with which the Lord had fed them from day to day; "There is nothing but this manna before our eyes": and lusted for the flesh-pots of Egypt again. This was, in the antitype, the first sign of departure of the church from Christ. And, oh, what a solemn moment it is for the soul when Christ is not found to be enough for it when the heart cries out for something more than His blessed person! How it turns to some vanity, or some folly or sin, some idol of its own device, to fill up the void in the heart that desires something more; something to satisfy the cravings of the flesh! What was this but the history of the, departure of the church from her first love to Christ! "Thou hast left thy first love," is the sad and solemn plaint of His heart (Rev. 2:4), and no activity could make up for this.

Now the apostle turns to another marked occasion (1 Cor. 10:7) which happened before they left Mount Sinai. When Moses was in the mount, receiving the law from Jehovah, Aaron and the children of Israel made the golden calf, and danced round the idol. Their forefather Abraham, as they themselves also, had been called out of a world of idolatry to be the witness of the one true God against all the gods of the nations. The first thing they do is to fall back into that out of which they had been called. They must have something for the eye to rest upon; for Moses had gone up the mountain of Sinai,

they had lost sight of him; and Aaron made them this golden calf, and coupled the name of Jehovah with "a calf that eateth hay." "These be thy gods, O Israel": "To-morrow is a feast to Jehovah."

So with the church. She was called out of the world to walk in the Spirit, and the first thing she does is to sink back to walk in the flesh once more. Instead of walking by faith, and waiting for an absent Lord, she desires something her eye can rest upon, something more tangible than a glorified but unseen Christ, known by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven; and, the moment she does so, fornication with the world follows.

This comes out in the next verse (1 Cor:10:8). There we get an incident which happened about the close of the fortieth year (Num. 25). "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them also committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." Illicit intercourse with the world follows. This is what is so strikingly mentioned in the message to Pergamos in Rev. 2:13, when the church had shaken hands with the world, so to speak. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is." The church "espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2), had given herself to another. The result is, Christ is tempted. "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents" (1 Cor. 10:9). This is told of Israel in Num. 21.

Then comes the final one, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1 Cor. 10:10). This we find in Num. 14. The solemn moment came when "All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron." "And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." Here was the complete giving up of the Lord and His servants, and that at the moment when those faithful men "men of another spirit" were exhorting them to go up and possess the land. They despised the pleasant land, and propose to make a captain and return into the land of slavery once more; and they "were destroyed of the destroyer."

Thus, from what seems merely a number of incidents in their history, put together without any apparent {chronological} order, we find the most comprehensive moral picture of the history of the professing church. It begins with finding an unseen Christ insufficient, and the craving for something which would satisfy sight and sense (1 Cor. 10:6). Then idolatry follows, with what is set up to fill the eye of those who could not walk by faith, and wait for this absent one (1 Cor. 10:7). The world can now walk with the church, for she has left the ground of faith, and has gone back to that which the eye can see, and fornication between the world and the church is the result (1 Cor. 10:8). This is "provoking the Lord to jealousy"-- "tempting Christ" (1 Cor. 10:9). And it ends in the giving up of the heavenly hope, and proposing to make a captain, and return to man and man's estate once more!

In other words, it began with a *calf*-- that is, something, no matter what, set up, which the senses can rest upon, when Christ is not enough; and ends with a *captain*, that is, man is put in the place of Christ. The departure from first love gave place to the working of the "mystery of iniquity"; that is, flesh

10. This is the correct reading. It connects the chapter with the closing verses of ch. 9. The dividing of the chapters has broken the order of the subjects in them.

in man getting a place in the things of God. The story ends with an Antichrist, when the profession of Christianity is abandoned, and thus the “falling away” or apostasy comes, (2 Thess. 2) and the Antichrist or man of sin!

How solemn is this history, beloved friends! How wise, how merciful is our God, to warn us and tell us what is coming, we know not how soon! How needful to see to it that we are not resting in privileges merely, but that our souls have had to do with the living God, who of His own will has begotten us by the word of truth!

Now, all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but *God is faithful*, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:11-13.)

Now I turn to a few other passages of the New Testament, still to bring before you this thought of the house of God.

In Philippians you will find that Paul recognizes how things had gone astray. At the first moment of the church’s history, the body of Christ and the house of God were co-extensive, that is, they were composed of the same individuals (Acts 2). But when men began to build, the house enlarged its proportions disproportionately to the body. There was a mass of material not introduced by the Lord; but *the Holy Ghost did not leave the house*. On the other hand, the Holy Ghost constituted and maintained in its true unity the body of Christ; uniting the members to Christ in glory. The two thoughts are quite distinct: the *house*, and the *body*. In the thought of the house you lose individuality, but you do not get either head, body, or union. The body is united to its head in glory. It is the double relationship of the church; to God as His dwelling place, to Christ as His body.

In Phil. 2:21 we find how things were failing, and those who professed Christianity were “carnal,” and walking “as men.” “For all seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ.” Again, look at the third chapter.

Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule; let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things (Phil. 3:15-19).

You will note here how the apostle’s wisdom detects three distinct states of soul in the professing church:

1. Those “perfect,” or full grown, that is, having the full sense of a Christian’s place as dead and risen with Christ, and running on like Paul, towards the glory, and likeness to a glorified Christ.
2. Those who had not fully attained in the soul’s

consciousness to this true normal condition of the Christian, as apprehended for the glory by Christ; but who were to walk up to what they had, and God would give them more; and,

3. Those who, under the name of Christ, were glorying in their shame, in that flesh for which Christ had been put to shame on the cross (the cross on earth answering to heavenly glory on high). These were mere professors, whose end would be utter destruction.

And here I would draw attention to the strikingly analogous state of things, in this threefold state, to that of Israel when we come to the close of the Book of Joshua. There Joshua dies; and in Philippians Paul is in prison at Rome, and the church of God has lost the devoted services of the great apostle. Joshua had put two and a half tribes in possession of their portion in the land of promise, namely, Judah (Josh. 15:1, &c.), Ephraim (Josh. 16:5, &c.), and half Manasseh (Josh. 17:1, &c.). Two and a half tribes would not go in and possess the land that he divided. They did not go back to Egypt, nor would they go into the land, but took an intermediate place outside the borders of the Lord’s possession (namely, Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh; see Josh. 1:12, &c.; 13:15, &c.). And lastly, seven tribes were in the land, but were not put in possession of their inheritance. (See Josh. 18:2, 3.) Thus the land was conquered, but not possessed. They were thus left to “work out their own salvation,” so to say, from the enemy; but, alas! “all sought their own, and they sank to the condition seen in the book of Judges after Joshua’s death.

Those “perfect,” answer in the analogy to the two and a half tribes in possession.

Those who had “not attained,” to the seven tribes in the land who had not yet possessed; and,

The, two and a half tribes to those who, under the profession of Christianity, were enemies to the cross of Christ. They did not abandon Christianity, as those did not give up their title to be termed “of Israel”; but refused their true, calling, gloried in their shame, minding earthly things, and so were the first to fall into the hands of the enemy, and give him an entrance to the professing church.

I have no doubt that these three states are thus found till the end in the professing church.

If we pass on now to 1 Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy as to how one ought to behave oneself “in the house of God, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

The church is looked upon as the depository of the truth; and so responsible to hold it up as the pillar and support of it. “The truth” is Christ Himself. If He were here He would not want a pillar and ground of the truth. But He is absent and “the mystery of godliness” is committed to her. “The mystery of iniquity” is in contrast to this, and is Satan’s effort through the flesh in man to frustrate the testimony of Christianity, which is founded on the end of the first man, and a last Adam, before God. Then you have (1 Tim. 3:16) the whole course of Christ from the glory; God come down and “manifested in flesh”;

presenting all He ever did as man, in the power of the Holy Ghost, even as He was declared Son of God in power by resurrection according to the Spirit of holiness, thus “justified by the Spirit.” “Seen of angels,” most blessed of creatures, sustained of God unfallen, they beheld their God for the first time when He became a babe, and they burst open the heavens, and in unselfish praises sang of God’s good pleasure in men (Luke 2). “Preached unto the Gentiles”; this was the new thing in Christianity, there was no preaching in the Old Testament: Judaism was not characterized by preaching. “Believed on in the world”; an object of faith in it and not merely among Jews: and then “received up in glory.” Thus you get the whole testimony of Christ which was committed to the church; God come down in love, passing through His course here; and finally, man received up in glory.

Hence, in 1 Timothy, we get external order before men, as the great subject in hand, in the house of God here below.

So in 2 Timothy, ¹¹ things had got into deeper disorder than ever; and, once ruined, there was no repairing the ruin. It is not God’s way to restore a fallen state, but to bring in a better when His purposes allow of it; and meanwhile, the faithful have their path clearly defined through a ruined state of things.

Nevertheless [that is, although evil had come in as a flood] the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

Here we discover what things had come to in man’s hands. He does not call it The great house, but “A great house.” It is an analogous thought; for responsibly it is still the house of God, where the Holy Ghost dwells (1 Cor. 3). God’s foundation had not changed, and there was a seal, having on one side an inscription, which showed the privileges of all who were His -- the Lord knew them; and on the other, that which marked their responsibility --

Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

One cannot leave the house while God lingers in it in long-suffering grace, but let him clear himself from all that was false and untrue. There were in it vessels to dishonor,¹² as well as of honor.

Now, if we compare the opening verses of 2 Tim. 3 with the closing verses of Rom. 1, we find how that, under the name of Christ, all the horrible wickedness of the heathen world has

been revived. The words used by Paul to describe the heathen are almost word for word the same as those used to describe the professors of Christianity in this chapter. How deeply solemn; and worse too, because done under the name of Christ (cp. Rom. 1:29-32 with 2 Tim. 3:2-5).

Now we come to the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is very true that in it we do not find that the writer is teaching or treating of the church of God, as such. He has another subject in hand. Still, underlying his teaching is the thought of the house of God, where the Holy Ghost dwells. Those who have professed Christianity, and have taken on them the name of Christ, are seen in their responsible place, traveling through the wilderness. I am about to examine two passages, both of which have troubled godly souls, who have not yet enjoyed thorough, perfect peace with God. One can speak for another in this. I allude to the sixth and tenth chapters.

In the former we read,

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put him to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).

I will examine each sentence in these verses separately; and I may remark, in passing, that the essential difference between these verses and those in Heb. 10 is, that in ch. 6 we have at length, the privileges to be enjoyed by all who profess Christianity consequent on the exaltation of Messiah to the right hand of God, after having accomplished the work of redemption, and the consequent presence of the Holy Ghost on earth; while in Heb. 10 we find rather the excellency of a sacrifice, so perfect that it left nothing to be added to it. It was so absolute in its value that it left no room for another. In ch. 6, the Holy Ghost is prominent; in ch. 10, the sacrifice of Christ.

“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened.” If we turn to John 1:9 we find the words, “That was the true light, which *lighteth* every man that cometh into the world.” Christ was this true light. Just as the sun shining at noon-day; if a man does not open his eyes to see the sun, it is of very little use to him as light. Now you find that the same word is in each sentence. In Heb. 6, “*enlightened*” is rendered “*lighteth*” in John 1 (φωτίζω). It means the external enlightenment of the truth of Christianity shining on the heart and conscience. Souls might thus be “shined upon,” or enlightened, without having life at all. Far different is the thought of Paul when he speaks of God having shined into his heart, “for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). That was a real work in his soul. “Enlightened” means, then, the external presentation of the truths of revelation to the soul, with the light they bring. John 1:9 makes this clear from the use of the same word. For although Christ came into the world shining as a light for every man, every man did not use the light. To use it were to be saved.

Again, “And have tasted of the heavenly gift.” Here we have what was in contrast to the law and even that spoken by

11. It has been remarked that 1 Timothy contains the ordering of things when the house of God was in order; and 2 Timothy, the path of the saint when all was in disorder.

12. This word does not refer to degrees of honor, as some have supposed. It may be rendered “disgrace,” “ignominy,” “infamy,” &c.; anything false or untrue.

the Messiah on earth. He now spoke from heaven (Heb. 12:24); and the gift (for it was a gift that was now presented to men, instead of a demand being made upon them as under the law) was now fully from that source, even as announced here below. How many, during the ministry of the Lord on earth, had tasted of the blessedness of His gracious words, and with hearts moved to say, as they heard Him, "Never man spake like this man!" and who turned back and walked no more with Him, as the character of the path in which He has to be followed began to dawn upon them. *Tasting* of the heavenly gift (it now came from heaven) is not eating His flesh, and drinking His blood, and so vitally receiving it in the heart.

"And were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." All who profess the name of Christ partake of the Holy Ghost in the sense spoken here. The word is used for external *participation in privilege*, without necessarily the *possession* of it. The Holy Ghost having come down from heaven, charged with this heavenly gift, to dwell in the house of God, all who have been received into that house have a common interest in His presence; quite another thing if they used the blessing. It is not at all the same thought as being born of the Spirit of God, or being possessors of the Holy Ghost, who has been given us as a seal, and who dwells in our bodies as believers.¹³

Thus all who are in the house of God, confessing and hearing the name of Christ, are partakers (μέτοχοι) of the Holy Ghost, who dwells there. All have an opportunity of participating in the blessing which He imparts, and may even have been made vessels of His power -- a totally different thing from communion in the divine nature and His indwelling as the power of the realization of it.

Perhaps, too, they have "tasted the good word of God" thus, and remained the same people, unchanged. How often do we see this! Souls to all appearance seeming to receive the glad tidings with joy and brightness, and have no root in themselves, and {en}dure for a time, but when temptation arises, because of the word they are offended. Now, I believe that when a soul does really receive the word in his conscience, he never does

13. The word used to express this external partakership in privilege (μέτοχος) is found (with the verb, &c.) in the NT in *Hebrews* and *1 Corinthians*; and in one other passage which serves as a key to its usage. I refer to Luke 5:7-10. Nothing can explain this more simply to any soul than the use of it by Luke in describing the fishing scene in this chapter.

Simon had launched his ship out into the deep at the Lord's command. The Lord had wrought the miracle, and they had enclosed the great multitude of fishes; and beckoning to (τοῖς μέτοχοις) their partners, . . . which were in the other ship; they came and filled both the ships, so that they "began to sink." The fishermen in the *other ship* had a common right and privilege with Peter and the others, as fishers in the lake of Gennesaret. "Partners" is here expressed by μέτοκοι. But when we come to v. 10, we find, "So was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon" in the same ship. Here we find a different word used (κοινωνοῦ) to express real partnership in the same boat, in contrast to common rights with all the other fishermen in the lake.

To put a case. Suppose a guild of merchants, all of whom have a common interest in the privileges of the guild. Some two or three are partners in, and own, a flourishing concern. All who are of the guild have these common interests, and would be μέτοκοι but the partners in the special concern would be κοινωνοί.

receive it with *joy* at the first. It makes a soul serious rather than joyful, though it leads to everlasting joy.

And the powers of the "world to come," or "coming age." This will be the millennial age, which is characterized by Satan being bound, and men's diseases cured. The testimony to that age were the miracles which the Lord Himself performed, as well as His bestowing power on His disciples to perform them. How many -- nay, how few of those thus wrought upon had real life in their souls? We learn from 1 Cor. 13 the vast difference between any amount of power, and the possession of the divine nature which is love.

Thus you see, dear friends, that heaven had expended all its treasures of grace and blessing, consequent on the exaltation of Christ after His atoning work; giving the presence of the Holy Ghost, and all these privileges, as characteristic of the new position as we have seen. If souls turned away thus from the Holy Ghost, as some have, done, and the whole profession of Christianity is rapidly doing the same, what could be done? They endorsed the sin of their nation (those Hebrews) and crucified *for themselves* the Son of God.¹⁴ The nation had done so, and said, "His blood be on us." Some had escaped to the city of refuge -- the church was such to the blood-guilty Jew -- but there was the danger of abandoning it, and thus the avenger of blood would overtake them, and they would not escape. While in one closing verse as he turns to the reality that was manifested to be among them (v. 9) we learn that all these things of vv. 4, 5, might be there, without the possession of salvation.

I see a striking parallel between the law of the cities of refuge (Num. 35) and this, chapter (Heb. 6) which I do not think had been before noticed. Like the church, the city of refuge was for the Israelite, and the stranger and sojourner amongst them. There were two characters of guilt mentioned and dealt with; namely, that of the premeditated murderer, and that of him who slew another suddenly without enmity in time past. These two were differently dealt with. The murderer was to be given up -- his sin would find him out, even in the city of refuge. The unpremeditated slayer of blood was safe. He was to flee there, and remain there, till the death of the high priest who had been anointed with the holy oil: then he might return to the land of his inheritance.

Now, when we examine Heb. 6, we find a solemn and beautiful analogy. The church had become the city of refuge for the poor blood-guilty Jew. Peter invites them, at Pentecost, to judge themselves for the deed, and flee; saving themselves from the "untoward generation" (Acts 2). All would go on thus till scrutiny took place according to God (cp. Matt. 22:1-14). Then, no amount of privileges would avail where there was no life in the soul, and at the same time the strongest "consolation" to those who had "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before" them (Heb. 6:18), confirmed by the promise, and the oath of God!

14. The word "afresh" in the English Bible is not needed, and should not be there.

This little sentence, “fled for refuge,” so links the thought of the type with the antitype, as now known to faith -- this, too, in an epistle where the High Priesthood of Christ is so much the subject, and in its present exercise, within the holiest. As Christians, we have to do with Him as a priest *gone in!* -- “the forerunner for us,” making the sanctuary of God the present refuge of our hearts; the Jew will have to do with Him as a priest *come out!* This He never does in Hebrews; there is only a *hope* that He will do so (Heb. 9:28, &c.). Accordingly, when He leaves the present exercise of His priesthood as intercessional, and comes forth to exercise it after its true order -- royal, or Melchisedechial -- the history of the church as in her sojourn here will be past; and Israel as a nation (that is, the true remnant of them in that day) will return to the land of their possession. In the type, it was at the death of the High Priest; in the antitype, it is Christ ceasing to carry on His priesthood after the present character of its exercise on high, and entering upon its character as Melchisedec.

You find in this chapter, as has been remarked, the highest character of Christian privilege *short* of life, and, what is so touching, in the close of it, -- the feeblest expression of true faith found in the NT -- that of a man pressed for his life, and “fleeing for refuge to lay hold!” God thus acknowledges the faintest expression of faith, and encourages it with the “strong consolation” of the word and oath of God, at the same time giving the most solemn warnings as to profession and participation in privileges, where there was no life. Life, where it existed, was expressing itself by works and labor of love -- could be known by its fruit as ever.

Now, I turn, beloved friends, in the close of this subject, to the 2 Thess. 2, where you find, in v. 3, the apostasy, or giving up of the profession of Christianity *in toto*, and the revelation of the “man of sin.”

He shows that while the mystery of lawlessness works, God was still restraining the manifestation of the “lawless one.” The apostasy, or “falling away,” will not be, as long as true Christians are in the scene, and as long as the Holy Ghost dwells here to maintain the body of Christ. Then, when the hindrance is removed, the abandonment of Christianity comes. An Antichrist, or man of sin, is then revealed, who would sit in the temple of God. Antichrist “denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22), that is, the revelation of the Father by the Son, known to our souls by the Holy Ghost; or, in other words, the revelation of Christianity. This is at the time of the apostasy. I could not say there is the apostasy now, (or as long as true saints are in the scene, and the Holy Ghost here, although the principle’s of it may be at work, and many may be apostates. But the whole professing church has not yet reached the apostasy.

I have endeavored to lay before you seven points in these two lectures.

1. First of all, the assembly, which is the body of Christ, as seen in heavenly places, in the counsels of God, and in result, when Christ is *de facto* “Head over all things,” according to Eph. 1:18-22; and composed of all saints from the day of Pentecost until the taking of it to glory.

2. The body of Christ as maintained in unity on earth by the power of the Holy Ghost, and composed only of those who are alive upon earth at any given moment where as to personal place, the Holy Ghost is, and having for the symbol of its external unity the partaking of “one loaf,” as in 1 Cor. 10 - 12, by the members set in the assembly.

3. A holy temple in the Lord, growing under His hand -- “fitly framed together” -- silently and without flaw, until the last stone is placed on it in the glory (Matt. 16; Eph. 2:21). No responsibility of man enters here.

4. The house as a habitation of God by the Spirit on earth, in its normal condition (Eph. 2:22). Here it does not state who builds it. But it connects with --

5. The house or temple, that is, all who profess His name on earth, where the responsibility of men enters as of builders, and those built; wood, hay, and stubble, may he found there (1 Cor. 3;10; 2 Cor. 6) -- what is commonly called “Christ- endom.”

6. What it comes to in such a case, having in it vessels to honor and to dishonor: this Paul likens to “a great house” (2 Tim. 2). And, lastly,

7. The apostasy, and the man of sin. But this is the abandonment of the profession of Christianity (2 Thess. 2), the true saints having been removed from the scene at the Lord’s coming.

On another occasion I hope to present, in some measure, a sketch of the aspect Christ assumes towards the external church, as given by John in the first three chapters of the Apocalypse; and, ultimately, the path of an “overcomer” in the midst of it all.

Meanwhile, may He keep the feet of His saints, and bless the truths of His own word. As the darkness of the scene deepens, may the light shine more brightly from Him, lighting up the pathway to those who seek to do His blessed will, and walk to His glory. Amen.

Lecture 3:

Christ Amongst the Candlesticks

Rev. 1-3

Part 1

On previous occasions, beloved brethren, I have sought to bring before you the two great aspects of the church of God as presented in scripture.

First of all, the true thing in its relation to Christ as His body -- that which is united to Christ by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; "the assembly which is his body" -- and, on the other hand, in its relation to God as His dwelling place on earth, the assembly, or house of God. Of this last, two aspects come out very distinctly in scripture: that which Christ builds, and that which man builds.

They word "church," or properly "assembly" is used of both the body of Christ and the house of God. That is, if you look into heaven you find Christ gone up there, and the assembly is His body, as seen in Eph. 1. If you look below here on earth, the house, that is, those who profess Christianity, is "the assembly of the living God" (2 Tim. 3). They are two distinct thoughts, and never confused.

Most of the confusion of Christendom at the present time has come in by the mixing up of these two things. There is also, as we saw, the body of Christ as in 1 Cor. 12; seen on earth, composed of those who are here, and these only, maintained in power and unity by the Holy Ghost on earth. And Christians on earth were treated practically, as gathered together in any place, as "the body of Christ" in that place: as Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:27), "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

We saw too, how man's responsibility was owned in carrying out God's work here below, tracing the house or temple in which man might build and fail in the character of his work, until the complete abandonment of Christianity and the Antichrist.

Now to-night I am about to trace some thoughts from a scripture which is happily more or less familiar to many of us; I mean the first three chapters of Revelation.

I am about to examine it in three ways:

First of all, the attitude in which Christ is seen in the midst of the churches in Revelation, as presented by John.

Then, secondly, what His testimony is to these assemblies: His thoughts as revealed as to the "things that are."

And lastly, I hope to unfold in some measure what it is to be an "overcomer" in the midst of such a solemn scene.

You will easily accept what I am about to say to you, namely, that *Paul* could not be the vessel to reveal *this* aspect of Christ amongst those assemblies. Paul unfolds the Son of God a heavenly Christ, gone up on high, whether as head of His body

the assembly, or High Priest. *John*, on the contrary, speaks of God come down; a Christ walking upon earth, whether manifested there in grace, as in his Gospel; or His judicial dealings as in the Revelation, by which He substantiates His claims here on earth. Paul is "*heavenly*" in his testimony; with him it is man gone up on high; John is "*divine*," and with him it is more God come down, manifestation on earth. This thought is familiar to many.

Hence, in consonance with his other testimony, *John* is the instrument taken up to show us Christ in this intensely judicial attitude towards the external body which bears His name. We must carefully distinguish Him as Head of His body, ministering nourishment by joints and bands to His "own flesh;" and His judging and scrutinizing, and threatening the external church with excision in result, in her place as a corporate witness on earth.

John is here watching over the fortunes, as it were, of that which Paul had set up; and telling us what Christ will do with it: He is "about to spue" it out of his mouth (Rev. 3:16).

He is in the Island of Patmos for the word of God and testimony of Jesus. Sent there into exile by the Roman Emperor, he was, nevertheless, in the full enjoyment of his Christian privilege, "in the Spirit, on the Lord's day." From this and other passages of the word, I gather that there is a special action of the Holy Ghost on that day (see John 20:1, 19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1, &c.).

You will bear in mind the book of the Revelation has specially Christ's claims upon the earth in view, to be made good when God will bring the First-begotten into the world. But before the visions which point to this end, John is recalled by a voice *behind* him (his *face* is with the mind of the Spirit towards the introduction of the kingdom), and he turns about to see the vision; and sees the Lord in this character, and learns what He was about to do with the responsible body here below, which was not emitting the light, to be the responsible vessel of which He had set it up.

"I turned to see the voice that spake with me; and being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks." They are described as of gold, because set up from a divine source at the first.

And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his

countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first, and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and having the keys of death and of hades" (Rev. 1:12-18).

Here you find Christ's aspect toward the assemblies as John presents Him. His personal and judicial character, as Son of man, and yet Ancient of Days; judging and discriminating amongst the candlesticks. You do not find His relative characters, such as High Priest, or head of His body the assembly; that is more the Pauline way of presenting Him.

As "Son of man," He is judge of all -- and as such you find Him here. "He hath given him authority to execute judgment also; because he is the Son of man" (John 5:21). He is "clothed with a garment down to the foot"; not "laid aside" as for His gracious service of love and washing His people's feet (John 13); and "girt about the paps with a golden girdle." His heart and affections are not seen flowing out to His church -- His bride, but girded up with a zone of righteousness -- not grace.

In Dan. 7, the "Ancient of days" is described as Christ is here; so the Son of man is the Ancient of days as we know even from that prophecy (cp. Dan. 7:9, 13, 14, and 22). "His eyes as a flame of fire"; this intense personal scrutiny which reached the soul. I dare say some of us may remember (and some may feel it now), when they were uneasy, and conscience was not at rest in the midst of ecclesiastical things around. The effort to explain and excuse matters, under plea that they could not get perfection here, failed to reassure the conscience. They were unable perhaps to account for the sense of disquiet they felt; practices in religious things irreconcilable with scripture, troubled their souls: efforts to be happy and mend matters, and seek personal freedom when in the midst of corporate corruption, were unsuccessful.

What was it that caused this exercise of conscience? Simply this -- Christ's eye was turned upon them; and though they might not have known it, they felt it, and felt too they could not be happy in such connection any more; they could not stand His gaze. How solemn and sad, when you know of those who were once exercised about the evil in which they walked, settling down into it, and the exercises of soul passing away, and conscience acting no more! Christ's eye has been removed from them, as it were. They did not accept the light, and bowed not when the heart was sensitive to the evil, and now they are left where they desired! How solemn.

He holds all subordinate power -- the stars, in His right hand of power; His voice is heard in majesty, and He judges by the word of God the sharp two-edged sword; while His countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength, the symbol of supreme authority.

I pass over the details, desiring only to present the general thought as to the aspect in which He is here seen.

When John saw Him he "fell at his feet as dead." It was the same disciple whom Jesus loved, and who leaned on His breast at supper in his own familiar place, accepted in the grace of the Lord. Converted by the apprehension of the person of the Lamb of God, and attracted to Him from that moment; here all is changed. This terrible aspect of Jesus as judge, causes him to

fall at His feet as dead. He is reassured by "Fear not" -- He was the living One who had died, and held in His own hand the keys of death and of hades; He had never given them up. "Hades gates" could not prevail against the Son of the living God; Christ had the keys of all! He had never given *them* to Peter, nor to any. He gave "the keys of the kingdom of the heavens" to Peter -- never the keys of death and hades.

Now He sends seven messages to seven assemblies in Asia through John. There were many others in those provinces, but these are chosen as presenting, in their then state, what will serve the Spirit of God to give us, as in a lengthened out picture, the history of the profession of Christ's name on earth and its responsibility, with His thoughts and judgment of it from the start to the finish.

They may be looked upon in three distinct ways:

- 1st. As seven existing assemblies whose condition needed the words spoken to each, at the moment.
- 2nd. As messages containing words to him that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith, at all times: and,
- 3rd. As affording in completeness a prophetic delineation of the history of the whole church in responsibility from immediately after the apostolic times, until its final excision, as a false witness for Christ: "I am about to spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16).

Seven {churches} are chosen as the number of spiritual completeness, here conveying the completeness of God's thoughts as to the subject of which He is treating.

This manner of presentation of what has become history is wise and beautiful, as everything of God must be. For if so many successive and varied phases of the church's history on earth had been presented *as such* prophetically foretold, what would have become of the hope of the Lord's coming, given to the saints to be their constant expectation from the time He went away? How be looking for Him if there had been the express revelation that all these things had to take place in the church's state before He came? The answer is, that in the wisdom of the Spirit of God, the moment they were uttered, *all the features were there*, and no delay was needed to unfold and develop them; so that He might have come at the moment the messages were penned. And at the same time they would afford a word of encouragement and warning to him that had an ear to hear at all periods; while they would convey, as the "long-suffering of our God waited," to those who were called, near the close of the period, the most important instruction as to what had passed in successive phases of the church's history, accounting for its state at the end and marking out the path of God in it for any who had an opened ear.

We will take a rapid glance at them, as I do not mean to go into details; this has been ably done by others.

Ephesus presents the state of the church immediately after the first planting of it in apostolic days. Active enough, but her first love for Christ had waned. No activity could compensate for this. He seeks to recall her; "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent." She had allowed the light to flicker and grow dim, and there is no more said as to a candlestick in the messages; for from the moment of failure of

heart for Christ it was treated as such a departure of the general body, that it ceased to be a true collective and corporate testimony to Christ on earth, though having the place of the candlestick in responsibility till the close.

In the second assembly, "Smyrna," which answers to the early persecutions of the church which followed, from Nero to Diocletian, you find the Lord turning to account times of tribulation to restore if possible the church's heart to its normal condition; and Satan the instrument of it. How often it is thus with individual souls. When there is a decline of soul and the danger is of its slipping away from Christ in practice, then comes trial in mercy; the sorrow and tribulation are for good, even to drive back the soul to Christ, from whom it had departed. So with the saints here; though there was poverty in the eyes of the world, Christ could say "Thou art rich"; far different from Laodicea in the end, boasting of herself that she is rich; to her the Lord shows she is poor and miserable and blind and naked.

Now mark in Pergamos how Satan changes his tactics. If he cannot succeed by persecution (which only made Smyrna brighter in testimony, as nearer to Christ), he will try seduction. If he cannot be a lion, he will be a serpent. Here she has settled down to dwell where Satan has his "throne." It answers to the time of Constantine, when the empire took up the profession of Christianity and patronized the church. Thus, instead of being a thing persecuted and despised by the world, the friendship and patronage of the world became hers and her ruin. In the midst of all an "Antipas" (which means "against everyone"), can be recalled, a faithful witness for Christ, who had suffered death in the place where an unfaithful church was content to dwell. The world which her Lord and Master had refused from Satan's hands had attracted and overcome her (Matt. 4). She should have trodden in His lowly footsteps. More difficult, therefore, for the faithful ones to stem the torrent of corruption now setting in; yet those that did would be fed by the hidden manna -- a humbled Christ -- in their lowly path. The doctrine of Balaam was tolerated, and that of the Nicolaitanes -- the abuse of grace once hated (v. 6). Grace was so full that they said in principle, you may live as you like, it will only enhance the grace.

In Ephesus you find they *hated* the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes; in Pergamos "Thou *hast them that hold*" it. Alas, how the atmosphere into which the church had slipped had darkened her perception of what was due and suited to Christ! We feel the slightest soil when the heart is with Him. Let the heart start aside like the bow that is broken, and things we would have shuddered at are allowed, and conscience grows dull. Balaam's seductions were getting a place; indeed they had one already; and yet in the midst of all, "Antipas" -- strangely significant his name! -- was slain for his faithful testimony of Christ. It was a great thing to be an "overcomer" in such a state of things. An overcomer was one who was stemming the tide and swimming against the stream. Such an one would know what it was to feed upon the "hidden manna," and to have the "white stone" from Christ. He could understand the path of a humbled Christ, who had refused the seductions of the world, as the church should have done. None knew the value of the secret approval of Christ, but the one who deserved it and got it.

When Thyatira comes you get another thing. It is the complete corruption of the Popery of the middle ages. You find

that instead of being seduced into corruption as Pergamos, the church was now the originatress and propagatress of it. It took its origin in her. Children were born of the corruption (Rev. 2:23). Still Christ owns even increasing devotedness of faithful ones in the midst of such a scene, but evil was allowed. "I know thy works, and love, and faith, and service, and thy patience, and thy last works to be more than the first. Notwithstanding, I have against thee, that thou *sufferest* that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teaches and seduces my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not" [as the passage must be read] (Rev. 2:19-21). Up to this message we find the Lord seeking to recall the church to her original condition; now, there was no hope of this, "She repented not," or more correctly "her will was not to repent." The corruption had come in and finding a lodgment there, fresh corruption took its rise in that which bore His name on earth: hope, therefore, of recovery is past.

Now, we find two things for the first time mentioned.

First, a remnant in the midst of the scene of corruption, owned of the Lord; and

Secondly, the Lord's coming as the only resource for the faithful, and instead of any recovery of the church, the kingdom, and the morning star, are presented in hope.

Here I would venture to use a figure, to illustrate the varied states of the professing church. A rainbow is seen to present a number of colors, of which one special color is prominent at a given moment. If you watch it, you will remark that the prominent color softens, and another stands out, and so on. So with these churches: some characteristic which stands out prominently at a given moment is before us, then comes another. All the colors are there at the same time, but a prominent one stands in relief amongst the rest. So all these various features may be found at one and the same moment in the professing church; but at certain moments one stands out markedly from the whole.

Thyatira here is complete corruption and the authoress of it, and no hope of return. The faithful have to hold fast till the Lord comes again. She, was assuming "power over the nations" -- the Papacy in the middle ages did this; the faithful would have this, when He came back to whom of right it belongs, but not as in the scene of His rejection, where the corrupt church was usurping it. The "morning star" given them meanwhile would speak of Christ known in heavenly glory, and of the heavenly side of His coming before He appears to take the kingdom, the harbinger of that bright day of earthly glory in which they would be associated with Him in all that He received from His Father.

Read Rev. 2:24 thus, "But to you I say, the rest [or remnant] who are in Thyatira." "That which ye have hold fast *till* I come," is the word that would test them. It would be time enough to have the kingdom when Christ gets it instead of "reigning as kings" with the church unfaithful to its absent Lord.

When we come to Sardis, which gives us Protestantism since the Reformation, we find that they had "received and heard" much. What use did they make of it? God had wrought, and out of the effect produced in man's hand came this Sardis state, of which death was the chief feature. Sardis had a name to live, and was really dead before God. The church in

Protestantism had not assumed power like Thyatira, but had appealed to the world, and was of the world, and would be treated as the world when He came upon it *as* a thief.” Their works might look well before *men*, but they were not perfect before God. If of Thyatira He says, “I will put her into great tribulation”; of Sardis He says, I will treat her as the world, because she *is* the world and nothing else. This is what is before Protestantism, with a decent outward profession, but wanting in all that would give it reality before God. The Lord’s coming, you will note, is mentioned here, as to the *character* in which He would come on Sardis. “*Till*” that event was the thought prominent in Thyatira: “*As a thief*” in Sardis. See 1 Thess. 5:2-5 for the solemn force of it.

To Philadelphia it is more the *Person* who comes that is before the soul; and He comes quickly. This is the calling of God in the closing scenes of the church’s sad history; the prominent color, so to speak: the power of Christ resting upon them in weakness. “A little strength,” is her character, but she uses it, and keeps His “word,” and does not deny His “name.” Beautiful and blessed testimony of His heart to the feeble ones! Philadelphia (“brotherly love”) is not a *perfect* state of things, but it is God’s state of things; ¹⁵ and this is what we want.

Silently and quietly she walked in what was suited to His name -- the Holy and the True. She could not say, Jehu-like, “Come and see my zeal for the Lord:” which, after all, was characterized at bottom by ambition and cruelty. Nor could she, like Laodicea, boast that she was rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing.

Thyatira may go into great tribulation -- Sardis be found as the world, and treated as the world -- Laodicea be ready to be spued out of His mouth: in the midst of all, Philadelphia waits for the Lord, she observes His word and walks in what is suited to His name, and He will keep her out of the hour of temptation (Isa. 24), which comes upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth (Rev. 3:10).

Christ presents Himself to her as one outside the whole scene -- not in an ecclesiastical way as walking amid the candlesticks, but morally according to that which He is in Himself, and as one who disposes of all. Both positively and negatively she is faithful to Christ; yet to others has no apparent strength. She had but little, and she used it for Christ! This was power. People are attracted by power. But how do they look for it? In some great display with brilliant effects, and manifestations of it. Did they ever think of power being manifested in *patience*? Patience is a sign of power when the church is in ruins. It is to produce this in His people that God puts forth all the resources of His power. “Strengthened with all might according to the power of his glory” (Col. 1:11). To what end? you say; “to patience and long-suffering with joy.” What a descent in man’s estimation, expecting some brilliant result to draw the attention of all! But patience was the first sign of

apostolic power even (2 Cor. 6:4), and is of more account with God than the most striking manifestation of power.

In Laodicea you find what Satan can do with flesh in man in a religious way. Of her He says, “Thou art neither cold nor hot” and He is about to spue her out of His mouth! The church was called to walk in the Spirit, outside of man and his sphere of things. Here she has completely gone back to walk in the flesh, and is a false witness for Christ. He stands at the door and knocks; He is outside the whole scene, shut out by what bears His name. When this phase of evil is fully manifested, He can bear with the profession no longer. And the judgment threatened in Ephesus is executed with every mark of His disgust. The corruption of the best good is the worst evil, and He treats it as such.

To return to the attitude of Christ among these candlesticks. It will be seen that He calls upon the individual who has an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the church as a whole: *not the church*, at least from Thyatira down,¹⁶ she is corrupt; the overcomer would have his reward. The rewards are suited to the peculiar difficulties each has passed through in faithfulness to Him.

But it will be noted that in all this scripture there is *not one single instruction to the individual but to “hear”!* Some have found it a matter of much difficulty, why, in the midst of so much that is evil, no directions should be given to clean oneself from it, and to depart from such a state of things. While other scriptures, are clear enough as to the principle, here where such flagrant evil is disclosed, why are there no directions how to act?

The answer is simple. John is watching over the fortunes of that which Paul had been used administratively to set up, and we learn from these addresses what Christ will do with it. He does not unfold what I am to do, but tells me what He will do, and calls upon me to hearken and overcome. If I want to see my own pathway, and what I am to do, I must seek it elsewhere when I have heard what the Spirit says to the churches. I should more likely find my path from Paul, through whom, if he had laid the foundation of the church which had now fallen into decay, we also learn that this would be its history and have inspired directions to meet the changed state of things. To him then, I must turn; as also to other scriptures, to see what the path of an overcomer should be in an evil day. This I hope to enter upon at another occasion.

15. It would be this at any time, and wherever found; but specially characterizing those who go on with Christ, a true remnant at the close; as Laodicea characterizes those who sink into the worldly religion with much boasting around us. These two branch out of the state of things that made Sardis. All four states, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, are contemporary and run on to the end, while commencing after each other in point of time. All are in existence now, for who can deny that Laodicea is manifested?

16. The call to hear hitherto addressed to the whole church is from this point (Rev. 2:29) only sounded in the ear of the overcomer. The church as a whole is given up as even having an ear to hear.

Lecture 4:

“Him That Overcometh”

Part 2¹⁷

Heretofore I have endeavored to bring before you, first of all, what the church is in the truth and actuality of it, as the body of Christ in purpose and result, according to the counsels of God. That which it will be when Christ -- the second Man -- the last Adam -- possesses manifestly all His glories; the church then “his body, the fulness of him who filleth all in all.” We also looked upon the other aspect of the church as Christ’s body on earth, constituted and maintained in its unity as “one body,” by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. Then we traced from scripture the house of God as the professing body here below; and lastly, we saw the judicial attitude in which John presents Christ as to it, “with eyes like unto a flame of fire”; an aspect in which Paul could not, I think, present Him. It is more His province to present a heavenly Christ gone up as man into the glory of God; and he does not bring Him down again. Of course, that He will be manifested in judgment, is in Paul’s writings too; quite true and needful in filling up the word of God.

It is very blessed, beloved friends, to know that we are united to Him, who is the Judge of quick and dead, by the Holy Ghost sent down. We have eternal life in Him, and we stand in complete redemption. There is not a single shadow judicially, between our souls and Christ.

But still He is going to spue the professing body that bears His name here out of His mouth, and I do not want to be identified with the state for which He will thus reject it; I want to be an overcomer. I do not say it is possible for a true Christian to be spued out of Christ’s mouth; but he may, alas! be found at this moment identified with that state that is utterly nauseous to Christ.

There is much said of the blessings to the overcomer in these scriptures (Rev. 2, 3). What is the meaning of an overcomer? He is not a person who is standing fast when things are all in order. Take Adam in the Garden; had he to overcome in anything? No. Then, when overcoming becomes necessary, what is the fact? Things have got into disorder; the mass have gone right away. A flood tide brought them in; the ebb came and swept them right away. Now when things were so, the overcomer has to stand fast for Christ in the scene; and he is the very one to whom Christ’s heart is drawn out in a way that could not have been when the whole body was going on well.

It was in the dark day of Israel’s ruin that Elijah and Elisha were sustained; there were none such men in the palmy days of Solomon. The faith that carried Elijah through such days of ruin for God, was answered by his being taken to heaven in a chariot of fire!

The overcomer was one who when he found that the people of God were drifting away from a state suited to him, was stemming the stream. If you ever swam against a stream, you know what would come of your missing a single stroke and where it might land you: and it is one thing, beloved friends, to have gained a firm foothold, and another to keep it -- one thing to have the intelligence of a divine place, and another altogether to maintain it in power.

On the last occasion on which I addressed you, I noticed that in the messages to the Seven Churches you get no individual directions as to what to do. You get rewards promised the overcomer, but you are not told how to overcome. Many say, Look at all the evil that is in the seven churches and the like, and the Lord does not direct His people to leave them! Shall I tell you why? For this reason: you never have in them a single direction as to what *you* are to do, but one. That is, you are to “hear,” the church? no; it is a judged thing but “what the Spirit says” to her; then you find the blessing promised “to him that overcometh.”

Turn with me to a few scriptures in the Old Testament, that we may see how others overcame in an evil day.

In Ex. 32 we find a fine case of this character. Israel had been called out of idolatry; Abraham first, and then the whole nation, to be the witness of the one true God. But the moment poor man gets anything committed to him he fails. Moses had gone up to receive the law from Jehovah, and the people of Israel and Aaron were below. As soon as they lost sight of Moses, they made a golden calf; they went back into idolatry; into the very thing they had been called out of.

So with the church of God. She was *called* to walk outside of man and flesh altogether; the first thing she does is to fall into walking in the flesh. You find murmuring over a question of the funds in Acts 6. In Acts 2 they were “all filled with the Holy Ghost”; when we come to Acts 6 they were to “choose men full of the Holy Ghost.” You see they were not all full then.

Well, here in Ex. 32 Moses had gone up into the mountain, and Aaron had made the calf of gold; coupling the name of Jehovah with the similitude of a calf that eateth hay! And they said “These be thy gods, O Israel,” &c. Now I only recall this well-known history to show how Moses and Levi overcame. God sends Moses down, and he saw the calf and the dancing. He took the tables of the law which God has given, him, and brake them beneath the mount. Why does he act thus? Through entering into God’s mind, from being with God. He does exactly the right thing at the right moment. It was the instinct of divine

17. These two parts were taken up on two occasions, and formed the subjects of two lectures. This will account for the manner of their presentation to the reader.

communion. Beautiful action of Moses! The glory of Jehovah was cared for, and the safety of the people too. The breaking of the tables met both; for if the law had come into the camp it could only have been their destruction, and where then would have been the witness of what He was in His own nature?

Mark verse 25. Moses had been given Aaron through his unbelief at the first, and of all he led him into the deepest trouble. So it is always. We bring a thorn on ourselves by our unbelief, and then the time comes when it rankles and gives us many a bitter moment. See Abraham, too, he goes down to Egypt and gets the Egyptian maid. She was a thorn gotten in that land of darkness. See how he reaped what he had sown through her.

It is always so. God says, as it were, Well, you cannot rise to me, I will come down to you. Then we find how much better had we risen up to Him, surmounting all the mountains of difficulty unbelief had conjured up.

Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said -- and oh, let it be a word for every conscience I address, may each one be bent on standing for God down here -- he said,

Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me; And all the tribe of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

Splendid action in faith in overcoming. They stood in faithfulness for God before men, and they earned the glorious privilege of being the priestly tribe! And this is the true character and basis of all priesthood It is one thing to be by grace a priest of God, as all Christians are, but quite another to *earn* our priesthood by consecration to God. It is just in the measure we have been faithful before men for God, that we can stand before God for men!

Moses says, "Who is on the Lord's side," and the tribe of Levi respond to the call. They separated themselves in faithfulness from their brethren who were unfaithful to God, and consecrated themselves for their priestly place to be the priestly tribe; for they had not hesitated when the moment came to choose between God and man. The Lord, so to say, never forgot it to Levi.

If I turn to Deut. 33, and examine the blessings of the tribes, I find Moses takes up two especially, Joseph and Levi.

And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.

The lights and perfections (Thummim and Urim) of the relationships of Jehovah with His people, and of His people with Jehovah, would be his. There was intercession too with the Lord; "They shall put incense before thee," and teach Jacob His judgments and Israel His law. This was overcoming in Levi.

In the next chapter of Ex. (33), Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp. There was no command from God to do this, but he acted in the intelligence he had gained from being with Him. All who sought the Lord from that guilty camp

came outside to this separated spot. And the cloud or presence of Jehovah came down and talked with Moses as a man talks with his friend. Here you find another action in overcoming. The camp had utterly failed. Well, says Moses, I will not go with the evil. He sees that if the Lord was to go on with the people there must be separation from the evil to Him.

It was, the most glorious moment of that blessed servant's career. If you turn to Num. 12 you will see how the Lord appreciated the action. "My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house," "With him will I speak face to face."

Now I turn to another "overcomer" in Num. 25. A moment of deep corruption (had arrived, and the Levite Phinehas, with his javelin, acquired an "everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God" when corruption was spreading its foul stain on His people. It mattered not if in former days Levi and Simeon were the closest allies in wickedness (Gen. 49:5-7), now came the moment: when God was everything, and Zimri the Simeonite falls by the javelin of Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest! This was overcoming; this was the son of a priestly tribe qualifying himself under testing for his priesthood a priest amongst the priests!

If we now turn to Judg. 7, we shall find overcoming, when it was a case of natural blessing which drew others off the path. I read of Gideon's little band who overcame. First, we find that in this day of battle with the Midianites, the army of Israel went out thirty-two thousand strong. And the Lord said, "The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, My own hand hath saved me." It is God's way to work in the weakness of man, "that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." Twenty-two thousand who were "fearful and afraid" returned from the host. "And there remained ten thousand. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I shall say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go."

Fear and difficulty were the tests for the first time, and those who had stood these tests, and were neither fearful nor afraid are now tested with a natural blessing, and nine thousand seven hundred fail! Only three hundred now stood the test. How many souls have received vigor and strength by passing through a strait with Christ; but when a moment of ease comes, when nature can let itself out, and the loins are ungirded, failure and disqualification ensue. See David in the days of his rejection, what a noble path of faith was his! Yet when at ease and at home, with ungirded loins, he drops into the path of gratification of self. How deep was his fall in the matter of the wife of Urias! "The time when kings go forth to battle" had arrived; "but David tarried still." Oh what failure; what bitterness ensued!

So here with Gideon's army. Only three hundred stood the test. Their hearts were in God's battles of that day. They did not in the ascetic zeal of flesh refuse the blessing as it came in their way, but they were not entangled by it. That was the point. Like Jonathan dipping his staff in the honeycomb and passing on, he was refreshed. Other interests pressed on his heart, and he passed on with enlightened eye.

The test was, "Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise everyone that boweth down upon his knees to drink." The one snatched the blessing hastily and passed on: the other partook of it at ease. Israel wanted the first, and so did God. And God delivered Israel by the three hundred self-denying men. The victory was won. And God is delivering the many at the present hour, by means of the faithful, prayerful earnest, self-denying few; while thousands are sunk in the ease of things around, in carnal enjoyment and rest.

I turn to another "overcomer" in Jeremiah. His pathway is a very striking one. Cradled, as we may say, in the lap of the finest revival that ever took place in Judah -- the bright day of Josiah, which followed the drear and evil day of Manasseh.

I may remark that there were two great revivals in the history of Judah's kings. That under Hezekiah, and that of Josiah. The first was characterized by *faith*. You will remember how Hezekiah prayed and spread the letter before the Lord, and the Lord came in and destroyed the army of Sennacherib. But Josiah's revival had another characteristic, which was *attention to the Word of God*. The roll of the book was found, and then came the wondrous revolution effected by this judging of all things by that perfect standard.

In analogy you have these two revivals in the history of the church. That of the Reformation was characterized by bold faith, breaking up existing things; and although the word of God was in measure. the basis of appeal, things were not judged according to its standard. Rather was it a *reformation* of that which seemed to be the church around. In the present day, another action has come, and God is leading souls back to scripture; and close attention to the word of God gives a character to the action of His Spirit in souls at the present time.¹⁸ Everything is judged to which the veneration of centuries and the antiquity of ages lent a charm, and led souls away from scripture; and God has taken care, in His infinite, boundless mercy, that when He has commended us to scripture in these last days, we should find in it everything needed for the exigencies of every hour.

Press the word of God on people and they give you up. They say the times are changed. It might do then, but it will not do now. It needs courage to obey it, no doubt: courage with oneself, courage with others. But he that obeys God in a world like this, is owning God in a world that disowns Him. People may say they have it. But do they keep -- observe His word, and not deny His name. "Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law," &c. It is true Christian obedience, the obedience of Christ, to have no will of our own, the new man living by, and guided by every word of God.

God is recalling His saints now to -- not *primitive*, but *original* Christianity. This tells us, too, how near is the coming

18. I do not say how far of course there has been the bowing of heart in His people to the word of God, to any great extent. Still it is to scripture God commends us. We have the truth there, and "He that is of God 'heareth us'" (that is, Apostles and apostolic writings). See the address of Paul to the elders at Ephesus Acts 20: and the close of 2 Tim. 3, 1 John 4:5, 6, &c.

of the Lord.

Well, Jeremiah's history commenced in the days of Josiah's passover. He sang the Lamentations when that faithful king was slain. There have been men whose ministry has left a big mark, so to say, behind them; it was not so with him (unless what he has written). He was the voice of God to His poor people as long as they had an ear to hear. Look at ch. 13. What does he say? If you do not hearken to His words, I will go and weep for you before the Lord (Jer. 13:15-17).

It was a day too when they could boast, "The temple of the Lord are these" (Jer. 7:1-11); and yet add, "We are delivered to do all these abominations." How like the cry of some: We cannot help the evil, and it is the best thing we can find, and the like. It was a day like the present in more ways than this. The ecclesiastical party boasted that the law should not perish from the priest, nor the counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet: "Come and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words" (Jer. 18:18, 19). The testimony of God was refused and the plea of antiquity and succession set up.

Oh how like the present hour! When there is a stand made for the testimony of God's truth by a few simple souls, who are they who are the most hitter opponents? Those who claim to be the conservators of what is divine! Yet they alike oppose the testimony God gives, and the evidences of God's work in others, and sink down into more complete darkness and hostility to God than before.

In Jer. 15 we find Jeremiah's path;

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by thine name, O Lord God of hosts.

He eats the word, digesting it and making it his own. Now, what was the effect? "I sat alone!" It separates him from all, to God. Then the answer of God comes; God owns the position. Mark, too, how his own faithfulness was the ground of his being used to others; he earned the place; not of course that it was not grace that bestowed it upon him, and used him too, I grant it was, fully. Now, says the Lord,

If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth. Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the Lord.

This position of separation to the Lord, was a tower -- a citadel of strength in an evil day; a position where all who loved His name could come.

If I turn to Paul in the NT (Eph. 4), I find that it is no vague separation to some indefinite object. I find what we have in the midst of the scene. I

beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit" &c.

There is a difference between the calling (vocation) here named, and that of Hebrews (3:1). In the latter it is individual; in the

former, connected with the corporate calling of the church -- "one body" -- a "habitation of God through the Spirit." Now he says, Do you walk worthy of it. Still I must know my calling, before I can do so. Here it is plain enough. I might as well say my salvation is of no consequence, as say that my pathway is of no consequences as a member of Christ. *Both* rest simply and immutably on the word of God. If I accept one I am bound to accept the other. I dare not say, Christians have failed to follow what has been given, and this exonerates me. Such reasoning would not stand before the Lord for a moment. If I say, Things are in hopeless confusion. So they are, but will this state of things, will putting the blame on others, exonerate you?

Has the Holy Ghost left the church? Has the divine fact that "There is one body and one Spirit" changed? No. He is here, and maintains the unity of Christ's body on earth as truly as ever. The simple question is, Has He failed? But you say, It is all scattered. I am told there are thirteen hundred sects in Christendom! How can I set things to rights? Well, supposing you cannot (and it is true), you must begin with *yourself*, and set yourself to rights! This is the first thing. Just as Jeremiah did in his day; the word of God digested in his soul isolated him but not for long, for he was to be God's mouth to separate the precious from the vile.

There is the intrinsic, real thing, "one body, and one Spirit" with "one hope." Then comes the unity of profession, "One Lord, one faith (that is, one common creed, not Jew, or Pagan) and one baptism"; of course the baptism of water, which introduces into the sphere of profession. Then you get the third circle, the widest of all, and yet coming down to what is most intimate of all; "One God and Father of all; who is above all, and through all, and *in you all*." He is "above all"; that is His supremacy. "Through all"; He permeates everything. Then He returns to the saints, He is "in you all"; He is in relationship with them according to the character of the name of God and Father. Just as one owns a great estate, but he dwells in the house on it, and so possesses it; so will God do in the church by-and-by. He will take possession of "His inheritance," in and by the saints, with Christ, as He did the land of promise of old, in His people Israel.

There are thus three great circles of unity. They bear a certain analogy to those you find in John 17.

There is first, the apostolic, essential unity; they were of one mind and purpose, as the Father and the Son, by the Holy Ghost (John 17:11).

Secondly, you find the unity of divine fellowship and consequent testimony to the world around in grace (John 17:21) this was seen at the first moments of the history of the church at Pentecost.

Thirdly, the perfected unity of glory, which will be by-and-by, when the world will "know" what it might have "believed" through the second if we had been faithful (John 17:23); this will be the displayed unity of glory in the millennial day when there can be no possible failure.

To return; we find that the Holy Ghost has maintained intact this unity, no matter how men have externally broken up the church of God. Thus we find something definite to guide us; we can come together to the name of the Lord, when we have cleared ourselves from the evil and falseness and profession around us;

even the feeblest few, and we find "One body and one Spirit" abides.

This "unity of 'the Spirit'" embraces all members of Christ who are not under discipline, and even Christ Himself as chief of it. It is a basis which embraces and contemplates the whole church of God, and yet in its character it must be suited to Christ. It is not merely the unity of Christians, it is comparatively easy to have this. Easy to say, Let us sink differences and be together, and then attach Christ's name to it, and call it unity. The fashion of the day is to make a union and attach Christ to it nominally. The Spirit of God, on the contrary, attaches unity to Christ.

People reason, Are not all believers, however they walk, members of the body of Christ? I admit it most fully nay, you may say, I cannot deny it! *Abstractly* they are members of "one body," and the Spirit of God maintains its unity. But when I come to *practice* I cannot own that all are "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit." I speak of practice, diligently seeking to realize by the power of the Spirit that unity in which we have been formed.

What God commends us to is that unity, which embraces all members of Christ, and yet allows of nothing that is unsuited to the Chief of this unity, who is Christ Himself!

There is a marked difference between being in the abstract "one body," and the observance of this practically.¹⁹

Let us examine what Paul says in 2 Tim. 2. He sees the house of God in ruin when he writes this letter to his beloved son in the faith. In his first epistle we find the orderings of things when things were in order; in the second, the path of the saint when things were in disorder.

In 2 Tim. 2:19, he says,

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his; and, Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.

We cannot say, The whole thing is in ruin; we are delivered to this corruption. No. Fundamental truth has not changed, and although the ruin cannot be remedied, we are responsible for this. The Lord sees a great mass of profession and says, I know them that are mine in it. Then we have the responsibility of those who name His name, they are to "depart from iniquity." This we have touched upon before. I need not say another word if souls have not gone this far. Then He takes up the analogy of a great house, with vessels to honor and dishonor; the man of God has to purge himself from these, that he may be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, like Jeremiah, and meet for his Master's use. He cannot go on with what is untrue nor can he set things to rights; this then must be his path, to be an "overcomer" in the scene around. If you find what is right and what the Lord would have you do, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not,

19. If Ezra and his remnant came to Jerusalem, they found a divine center of gathering for all Israel; they could exclude none who could show their genealogy - this was needed, for it was a return. Still if Nehemiah and his company come later, it will not do to make a fresh city and temple and call it Jerusalem, because in the abstract all were Israelites. They must follow where others had been led of God, and thank God that His grace had wrought in souls before they appeared on the scene.

to him it is sin.

Now he goes on to say, "Flee also youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Nothing can be clearer to any heart subject to the word of God. I have to watch my own heart, lest the enemy find an open door, to ruin a path of outward separation from evil by inward unholiness. Then I find those in v. 22 with whom I can -- nay, I am bound to walk. It is not a lonely pathway, for thank God there are those "that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" to be found.

This is the action of the Spirit of God amongst the saints at the present moment, separating "the precious from the vile." The Lord has it in His heart to awaken His sleeping saints, that they may not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Then a person may say, Why these people are open to the same difficulties as at the first when the evil came in. How will they deal with them? Well, I find in the next chapter (2 Tim. 3), "Thou hast fully known [had perfect understanding of] my doctrine, manner life," &c. "*Continue* thou in the things thou hast heard of me," &c. Paul's "doctrine" is the resource, and never to be surrendered; and we can endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and such action will have all His members in view, though they may have no intelligence of

their privilege and responsibility. If walking in the truth together, the action is not merely towards each other; our action radiates towards, and has reference to every member of Christ, no matter in what association he may be found.

But it will be easily seen, that this is not standing fast as when things were in order, but overcoming and getting back to divine principles when things are in disorder.

All our path God makes so plain for us, that we need have no difficulty in an evil day. It is an *evil* day, but the very evil makes the path the more plain for the single eye.

The Lord gives us in full measure, then, to know what it is to overcome. We each and all have something to do; and the great thing for each is to do that for which we have been left here by Christ. We may do much and largely, and not do our first works, or that to which God has called us. See Saul; he was raised up to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 9:16). He slaughtered Ammon, "so that two of them were not left together" (1 Sam. 11:11); yet failed in what God had set him to do. We have to seek His mind, and not argue for expediency, and what *we* think is right. Nothing God meets so blessedly as the single eye. When our eye is single, the whole body is full of light, having no part dark; and the heart walks peacefully with God. It is due to Christ that so it should be. Do I love Him? Than let me keep His commandments. We need personal devotedness to Him, and it is humbling that we find so little of it, in days when He is imparting such light to our souls. We need the alacrity of heart that bows to His will in the most trivial thing, and it brings its own joy from Him who has said to us, "If ye love me keep my commandments."

Lecture 5:

Our Present Condition and Our Hope ²⁰

Acts 17:1-7

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

It may seem strange that I have read this account of the ministry of the apostle Paul, during the three sabbath days in Thessalonica. But it is extremely instructive to compare the

historic narratives of the Acts with the Epistles afterwards written to the saints in the same places.

I have read these verses for the sake of two special

20. This paper, as will easily be seen, does not pretend to unfold in detail the various features of the Lord's coming. Being one of a series of lectures, the subject was treated more as filling up the line of thought presented to those who heard them. This will account for the manner of its presentation to the reader.

thoughts contained in them: 1st, that there was a crucified, dead, and risen Christ preached by the apostle to them; and, 2nd, that there was to be a reigning Christ by-and-by; “another king, one Jesus.” This we may gather from v. 7. Its suitability too, is apparent when we think of those whom he addressed; namely, Jews who were familiar with the hopes of a glorious reigning Messiah, and who were instructed in the scriptures which so spake.

The basis then, of the thoughts I desire to present this evening is, as to the past a suffering, dead and risen Christ; as to the present, the association of the people of God with Him in a pathway of suffering and rejection; and as to the future, His Coming again in glory, and taking to Him His great power to reign, and our association with Him in His glory.

Now there is an immense reach between the first and the last of these thoughts; He has suffered, died and risen again, and gone on high, “to receive for himself a kingdom,” and He will return to take it in power and great glory; you will find that the two Epistles to the Thessalonians fill up the great gap, if we may so term it, between the past sufferings of Christ and His future glory.

You will anticipate from this, that I am about to speak a little this evening about the coming of the Lord, as the great event which will bring about all this glory for which He waits and we wait. It is near, beloved brethren; the heart feels conscious that it is so; and the present action of the Holy Ghost marks it as very close at hand.

You will find that when redemption is accomplished, and the Holy Ghost is dwelling here, there are two thoughts brought before us very prominently in the NT; both very different in character, yet very closely allied; that is, the “coming” and the “appearing” of the Lord Jesus.

I may remark as to the expression, the “coming” of the Lord, that it means His *presence* in contrast with His *absence*; and it is a large and comprehensive word as so used, reaching from what is known to many of us as the “rapture” of the saints, to be “for ever with the Lord,” and continuing through the interval which follows, till His appearing with His saints in glory. The word “coming” (παρουσία) embraces both thoughts; while the “appearing” (ἐπιφάνεια) is the shining forth of His coming when He will be displayed in glory to the world. That word “coming” is often used for this event, the “appearing”; but this last word is never used for the “coming: His “coming” or presence in contrast to His absence, embraces many details which He will accomplish in the interval, till His open manifestation to the world, when “every eye shall see him,” coming with “ten thousands of his saints.”

Many of my brethren whom I address know, that Christ is presented in the gospel narratives in four distinct ways. In *Matthew* He is seen as Jehovah-Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham, presented to His people and rejected, and in consequence passing to His higher glory as “Son of man,” over all the works of God’s hands (Psa. 8), through death and resurrection; then coming back as Son of man, in judgment, with the ensigns of Jehovah power and great glory.

If you examine Matt. 24, you find the Messiah rejected by His people and cast out, then returning as Son of man in judgment, and delivering His people Israel. First dealing with *Jews*, in the land of Judea (Matt. 24:15-31), and appearing for

their deliverance. Then gathering the “elect” of Israel from the four winds, from amongst the nations of the earth (cp. Isa. 27:12, 13; Zech. 2:6).

Before that day comes, there is an immense heavenly interval, during which *Christians* are in relationship with Christ. We have this presented under three parables: The good and the evil servant; the wise and foolish virgins; and the faithful and the unfaithful use of the spiritual gifts {perhaps, rather, responsibilities} of Christ, as ascended and gone away for the time from Israel, until He comes and reckons judicially with His servants. And then, when the time we are passing through is past and gone, you find that after having come and delivered Israel (Matt. 24:15-31), and dealt in the true appraisal of the work and watchfulness of His servants (Matt. 24:44-51; 25:1-30), He sits upon the throne of His glory, and before Him are gathered the *Gentiles* or nations, and His “brethren” after the flesh, the Jewish remnant of that day; and the former are judged, as to how they had received the message of His coming kingdom and glory through the latter. Believing and bowing to it, constituted them the “sheep,” as the rejection of it, the “goats.” It is the judgment of the “quick,” which introduces the millennial kingdom, the thousand years of earthly blessing. It will be seen that there are *three* classes of persons in this scene; the sheep, the goats, and His “brethren.”

You must quite set aside the human thought of this scene being a “general judgment” -- there is nothing so foreign to scripture. God does not confound together the saved and lost in “that world,” when by the truth He has wrought to separate them here, much as man has blotted out the distinction. In the judgment of the great white throne of Rev. 20, after a thousand years there is not a *living* man seen; in that of this chapter not a *dead* man is seen! Besides all this, the *ground* of judgment in this solemn scene would embrace but a small proportion of the population of the world. Comparatively few will have had the testimony addressed to them, which forms the ground of judgment here, or any testimony from God: they will be judged according to their works -- a totally different ground of judgment. This precludes the thought of its being a general judgment. Nothing but most careless reading, or the bias of human thought, could have so interpreted the passage. With this judgment of the living nations, the Jewish mind was most familiar; with a judgment of the dead but little. To us as Christians, the judgment of the dead is a familiar thought and the judgment of the “quick” {living} very little known.

In the Gospel of *Mark*, the Lord Jesus is presented as God’s servant in testimony, in His holy mission of service of love; at the close of it when ascended and in glory, it is said, even then, the Lord *working* with His servants whom He had left to carry on His heavenly mission here below. He is still the worker as gone up. In Mark 13 you find Him as one who has gone away, and set “every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch”: then He comes back to see if each is at His post of service and watching; whether at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning. Thus, is the Lord’s coming presented in keeping with the gospel of His service -- His own work, or that of His servants. He comes back to see if each servant is at his post.

Beloved friends, here let me say to you that it is a very solemn thing for every soul to enquire, Am I filling up the little niche of service that He has given me? There are not only great

gifts, but joints and bands; and the body of Christ is said to increase by the *joints and bands*; every joint supplying that which belongs to itself in the mutual and effectual working of the measure of each one part. It is a great thing if each has found out his own path of service for the Lord.

It may be by earnest prayer in one; by the use of his temporal means in another; of the spiritual gifts in a third. In one way or another, He has given us something to do for Him, and He is coming back to ascertain how each is discharging the duty given him, and "at an hour ye think not." Therefore, after giving to each his work, and commanding the porter to watch, He says, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

Now in *Luke*, who is the great moralizer, presenting things morally to men's souls, and looking for a moral state in them, we find another thing. If Matthew gives us the official glory of the Messiah, and Mark the mission of service of One who "went about doing good"; Luke gives us *Himself* -- Jesus, the Son of man -- dealing morally with man. What then, will he look for, as he presents to us the Lord's coming? A moral state of soul in those whose is such a hope. In Luke 12, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning" -- that is not *resting* here; "Arise, depart, for this is not your rest, it is polluted." If you compare every place in scripture where you find girded loins spoken of, you will find the characteristic of the place is toiling and journeying on in a scene where your heart and affections must be braced up, they must not flow out here; it is a place of conflict and toil of some sort or other.

He speaks here of a "little flock." He says, I have charged myself with your circumstances, you need not be of a "doubtful mind." Let your loins be girded, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves "like unto men that wait for their Lord." Notice the word "like"; that the world might take knowledge of them. Nothing tests the heart like it. I say there is nothing in scripture that has such testing power with souls. If the Lord's coming be the horizon of the soul, see how little you will care for this scene. How little laying up for the future. The world would say, Well, it is plain what the man is doing. His hope is imprinting itself on his life, and acting itself out in all his ways. Of what value is this blessed hope if it be only held as a doctrine?

What is so blessed is, that it brings a divine person before the soul, and the heart is drawn out after Christ: it cultivates intimacy with Christ as we pass through this scene. Your heart is in the very condition that will welcome His return; it enjoys and cultivates a deepening intimacy with the one for whom it waits. Nothing brings Christ so personally before the soul as the hope of His coming.

Now *John* presents to us the divine Word manifest in flesh; the only begotten Son of the Father, the Son of God. And instead of a coming in power and glory, or in scrutiny of service, or as expecting a moral state of soul and heart to answer His own, He says, "I go"! (John 14). I must take your heart and affections out of this place and all earthly hopes. I must lead them into the Father's house, where there are many mansions. David's kingdom and Messiah's glory must now fade away in your hopes and hearts. The day will come when all *that* earthly glory will be consummated. But your hopes are in another sphere. I am about to enter the Father's house as man. I have wrought out your title to be there, on the cross. I

enter it myself in the title by which you will enter into it. Then "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Thus His instruction deals with and supersedes the hopes of the Jewish hearts around Him, and, as a consequence, suits our hearts, which have had no such hopes at all.

How blessed, beloved friends, to find, the moment I am free in heart and conscience before the Father, in the knowledge of His grace, that there was an abode in His house on high for me before ever the world was! Why is it that we never find any *description* of the Father's house in scripture? You have the heavenly Jerusalem described in her wondrous glory and displayed as His bride -- but never the Father's house. Because you are supposed to be familiar with the Father's Son, the Father is revealed in Him; and then it is sufficient to know that *He* is there, and the heart rests content in peaceful joy in the sense that where Jesus is, it is enough! "That where I am, there ye may be also!"

There is but one other passage in John that brings you thus into heaven and the Father's house. This is suited to him because he is occupied in unfolding God on earth in Christ -- not as Paul, who rather shows us Christ as man gone on high, and our place in Him in glory. The other passage I allude to is John 17:24.

So far as to the general truth of the Lord's coming in the gospel narratives. He had come and presented Himself to bring in, in grace all the glories that the prophets had spoken of, but was rejected. When He comes again He will bring in, in *glory*, what was refused in *grace*. We will turn now to the two epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians. In them we shall find that the pathway entailed on the saints, and the circumstances which occur between the two great points I have before named, all come out. These epistles fill up, as it were, the gap between. So needed and suited too, to perfect that which was lacking in the faith of those saints at Thessalonica.

I might remark in passing, as to this chapter (Acts 17) that it illustrates the word of Paul, so frequently misapplied to cover worldliness, and mingling in the world. I allude to, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 4:22). Acts 17 explains or illustrates his statements. If he goes into a synagogue in Thessalonica to speak to instructed Jews, he takes up the scriptures they knew and profess to believe: if to Athens, amongst the wits and philosophers of that city, noted for learning and human wisdom, he takes his text from one of their altars, on which was the inscription, "To the unknown God," and quotes from one of their own poets a sentence which judged all their idolatry, "For we are also his [God's] offspring" (Acts 17:28). Then, again, when He passed into the cities of Derbe and Lystra, where the grosser and more superstitious forms of idolatry prevailed, he preaches that they should

turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:15-17).

He adapted himself to the turn of mind and religious thoughts

of men -- keeping his own liberty with and in Christ all through, and thus becoming all things to all that he might win the more.

Now in Thessalonica he took up in the synagogue their own scriptures, and unfolded what had happened to their Messiah as foretold there --

Opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ (Acts 17:3).

Then, when we examine what he wrote to them afterwards, he alludes to the fact that this rejected Jesus, who was their Deliverer from the wrath to come, had not saved them from a path of suffering, but that His path was theirs.

Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheous, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith; that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we were appointed there unto. For verily, *when we were with you*, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know (1 Thess. 2:1-4).

Thus the path of this suffering, dead, and risen Christ was shared with those whom His love had called to inherit with Him His future glory! How sad the mistake the Corinthians made in this. They had "reigned as kings" without Paul. "Would to God," he says, "ye did reign"; for Christ would be reigning too (now He is "expecting"); and Paul then would "reign with you" (see 1 Cor. 4:8).

You will remark too, how bright and beautiful was the state of these freshly converted saints.

Ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves [the heathen] show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:7-10).

Why was it that their Christianity was so bright? Because, whenever you find Christianity so, depend upon it, it is very *objective*. That is, Christ, as a living person, is so thoroughly before the heart, that the saints are lifted out of themselves, and every eye and heart is filled with Him.

In the first chapter (ver. 10) we find how this suffering, dead and risen Jesus had gone on high to His Father's house; and how these beloved saints were waiting for God's Son from heaven. It is not as "Son of man" we have thus to do with Him, but as "Son of God." Paul was the first who *preached* Jesus, "the Son of God" (Acts 9: 20). The Father had raised up His Son from the dead; and He is our deliverer from the wrath to come." "To *serve*" and "to *wait*": "to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven," was their blessed occupation here.

Now, while they were thus *servicing* and *waiting*, some had fallen asleep. You do not find in the doctrinal parts of the NT

that a saint is said to *die*. No; he has been laid to sleep. "Death is ours," and Jesus had taken it out of the hands of Satan; it was no more wielded by him who had the power of death, as the "wages of sin," over the saints of God. Some amongst them had "fallen asleep," and those who remained were troubled. They thought those who had thus gone would lose the blessing for which they waited, and they sorrowed for their loved ones who had gone. It was needful, then, to come in and reassure their hearts, and Paul is given an express revelation to do so. Suppose one whom we loved had fallen asleep, what comfort would be given to us now-a-days? Would it be, Be comforted, God will bring them back? Rather would it not be, Ah, you will go to him? Would it not be something like that by which David comforted his soul when the child died: "But now he is dead wherefore should I fast. Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23).

Nay; the hope is for Jesus to *come for us*, and bring with Him those who have gone before. Now Paul says, at the close of 1 Thess. 4,

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which are laid asleep through Jesus will God bring with him.

It is not "them which sleep in Jesus." Jesus, the true David has taken Goliath's sword. He has disarmed Satan, who wielded the power of death, by going down into his domain of death. Therefore says Paul, "Death is ours." It is not now the wages of sin to the believer: that which leads sinful man to the judgment which lies beyond. The Lord has taken it into His hand, and if a saint who has waited for Him here below, has rather to wait *with* Him on high, he is "laid to sleep through Jesus and God will bring them with him" {when He appears in glory}.

The terms of the last clause of 1 Thess. 4:14 would apply, I apprehend, to the saints who have slept from Stephen and onward. Only such are before the apostle's mind, though not of course excluding any: Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming." Because the Son of God had first to take a *personal name* -- "Jesus." He did so when He became a man. "Jesus" is His personal name. Then He had to die and rise again, and disarm the enemy, taking death into His own hands. It does not say, Laid to sleep by Christ, but "through Jesus." It is His action now. He has hushed the saint to sleep, as the mother has hushed her child! The spirit of the departed one is with Him; his body in the dust. When Jesus comes they will be re-united. The *power* God in resurrection will glorify the saint who has been fitted for the glory by His blood.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord." (Paul is about to give a *special* revelation. When he does this, he marks it strongly, as, "Behold I show you a mystery," and the like). "That we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [that is, anticipate, or, go before] them which are asleep." If there is any advantage as to time *they* have it. "For the Lord *himself*"; it is not merely "The Lord," but "Himself shall descend"; as He had said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3). He will leave His Father's throne and descend from heaven "with a

shout." The shout is one of relationship with His own. His voice once called us out of darkness to Himself. The same voice gave forth the bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," when under the hand of God as made sin for us. It is the same voice which now speaks in the accents of divine grace from heaven in the gospel (Heb. 12:25). This voice of the Good Shepherd which we have known in our inmost souls, but which the world discerns not, will speak once more to those who are His, by this shout of relationship. Then the "voice of the archangel" carries it on, and the "trump of God" gives its sanction to all. Then the "dead in Christ shall rise first." If there be a moment of precedence they have the advantage of those who are "alive and remain." You will mark that it is the "dead in Christ" for it embraces *all* the saints of God.²¹ When this wondrous rapture takes place there is no distinction between the OT and the Church of God. "In Christ" marks a state or condition; they have not died "in Adam," but in Christ." Just as you cannot speak of a person being in Jesus -- that is a personal name but "in Christ."

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up,
[or snatched up] "together with them in the clouds, to meet
the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.
Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

This is only one stage. The Father's house is more than meeting Him "in the air." "In my Father's house are many mansions {abodes} . . . that *where I am*, there ye may be also" {John 14:2}. That is, the Father's house. It is there He presents His saints as the fruit of the travail of His soul. This is ever the order, "First children, then heirs." As in Eph. 1, "Predestinated to sonship through Jesus" (v. 5); then "In whom we have obtained an inheritance." The highest relationship we have is sonship to the Father.

Thus we have (Eph. 3:18)

To the end that he may stablish your hearts unblameable in
holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our
Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Now you find that time apostle will unfold the evil that is to be manifested, while the saints are on high, before their shining forth in glory with Christ; before the "Lord comes *with* ten thousands of his saints."

This rapture of the saints of God is a positive necessity in the completion of the grace which has taken up our cause. One feels that scripture would be incomplete without it. It is the consummation -- the finish of the grace. It is power putting them into the glorious place for which His precious blood has fitted them the positive result of the meetness in which they now stand.

It has been said, but mistakenly, that it is only those who are actually waiting for Christ who will be caught up when He comes {partial rapture notion}. But scripture never supposes that a saint is *not* waiting for Him. It always gives us the normal condition of Christians; our common level as to standing and hopes; though degrees of apprehension and joy

are no doubt fully recognized. Consequently you never find in scripture that a saint is not waiting for Christ. Many, alas! have sunk into the abnormal state; many have never had the hope -- never have had bridal affections awakened. Does this set aside this blessed hope? Does it change His sovereign grace? No! blessed be God, and the rapture of His saints is the fruit of sovereign grace; and waiting or not, *all* will be included in that wondrous army -- for He must see the fruit of the travail of His soul.

Now the word for "coming" is a large and comprehensive term in scripture as we have seen. It embraces in its scope the interval from the catching up of the saints {the rapture}, till their shining forth in glory {the appearing} -- their manifestation with their Lord to every eye. The Lord will *do* many things during that interval. His first action will be to move from His present seat on His Father's throne to meet them in the air. His voice is heard,

And the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are
alive [the remaining ones] shall be caught up together with
them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall
we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

We gather another step from 1 Thess. 3:13. He presents them to His Father, in His Father's house on high. "First children, then heirs," is the divine order. We shall then taste the joys of the Father's house, already become the home of our hearts, amid its many mansions {abodes}. In this passage we find the "coming" looks on to a moment beyond their presentation in the Father house; and this because he had introduced the thought of responsibility and holiness. Hence it runs on to the moment when they appear with Him; and all responsibility as to their path and ways of holiness has passed under the scrutiny of His eye.

When the saints are thus safely housed on high, the complete unfolding of the evil on earth takes place. These epistles go on to develop that; so you see, we are finding in these scriptures the steps between our two points in Acts 17. The world goes on saving "Peace and safety" on the eve of her "sudden destruction" out of which "they shall not escape."

Nothing can be more solemn than the state of things at the present hour. The cry from the infidel heart of many is, The world awaits a man. You, beloved brethren, are informed of what is coming. Like "the prudent man" who "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself," while "the simple" -- the foolish -- "pass on and are punished" (Prov. 22: 3). You are trimming your lamps, and going forth to meet your Lord. People tell you that the coming of the Lord is death. What folly! Who ever heard of death being our Lord? And His own lips have told us to be "Like men that wait for their Lord." Jesus is this. He is our Lord and Savior, and He looks that our hearts may indeed, with unworldly joy, wait for Him.

In 2 Thess. 2 he recalls their hearts, and exhorts them by their proper hope, "The coming of the Lord, and our gathering together unto him," not to be shaken by the false letter, "as from us" (v. 2), that the "day of the Lord had come." The open manifestation, or "day" of the Lord, would not come while they were here, and before that day, the lawless one the man of sin -- would be revealed. The mystery of iniquity was then at work; the apostasy would come, and then he who would sit in God's temple as God, would be there. The Lord would then

{21. "The dead in Christ" in this passage refers to Christians. When the rapture takes place, this will be a stage of "the first resurrection," i.e., "the resurrection of the just." The OT saints will be raised at this stage of "the resurrection of the just," as Heb. 11:40 shows.}

