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# *Papers on the Church*

*The Church - What Is it?  
Her Power, Hopes, Calling,  
Present Position, and Occupation*

*The Church, An Habitation of God  
Through the Spirit*

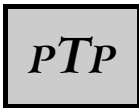
*Extract from: The Mystery*

*{Endeavoring to Keep  
the Unity of the Spirit}*

*That They All May be One*

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Made and printed in USA  
August 2004



*Present Truth Publishers*

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274 East Veterans Hwy  
Jackson NJ 08527 USA

Website: [presenttruthpublishers.com](http://presenttruthpublishers.com)

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## *Preface*

Five papers, or extracts therefrom, have been gathered in this pamphlet, trusting they may be of help to the reader.

The first of these papers covers much ground in a short paper and the reader may have to diligently apply himself to understand, depending on the Spirit of God, as always, to apprehend divine truth.

Remarks found in braces { } have been added by the editor of this collection, to clarify some matters, and Scripture references have been added to quotations to aid the reader in referring to them in his Bible.

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## Chapter 1

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# *The Church - What Is It? Her Power, Hopes, Calling, Present Position, and Occupation*

“Scripture speaks of our *place*, our *privileges*, our *responsibilities*.”

### {*The Kingdom*}

It is a solemn thing, when we come to think what the Church really is. <sup>1</sup> It is all blessed when we think of her privileges; but looking at her as Christ’s representative on earth is most solemn -- an “epistle of Christ.” As the tables of stone represented what God *demand*ed of man, so should the Church, and in an equal sense, be, in the world, the revelation of what God *is to man* -- an exhibition of God’s grace and power to man and in man.

When I speak of the “kingdom” it is a different thing. <sup>2</sup> We there get the display of power and government, not union and fellowship. Even the testimony of the kingdom comes necessarily to be quite a distinct thing. I should distinguish altogether “the gospel of the kingdom” and “the kingdom” from what we are accustomed to call “the gospel” <sup>3</sup> and the “Church.” Paul taught the *kingdom*, and he taught the *gospel*, and he taught the *Church*; but he never taught them as the same thing. <sup>4</sup>

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1. Not *ought to be*, but *is*. She ought to be a faithful representative; but we cannot take the Church of God out of this place, let her have got into what condition she may.

2. It is of great importance to distinguish between the *kingdom* and the *Church*.

3. We employ the term “gospel” in a very limited sense; but in the Scriptures it is used in a much more general way. For example, the apostle could say that, when Timothy came back from them, he brought good tidings (preached the gospel) of the brethren’s faith and charity. Again we read, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them.” (Heb. 3:3,) To them it was the promise of the land. The word is not restricted to the grace now preached, it is simply “good news”; and there may be the good news of the kingdom, or the good news of Canaan.

4. He preached the kingdom of God; but it is a very distinct thing that God should set up a reign  
(continued...)

There is one revelation -- God is going to take to Himself His great power, and to reign. There is another truth -- there is to be a bride and body of the King {rather, of Christ}. Again, certain things setting out the grace of God are necessary for the soul to be saved. These three things <sup>5</sup> are, very plainly, quite distinct.

From the moment Israel was called as a people, God had evidently the thought of having a *king*. <sup>6</sup> Man's way of setting about it was quite wrong.

Up to the time of Samuel, *priesthood* was, morally, the regular point of association between the people and God. But the priests were unfaithful, and then the Lord wrote Ichabod upon all that had been Israel's glory. The link between God and the people was broken. The ark was taken by the Philistines. The priests were slain. He delivered His strength into captivity, and the Philistines were in the mount of God.

This was the sign given to Saul <sup>7</sup> (1 Sam. 10). He found people going up to Bethel (v. 3). There were people that had faith in the God of Bethel <sup>8</sup> (i.e., that God would never leave His unchangeable promise to Jacob). Everything else might be gone; but God's connection with Israel could not be broken up. This became the resting-place of faith. God could not fail. Secondly, he was to go to the mount of God (v. 5); and there was the garrison of the Philistines -- the power of the enemies of the Lord in the place where God's altar ought to have been, and thus power against those who were acting in *faith*. Still, Bethel could be visited with a tabret and pipe; *faith* could take up the joy that was proper for the people who had Jehovah for their God. There was also the spirit of prophecy given to him (v. 6). But neither of the signs did Saul understand, though clear and instructive to the eye of faith.

David was the opposite of this, and was the type of Christ as king.

After the *king* is brought in there is a change in the position of the

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4. (...continued)

of power on the earth (take the word "*reign*" instead of "kingdom," and you will see at once that this is quite distinct from the idea of the "Church"); that would not necessarily touch the question that Christ was going to have a Bride united to Him in glory. And when he speaks of his ministry, he distinguishes his own ministry into a ministry of the *gospel*, and a ministry of the *Church*.

5. The *kingdom*, the *Church*, and the *salvation of the soul*.

6. This thought was not brought fully out until David; but in the days of Moses it was brought out that he would not only have a kingdom, but a king. Moses was called "king in Jeshurun" (Deut. 33:5), but he was not their king.

7. He ought to have understood it, but he did not.

8. Bethel was the place where Jacob had seen that God was the unchangeable God of Israel (Gen. 28).

priesthood; it ceases to be the habitual link of connection between the people and God. When Eli is set aside (1 Sam. 2:35) God says,

“I will raise me up a faithful priest, . . . and he shall walk,” not before me, but *“before mine anointed for ever.”*

There I get a royal person (another link between God and the people) set up above priesthood.<sup>9</sup> So that Solomon was quite right in thrusting out Abiathar (1 Kings 2:27).

When Solomon dedicated the temple, and the priests could not stand to minister because the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God, the *king* praised God and blessed the people.<sup>10</sup>

At length *THE KING* was presented in humiliation in the person of Christ.

John Baptist comes (Matt. 3) and says,

Repent ye: *for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. . . . *He that cometh after me* is mightier than I, . . . whose fan is in His hand . . . He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.<sup>11</sup>

John is rejected; and then (after he is cast into prison) Christ takes up the same testimony (Matt. 4).

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. . . . And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, *and preaching the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing all manner of sickness, &c.

The power of God was with Him in testimony, and was seen.

The disciples -- the King having been rejected -- are given to know “the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven,” which to the multitude are parables (Matt. 13) And they have God with them.

The apostles were to go on (and they went on) preaching the *kingdom*.

The *kingdom* is still to be *set up*; that is, the power of heaven in the person of Jesus Christ. He shall take to Him His great power, and reign. It will be set up in heaven. He must go to a far country to receive a *kingdom*, and to return (Luke 19:11, 12). He has gone up on high; but He has not yet been sent in in the power of the *kingdom*.

It will be a “world to come,” not merely a state of Judaism, the kingdom of the “Son of man”; not merely the Jews and their Messiah (Dan. 2, 7). Heaven will be, in the highest sense, the seat of the kingdom; but it is still the

9. From this time the people’s fortunes followed the king.

10. As Melchisedec {did}.

11. i.e. the King is coming in judgment.

*kingdom.*

There is another revelation -- we are to reign in the *kingdom*. I get "joint-heirs," and those who are to "reign with Him," and those who are to "sit on thrones"; but it is still the *kingdom* (largely extended, a wider sphere; but I am still traveling in the circuit of the *kingdom*).

The destruction of Jerusalem {in AD 70} was the setting it <sup>12</sup> aside in judicial power; but still we can preach the *kingdom* of God. There will be the effect of the actual employment of power in setting things to right {when Christ appears in glory}. At present it {i.e., the kingdom} is rather in testimony than in power. The effect of the power of Christ in "the world to come" will be to set aside the power of Satan. <sup>13</sup>

In all this we have only the *kingdom*.

### {*The Church*}

There is another ministry that goes out altogether on another principle. In Paul's ministry I get that which is beyond the reach of dispensations. I have here *what man is* (not merely "sinners of the Gentiles," or Jews). He may prove it, as regards the Gentiles, in one way, and demonstrate it, as regards the Jews, in another; but what he proves and demonstrates is this, that *man*, as man, is at enmity with God. If we *begin at Jerusalem*, we begin with a testimony *to Jerusalem*. <sup>14</sup> In Paul's ministry, Jews and Gentiles alike are known only as "children of wrath." We get him peaching the gospel <sup>15</sup> "*to every creature under heaven.*" <sup>16</sup>

But Paul was not simply a minister *of the gospel*; he was a minister also *of the Church*, to "*fulfil*" (fully to preach <sup>17</sup>) "*the word of God.*"

12. {The Mosaic system was ended by the rejection of Christ on the cross, the veil being rent by His blood. In AD 70, the Mosaic system was set aside by judicial power, God using the Romans governmentally.}

13. Miracles were "miracles of the world to come" (Heb. 2:6; 6:5).

14. The testimony in Matt. 28:19 goes out without a word about the Jews. Christ had been with the Jews, but the testimony is to go out unto the Gentiles. In Luke 24:47 the "beginning at Jerusalem" marks the greatest possible grace.

15. In the common sense of the word.

16. It was not a different gospel, as to the salvation of the soul, from that of Peter; but the testimony {of Paul} was more indiscriminate. I may distinguish in speaking to a man, but I must come to the same point. "You are a lost sinner, and God is a holy God, and (Jew or Gentile) if not washed in the blood of Jesus, you must perish."

17. In order to the completion of the word of God, the doctrine of the Church (as taught by him),  
(continued...)



We read (Col. 1:12):

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom<sup>18</sup> of His dear Son; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature;<sup>19</sup> 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: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is *the Head of the body, the Church*: who is *the beginning, the first-born from the dead*;<sup>20</sup> that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all *things* unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. And *you*,<sup>21</sup> that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet *now hath He reconciled*, in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight

-- and now as to the ministry --

if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of *the gospel*, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; *whereof* I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for *His body's sake*, which is *the Church*; *whereof* I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, *to fulfil the word of God,*" &c.

In the testimony about the Church, I find (not the kingdom, nor the salvation of individuals, merely; but) that there is a *body* for Him who is the King, associated and connected with Him in His Headship over all things. There is a certain special thing which the Lord *has* reconciled.

Paul deduces everything, as to the Church, from Christ's Headship of the *body*, and the flowing down from Him of all He has to minister. How is the accomplishment of this? "*By one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body*"

17. (...continued)

must be preached, as well as the kingdom.

18. There I get the kingdom.

19. Besides being the image of God, He is Head over creation, and the reason of that is that He has created it all.

20. It is now, "Head of the body, the Church," as "first-born from the dead."

21. The Church. Here (as there was the Headship over all things, and the Headship of the church, so) we get the reconciliation of all things *in purpose*, and the *present* reconciliation, through faith, which is the Church.

(1 Cor. 12:13).

Turn to Eph. 1:19:

And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He Wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be *the Head over all things to the Church*, WHICH IS HIS BODY, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

In this passage there is the Headship of the body, and He is “*Head over all things to the Church.*”

As to the way and power of the unity of the *body* of saints formed on earth with Christ the Head in heaven, it is by the Holy Ghost “*sent down from heaven,*”<sup>22</sup> making them *one body*.

As a consequence, when Paul speaks of apostles and prophets, he looks at them in this light,<sup>23</sup> and never as appointed by Christ on earth. He says,

If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in *the mystery of Christ*) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is *now* revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,” &c.<sup>24</sup> (Eph. 3:2-5).

As to the very existence of these holy apostles and prophets --

Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave<sup>25</sup> some,<sup>26</sup> apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the

22. Come down after Christ’s ascension, and consequent upon His glorification at the right hand of God, the work of redemption being accomplished. {See Acts 2:32, 33.}

23. As flowing from Christ, the exalted Head in heaven (Eph. 4:11).

24. Here I get “holy apostles and prophets,” and a thing known nothing of until revealed to these apostles and prophets, to whom it was revealed by the Spirit.

25. From this height.

26. {The reader should note that these gifts were given from Christ to the body. The comma after the word “some” is not helpful. J. N. Darby translates: “and *he* has given some apostles, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, . . . Apostles were not given to a local assembly, nor were the others named.}

ministry, for *the edifying of the body of Christ*, &c. (Eph. 4).

His thought about apostles is of something that flows from the exalted Head. He knows no man after the flesh {2 Cor. 5:16}.

By one Spirit baptized into one body, we have the Head and the body united together -- the Head at the right hand of God in heaven, united to the members, formed into a body down here on earth by the power of the Holy Ghost. Scripture calls that "*the Church*." <sup>27</sup>

There is a word in Matt 16. that is sometimes over-looked. The Lord says there to Peter, "Upon this rock *will I build* my Church." There had been the revelation by the Father to Peter of the person of Christ, as "the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him (on the confession of this),

Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee . . . And I say also <sup>28</sup> unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock *will I build my Church*; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And *I will give unto Thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,*" &c.

Christ is going to build His Church; and, besides this, He gives the keys to Peter. The keys of the *kingdom* are a distinct thing from Christ's building His *Church*.

The Church is that body which the Holy Ghost forms into unity, as connected with, and united to, the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven; and that which the Holy Ghost so unites to Him is the only <sup>29</sup> thing in Scripture called "the Church" (i.e., specially such).

It may be added that this is a question which, at the present moment, is running through almost every country in Europe. <sup>30</sup> There are endless theories about it; but this is the question, "What is the Church?" Some say it is "visible," others "invisible"; some, that there will be a Church by-and-by, but there is none now; that there is no Church on earth (there may be Churches), but, when all are assembled in heaven, there will be a Church. Now, whilst it is perfectly clear that, when Christ leaves the Father's throne to take the Church

27. One greatly respects the jealousy of souls, having the consciousness of the electing love of God, and His saving every one whom he has called, from Adam downward, in being alarmed lest this distinction should affect the foundation of God's electing love through the blood; but still it is my duty, as well as my privilege, to understand the position in which God has set me, and to call by the right name *what God has called by name in Scripture*.

28. In effect, "I am going to give thee an official place; I am going to say something -- My Father has revealed my name to thee, and I am going to give thee an official name!"

29. Local "*Churches*" are not in question here.

30. The thing people are seeking to settle is, What is the Church of God? It may be said to be the question of the day with the saints. And most surely it connects itself with every part of practice.

Unto Himself, it will form a glorious body in heaven; yet, plainly, whilst sitting at the right hand of God, the only thing He owns as the Church is the body *down here*.<sup>31</sup> Until He rises up from His seat on high, He is working, and ordering, and acting, always (while hid in God) by the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost is down here. That which He owns as the Church, is where the Holy Ghost is,<sup>32</sup> until it is united to Himself in glory.

There is no difficulty if we turn to Scripture. Where did Paul look at the Church? “By one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body” {1 Cor. 12:13}, where? On earth, and not only in heaven. Certainly, gifts of healing, &c., were not in heaven. Nor are the “joints and bands “in heaven. None of its ministries are in heaven. It will be in heaven eventually, no doubt, but it is *now* on earth. This is a great point to get our souls simple and clear upon.

As to her “power.” In Scripture it is not the power of the Church, but the power that works *in us* -- the power of *God* working in the Church.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh *in us*,<sup>33</sup> unto Him be glory in the Church,” &c.

The operation of the power of the Lord is necessarily limited by the moral condition of the Church; (He may bear with it, have patience towards it, but) God will never publicly act, so as to sanction what He disapproves.<sup>34</sup>

And with regard to power in public testimony, while the Church was no doubt the vessel of it (there was a certain measure of power in the testimony of the *kingdom*<sup>35</sup> then, for which you would look in vain now), still it was the power of the Son of man. Where it is merely the saving of a soul, or the ministry of the Church, one does not look for the same sort of power. (God is sovereign, and works as He pleases.) The Church was a vessel of power, and miracles were a testimony to the power of Christ, as the risen Son of man. But when I think of the saving of souls, I look rather for that operation of the Spirit

31. {This is the view of those who believe in independency of assemblies. The reader might obtain a copy of *The Whole Body on Earth*, from Present truth Publishers, for a brief examination of this matter.}

32. {The Spirit came *here* in a special capacity to form the body. The saints that have died meanwhile, are of the body, but not in the activity of the body. That activity is here on earth, and Scripture speaks of “the whole body”, showing every joint of supply in activity (Eph. 4:16). Clearly, that is not in heaven.}

33. “In us,” it is true, but still it is His power.

34. He sanctions the gospel preached, and there will be a certain measure of power go with the gospel.

35. The *kingdom was there* to a certain extent {and in a mystery form.}

of God through the gospel. And when I look at the Church, I look to the Head, to supply what its need demands. While the Church carried externally the character of Christ before the world, she was chartered with power -- the power of Christ. That which Christ is to supply can never fail. Christ and His power, and His acting in power, can never fail. He must nourish the Church withal, according to its need. But if God is acting in and towards persons, there must be truth in His actings; He cannot act in the power of grace contrary to the moral condition of the Church, any more than He can act towards an individual contrary to his state before Himself. We must get our souls down into the consciousness of where we are, before we get the blessing suited to our condition. *Where are we?* is the question. He never alters His mind. But the Church's responsibility never alters His grace. Christ is exactly what it wants *now* (otherwise my faith cannot get on); as exactly *now* what we want for the Church *now*, as when in the days of the apostles it was adorned with every kind of miracle. But He will not act in the same way. Christ will never give up His thoughts about the Church; and, if we are acting on our thoughts, and He acts on His, He will make sad work with what we have set up. "He that gathereth not *with me* scattereth abroad." If Christ begins to gather, He will scatter that which is not gathered in the power of unity with Himself. As with a card-house, the first wind of God's Spirit blows it all about. This may be very astonishing, very humbling, still it does not discourage (far from it!) those that look for God's actings. You are sure to get bad roads when the spring comes, and the frost breaks up. Let the Church be what it may, Christ is not altered. Her power is her weakness -- her spirit of dependence, in never getting out of the place of constant, simple, unmingled, dependence (2 Cor. 12:10).

### {*The Hope of the Church*}

The "hope" of the Church, as such, is identified with, and founded on, the relationship in which it is placed as united to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. It is true, she is here as a pilgrim on earth, but, at the same time, she is the Bride on earth united to her Head in heaven, seated in heaven in Him, she waits to be there. The one proper hope of the Church has no more to do with the world than Christ has (John 17:16), who is in heaven. She will see things set right in the *kingdom*, but that is not her hope; her hope is the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, where she knows Him. Where did Paul know Christ? In the heavenly glory. And Paul knew the Church to be one with Christ there.

There may be the change of the body, in order to the accomplishment of the glory, but there is nothing, as to its own position, but sitting in heavenly places, *with* Christ, because it is now sitting in heavenly places *in* Christ. To be along with Christ is our one hope.

“*That where I am, there ye may be also*” {John 14:1-3}. In the epistle to the Thessalonians the apostle says, “*Then shall we ever be with the Lord.*” And what follows? Nothing! A great many things may be happening; but the Church’s hope is to be with Him where He is, and like Him, when she sees Him as He is.

### {*The Heavenly Calling*}

As to the “calling.” The heavenly calling (though embraced) does not at all fill up the thought. It does not, in itself, convey the thought of the Church.<sup>36</sup> We might as a set of individuals be called up, and be caught up, into heaven, and have a heavenly portion as the brethren of Christ, without knowing that we were the *body* and *bride* of Christ. The “hope” of the Church is its marriage with the Bridegroom, and that is in heaven; we may come forth from heaven, for the *kingdom* and the glory, but our place is in heaven, in the unity with Christ as one with Him. We are builded together for the habitation of God through the Spirit {Eph. 2:22}; that is the calling of the Church down here.<sup>37</sup>

### {*Present Position and Occupation*}

As to “present position and occupation,” there is one thing makes a great difference. When the Spirit of God was working in the beginning of the gospel, the testimony had the aspect of power, and produced a sensible and visible result, there was *an ostensible gathering*. The central energy had the fulness of the truth, though there might be feebleness at the extremity of the rays. But

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36. We are constantly confounding in our minds the *members* of the Church and the Church *itself*. A great many things are true of the members that do not involve the Church distinctively (that is, as gathered into unity by one Spirit, baptized into one body). I may speak about the various members of a corporation without speaking of the corporation, its rights, &c., as such.

37. Eph. 4. Paul beseeches, “that ye walk worthy of *the vocation wherewith ye are called*, . . . endeavoring to keep *the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace. There is *one body*, and *one Spirit*, even as ye are called *in one hope of your calling*,” &c.

With regard to the distinction between Peter, Paul, and John, as to the subject of ministry committed to them. Paul develops the dispensations of God. Peter was a witness of the resurrection of Christ. In Paul, it is not simply resurrection, but union with Christ at the right hand of God; he was converted by hearing Christ (whom he had never seen on earth) telling him that (in persecuting the *Church*) he was persecuting *Himself* (Acts 9:45). That was the converting word. In John we get another thing, an abstract statement of what the nature of God is; and consequently, what the nature of the children of God -- love and righteousness. God is light, and God is love, and the nature of the children is deduced from the nature of God Himself.

there is nothing of this sort now. The sheep of God are scattered. The camp has got wrong. The consequence of this is, all manner of degrees of knowledge. The very principle of unity has a separative tendency. A man must now settle himself upon the center of truth. If my soul is not prepared to look to Christ, and to gather with Christ, and to take His judgment, *I shall be cast into the uncertain condition of the differing judgment of every saint I meet with in the day's walk.* Where Christ is the common object, there will be a coalescing power. I find the Church of God, in a unity which attaches itself to Christ alone, as the one sole center.

The "occupation" of the Church ought to be constant, incessant reference to its Head. If its Head is not its first thought (and that is shown in thinking of its Head, and filling itself into all the thoughts, and mind, and affections of its Head), it cannot act for Him. This is its grand occupation. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." I must get through the crowd of Satan's power, and I must get beyond the crowd to my Head, who is the only source of power. We should seek that kind of communion with the saints, which living in spirit with the Head gives. We should get all who hear to join in the cry (Rev. 22:17). So should the Church have its own light, that all that is outside would be shut out. The apostle was living in a world of his own -- he was filled with ideas of his own, but they were *God's ideas*, and he had power. It is not knowing the scene I have to act in that gives me power; we get no strength from the contemplation of that; but intercourse and living communion with the Head. We should get near enough to Christ to enjoy Him, and to know Him truly, and to gather up all that is like Him. If not separated by affection from the world, we shall be separated by discipline in the world. He will vex our souls to get us separate, if in spirit and in heart we are not separate.

Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart . . . therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies, which the Lord thy God shall send against thee.

I feel the importance of definitely apprehending the relationship in which the Lord has set us . . . Hence would flow that rigid obedience (and obedience is the only thing in which a Christian should be rigid) which would keep us from *latitudinarianism*, and that nearness to Christ which would keep us from *sectarianism* (the most natural weed of the human heart; for sectarianism is getting an interest in a little circle round ourselves); and it would give us a feeling and interest in the whole Church of God; for Christ can love nothing less.

From *The Christian Friend*, 1876, pp. 269-283.





## Chapter 2

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# *The Church, An Habitation of God Through the Spirit*

## *Ephesians 2*

There are two great ideas in this epistle as regards the saints. The grand thought all through it is the grace of God towards them; but, as regards the saints, there are these two ideas about the Church: 1st, its hope; 2nd, what it is now, meanwhile.

It looks at it, on the one hand, as having a certain place in glory, and as enjoying the inheritance; and on the other there is this second point, what it is even now before it gets there. And this last gives it, in a certain sense, a higher character of communion and fellowship in blessing than is contained in the glory itself which it expects, though doubtless the other will not then cease. You will see these two things in considering the prayers of the apostle (Eph. 1:3).

We shall be in glory before Him, children (that is the expression), to bring out the glory of His grace, who has predestinated us according to the good pleasure of His will -- "holy and without blame before Him in love." And here we have: "In whom ye also are builded together *for an habitation of God through the Spirit,*" before Him in glory, and God dwelling in us.

We will just consider a little, beloved friends, how it is that the Church becomes thus the "habitation of God." It is of the deepest importance to us. I said that the blessings connected with this are, in some respects, superior to what might properly be called glory. And this is important, because we find that even now this blessing is brought to us. In glory we shall be able to enjoy it better, but we *have* it now.

At the end of Eph. 1, where the apostle has been speaking concerning God's purpose about the saints, the thought is the "exceeding greatness of His power," and he prays. (See Eph. 1:18-23.)

At the close of Eph. 3 we have a prayer founded upon the other point I have spoken of. (See Eph. 3:14-21). The character of this prayer is higher, and it goes further than the former.

There are two titles given to God in this epistle. In the one, He is called the "GOD" *of our Lord Jesus Christ*, because Christ is looked at there as *glorified Man*, who has been down here, suffered, died, and been raised again. In the other, He is called the "FATHER" *of our Lord Jesus Christ*, because Christ is not thus looked at as the risen and glorified Man, but as the *Son of God*.

Now the prayer in Eph. 1 is founded upon the first of these titles {names} (v. 17), and is connected with the glory of the *risen Man*. In Eph. 3 the apostle bows his knees unto "the FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"; and therefore he looks more at intimacy of, communion and to our being "filled into all the fulness of God." It is not God giving us knowledge of the inheritance, but God filling us with *Himself*.

We find these subjects, and the distinction between them, all through. In the one, the Lord Jesus Christ is considered as *Man* whom *God* has raised from the dead, and there the Church is looked at as "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." In the other, as the Son of the Father, in the power and unity of that relationship, and so of the divine nature; this latter point being more especially connected with our being an "habitation of God through the Spirit."

There are two points in this expression, beloved friends; one, that of our being the "habitation of God"; and the other, that that is "through the Spirit." He is not speaking of our dwelling with God (although that is true), but of our being "an *habitation* of God." He says, "Ye are builded together," &c. And this is evidently a different thing. It is a different thing our having glory together with Him, and God's dwelling in us; that is, I repeat, evidently a most peculiar and special blessing.

God came down to talk with man (Gen. 3) -- man already fallen -- "and they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." But God then had no "habitation" on earth.

God's Spirit had dealt in power in various ways in the history of man; but the moment the people are called out, it is:

The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation," &c. (Ex. 15:2).

This is the first thing we find in the song of Moses.

David had the same thought (2 Sam. 8). He would not dwell in an house of cedar whilst the ark of God dwelt within curtains. But the Lord answers him, and says,

I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

“But Solomon built Him an house.” Having settled His people in the land, the “*habitation* of God” was built -- afterwards called a worldly sanctuary with carnal ordinances (Heb. 9:1, 10), but it was the “habitation of God.”

And then, when the Lord Jesus came into the world, this truth applied properly to His person. He says,

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up {John 2:19 }.

He is regarded as the temple of God. Therefore God was then dwelling (in Him) with man, in the midst of the sorrow and evil into which man was fallen.

Well, here it is the Church (v. 22).

Beloved friends, it is touching to see the place which God takes (referring to the passage I have quoted about David’s thought of building a house) according to the state of His people. God always takes the place that *suits* His people. A most marvelous thought, but a most gracious thought on His part. If His people are enslaved under burdens, as in Egypt, He becomes their *Redeemer*. If they are a journeying people, and in tents, He dwells *there* Himself. He takes the same place as His people, for He is to be the center of their blessing, and leads them by the cloud. This He did up to Solomon’s time. When Joshua comes in and has to fight with the Canaanites, He presents Himself as “*Captain* of the Lord’s host” (Josh. 5). When the people are settled (settled as far as they could be) under Solomon in fulness of peace and in blessing, God builds a *settled* house. And God dwells among them. Whatever the circumstances His people are in, God takes a place suited to them.

The place that God takes to dwell in now (until His people come into the rest) is, properly speaking, a tent or tabernacle. It is just, surely, as blessed, but, so to speak, more moveable. In glory it will not be so. While we are on our journey it is a tabernacle, not a temple; but still God dwells among men. His own grace has built an “*habitation*” for Himself. I am speaking, let us remember, not at all of that place of glory into which we are to come before God, but of that other thing, that God will come and dwell down here upon the earth. When Jesus was in the world, God’s presence was there. And it was that which was the center of all blessing. They gathered around Him. Well now, it is the same thing with regard to the Church; God dwells upon the earth, in the Church, as a “habitation,” though not visibly, not in manifested glory.

And this comes to be of the last possible importance. If it is really true that God dwells on the earth in a “habitation,” evidently the “habitation” wherein He dwells must be of the greatest importance. And this remains always true.

Failure though there may be, still the Church is His dwelling-place. Until Christ came, or at any rate until Lo-ammi was pronounced upon Israel at the Babylonish captivity, God dwelt there, and the blessing of the people and the guilt of the people was in respect of God's dwelling. If it was a question of idolatry, "They have set," He says, "*their altars by my altar.*" So when He is going to judge the people in Ezekiel, He goes on and shows the prophet what they were doing *in the temple*. It might be the ancients of the house of Israel in the chambers of imagery, or women weeping for Tammuz, or the men at the door of the temple of the Lord between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, worshipping the sun; but it was *in the temple*. That was the place to which sin referred itself.

Having stated this general truth, I would just see here how this "habitation" is brought about.

All the first chapter of the epistle, as also the beginning of the second, is taken up with the other point of which I spoke; i.e., that God has raised up Christ from the dead; as it is said,

According to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when, &c.

God is here stepping in in power (not merely as a Judge having satisfaction, but stepping in in his own power for the accomplishment of His purposes) to deal with man, looked at as under the consequences of sin. It is not only man in evil that is looked at in this epistle, responsible to God, and having to find that which meets His state in the cross (we see that in Hebrews and elsewhere; it is not specially treated of here), it is God acting in His own power for the deliverance of man. Christ takes this place. He descends into the lower parts of the earth, making Himself responsible for the consequences of sin. He comes down from the throne of God in the perfectness of divine love, humbles Himself, takes upon Him the consequences of sin, and comes down into the consequences of sin, where man had brought himself. Marvelous and blessed truth! Where we were looked at as sinners "*dead in trespasses and sins,*" Christ has come down: He put Himself there. Alas! the judgment of those who reject Christ! they will find the full consequences of sin in themselves. But that is where faith first sees the full consequences of sin -- in Christ. Sin was fully matured (man had behaved lawlessly without law, the law had been broken, Christ slighted and rejected), and He then enters into this place, and goes under the full power of the consequences of sin. We see Him brought down into the weakness of man under the power of death -- Satan's power (though He could not be holden of it), and under the wrath of God -- into the "dust of death."

All that which the heart of Christ felt and suffered is told out wonderfully in the Psalms; whether it be from the hiding of God's countenance, or from His

enemies surrounding Him, or from Satan's power, or from God's waves and billows going over him, all is freely expressed there. Occasionally we find this breaking forth in the gospels; but it is more especially given in the Psalms. What the gospels present to us, generally speaking, is the perfect walk of Christ -- of Him who, by virtue of His living by the Father, and His perfect obedience and love, was always towards man what man needed in order to approach God. All that man could see, while His thoughts about that which pressed upon Him were hidden within His own heart.

I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! {Luke 12:50}.

Constantly His soul was straitened; whilst, if you look at Him among men, they were not straitened in Him; all was grace and love still. He showed forth the great principle of the offering up of Himself as man to God. He had power to take that place, and He took it. Though without sin, He suffered the consequences of sin, even to the "dust of death"; He went down into it. But there He could not remain.

Having thus perfectly glorified God, it then became a question what God should do for Him. And we read,

He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places {Eph. 1:20} &c.

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things {Eph. 4:10}.

Having descended in the perfectness of love and obedience to the dust of death, He went thence back to the throne of God, and is set above all. And thus, whatever exercise of heart there may be, or whatever the evil and rebellion of unconverted man, *faith* knows perfectly that from the throne of God down to the uttermost consequences of sin, and from the uttermost consequences of sin up to the throne of God, Christ fills all things. There is not one thing to the eye of faith, from the throne of God to the dust of death, and from that up to the highest point of glory, that is not filled with the redemption power of Christ. The love of God has come down into the place of the sin and ruin of man; and *faith* rests in that love, and in the full accomplishment of redemption, as shown out in that He who went down into the dust of death is now at the right hand of the throne of God. "He that descended," &c. Woe be to those who reject this! But that is what *faith* knows about the work of Christ. He has gone down into the dust of death, and the "exceeding greatness of God's power has raised Him from the dead," &c.

That is the redemption power of God. The results, it is true, will be brought out afterwards. God is waiting, and souls are being gathered unto Christ; but *that* is the redemption, in the power of which we stand.

Well, now, the consequence of that is seen in this second chapter --

You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;  
and then, too (because God has done it *for us* in Christ),  
and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in  
Christ Jesus {Eph. 2:6}.

The great result of this salvation will be our being *with* Christ in the glory by-and-by; but even now by faith we can see ourselves “*in* Christ Jesus” (not “*with*” Him, as has been observed) there. I know that the redemption power which has visited me, touched me, and taken me up, when I was “dead in trespasses and sins,” I know that that has not stopped short of the throne of God itself. It has united me to Him who is at the right hand of God, and has therefore placed me there “*in*” Him, as having the same life, the same righteousness -- God’s righteousness now, and hereafter the same joy,<sup>38</sup> and the same glory.

This would have been true if there were but one saint. But there is a further thing. The apostle goes on to show that, looked at according to the largeness of the purpose of God, Jew and Gentile (whatever the distinction between them and that of God “*in the flesh*”) were on one broad platform of ruin.

Among whom we *all* had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh {Eph. 2:3}, &c.

Having taken that ground, he says, “Remember where you *are*”; “He is our peace,” &c. (See vv. 14-17). “Peace” having been made, the dealings of God with man down here, on the ground of redemption, are begun.

Christ sat down on the throne of God, having completed the work -- the peace being made, redemption accomplished. He could not go further than the throne of God. He has carried the “wave sheaf,” the first-fruits of redemption power, in His own person up to the throne of God.

Well, on that the “peace” that is “preached” is based. And here I would just for a moment (supposing there may be some here who have not peace) notice *how* it is that he preaches peace. He does not come and say to man, ‘You have to make your *peace* with God.’ He preaches *peace*. He does not preach a peace *to be* made, a peace that is not made; He preaches peace -- *a made peace*. *He has made peace through the blood of His cross*. Having sat down at the right hand of God, the whole work being accomplished, so that He is “expecting until His enemies are made His footstool” (Heb. 10:13). He comes to Jew and Gentile, no matter to whom, and *preaches peace*; not a progressive work, but

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38. {And the same place, too, as Eph.1:6 shows. Our place before the Father is measured by Christ’s place.}

a peace completely made. The soul may be a long while struggling under the sense of unanswered responsibility, it may cling to the law, it may mistake the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ, be looking for results in itself (we naturally look to our own righteousness, and even the saints often mistake holiness for the ground of peace), and the like -- all that may take place in the soul, but it does not at all touch the perfectness of the work of Christ, or alter the strain of what Christ *preaches*, as being at the right hand of God. Blessed thought! It is simple enough, and there is nothing more suitable; for, as we shall see (without the thought of holiness having anything to do with the ground of peace), holiness flows forth as the consequence of peace. *Wherever there is simplicity of faith there is peace.* That is the first point -- perfect peace, independent of anything in ourselves; no matter what we were, Jew or Gentile, despised or honorable in the earth, it is a peace that has been brought to us in Christ.

The next thing (and that as a consequence) is, that “through Him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:18).

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners,” &c. (Eph. 2:19-22). Christ having wrought this redemption, having ascended to God, having sat down at the right hand of God, having gathered us together, makes us thus gathered together “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” It is not God merely *acting* in certain men, it is God *dwelling* in the Church down here, as gathered through the word of the gospel. The Church is the place of God’s presence on the earth. He has set us in redemption, and He comes and dwells in us. When the Church was gathered together with one accord in one place, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down and dwelt there, the result of the accomplished work of Jesus. And this is a real thing. I am not speaking now, merely of gifts, but of the presence of God Himself.

Now it is quite clear that the presence of God down here must be of the last {i.e., most} importance. *His* “habitation” is that which *He* possesses, which belongs to *Him*, and there nothing that does not recognize the fulness of this blessed cost of salvation can be. It is those who are His redeemed ones, brought together by the peace which Christ preaches -- those who have, through Christ, access by one Spirit unto the Father, that come to be the place where God dwells.

There are many places in which the Spirit of God could act. We find the expression, “the eyes of the Lord” (2 Chron. 16:9),

the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.

If we turn to certain dealings of God as assuring the work He established by His Spirit, for instance, the laying the foundation of the temple by Zerubbabel

(Zech. 3, 4), we there find mention of these “eyes of the Lord.” So in Ezekiel’s throne (Ezek. 1:18; 10:12) -- the operations of God in His governing power in the world. So too Rev. 5:6. All this is the activity of the energy of the Spirit of God; it might act in glorious power, or it might act in silent energy, but in all it is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God going out and dealing in the world. And that is quite another thing. I am not speaking of that. We are

an *habitation* of God through the Spirit.

In grace to us it may be a tabernacle, but still it is “an *habitation* of God” -- the place where He dwells, where He lives, so to speak, where He has taken up His abode, where He can have around Him the things that suit His presence, that in which He delights. Beloved friends, this is what we are, we may have dishonored it, but that is just what we are made, and in this world -- the place where God dwells.

Now to take a simple example of the effect of this -- I said a simple example, and yet it is a very important one -- let us look at the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). That was not a question of gift. Peter said,

Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart *to lie to the Holy Ghost?*

God was there; there was no gift exercised at all; and Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead. They had had the folly and madness not to understand that God was there, and therefore when they came and brought only part of the possession -- lying to God (it was not to Peter and John they were lying), God showed the indignation of His presence, and they fell down dead. There was wonderful effect in this. We read,

And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things, &c.

The fact was known that God did “in every deed” (as Solomon speaks at the dedication of the temple) “dwell with men.” It was the real presence of God -- the Church was there, having God dwelling in it, and acting in it, by the Holy Ghost -- and He proved it; His presence sanctified the place.

Well now, beloved friends, that is always and constantly true. As I have said, we may have grieved the Spirit, dishonored the house, and been unfaithful (that, alas I is also too true), but it depends upon the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. What is the consequence of redemption? It is not merely that I have peace individually, nor yet that we are heirs together of glory, nor yet that we have access through Christ by the Spirit to the Father; besides all this, it is the ground on which God dwells down here. It is in virtue of the accomplishment of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ, that God can come down here and make His “habitation,” that He can comfort and strengthen those who are within (not merely act in providential power without), that He can be at home in the midst



of His people. This, His being at home in the midst of His people, practically sanctifies us; it involves great responsibility (His house should be according to His holiness). "Holiness becometh thy house for ever," but at the same time it becomes the source of our power and blessing.

Suppose for a moment God was here, and we were all His saints (the Lord grant it may be so), and all the saints of God that are in the world (which is not the case; God forbid that it should be), is it not quite evident that the eye, the ear, all would refer to that, the every movement, would be consequent upon God's being there, the presence of God's governing, and stamping its character on the whole? Again, if that were the case, supposing we could say that God was there, and all the enemies in the world were raging about us, beloved, would not the one thought be that *God* was there, and that that was *God's* concern? He would be the strength, the help, the confidence of the soul. Yes, and that was so beautifully shown when the Jews came back to Jerusalem, and were in fear of their enemies. The first thing they built was -- what? -- a high wall? No; they *built an altar*. God was their confidence and strength.

Well, we are "builded together for," &c. And see what a blessed truth is connected with this. On what ground could God come into our midst, and dwell with us? It is not on any uncertain ground. It is upon the ground of God's perfect and entire *complacency* in the Church -- His perfect delight. It is not God's coming down to call us, as He did Adam after the fall, in order to find out that he was lost. Neither is it God's coming down, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, to see whether the cry that was gone up is such as it seems to be. Neither is it God's coming down, as He did to Israel, to put to the test whether He can stay. He comes down on the ground, and in consequence of completed redemption -- of peace being perfectly made. His presence is the witness and evidence of accomplished redemption. He says, as it were, "I have so accomplished this redemption, I am so pleased with you, so satisfied because of Jesus, that I am come to dwell with you, to make my abode with you, you are to be my "habitation." What a character does this give to the Church! What manner of men ought we *to be*?

But then there is another thing. If we are the "habitation of God through the Spirit," the consequence is, not merely the favor of God, but all the consequences of this favor. The Holy Ghost comes down as the witness and testimony of the fulness of the Father's delight in Christ, and of our joy in Him. "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come," &c. (John 16:13-15). He ministers (I am not now talking of the instruments) to us these things. He has all "the goods" (as it is expressed in Eliezer, Gen. 24) "in His hand," to minister the comfort and strength of what belongs to us as the Bride of Christ, the true Isaac, unto whom the Father hath given all that He hath. And that is the

case in the midst of infinitive difficulty and trials (in that sense more blessed than if there were none). This is one of the present special blessings of redemption, one that we shall not know or want in glory -- we shall have the full result of redemption there. But it is not merely to be brought into glory, to be at home in perfect peace in the presence of God, and with God; redemption is so perfect that, before we get into glory, God by His Spirit can come and dwell with us here, in the midst of our weakness, and because of our need.

As the apostle speaks in the Philippians:

What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and *the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ* {Phil. 1:18}.

Paul was tried, persecuted, taken as a prisoner to Rome, and they were going on preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds, &c. Well, all this (he says) will "turn to my salvation," &c. His soul thus being fed and nourished by the Spirit, everything in which he found trial and exercise of heart became but the means really of working out of him that which was contrary to God, in order that his sympathy might have free -- course, and his soul joy only in Christ.

Again, beloved friends, in speaking of the sympathy of the Spirit of God *with* the saints, and *in* the saints, amidst a groaning creation (Rom. 8:26), he says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities," &c. Here I find the Holy Ghost taking notice of certain trials, sorrows, weaknesses, difficulties, and the like; of everything, in short, that can press upon the heart of the saint, and that even when it cannot be uttered, and "groaning" is its only expression. It is the groaning of the Spirit of God in such a poor feeble heart, that it does not know how to express it. But it is said, "And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth," &c. (v. 26). That is what He has found there, "the mind of the Spirit." It is not merely that human feelings are brought out, but that the things (the very trials and sorrows) that would have produced *human* feelings have now produced, if I may so say, *divine* feelings -- feelings "*according to God*," which go up to God, and which God can answer; so that they become the means by which He pours into the heart all the fulness of His consolation, not perhaps taking them away, but showing that He Himself is the sufficient blessing of the soul, because He dwells with it, and makes Himself the portion of it. Now, if we look at the way in which this meets us where we are, and what we are, this is how it works. He comes down into all our circumstances, and for a poor trifle of affliction, I get to find (not the thing set aside, but) God Himself taking the place of our sorrow. In the prayer in chap. iii. the apostle loses himself, as it were; and no wonder. After he has said, "I bow my knees unto the FATHER of

our Lord Jesus Christ,” he adds,

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being *rooted and grounded in love* [that is what God is -- the divine nature], may be able to comprehend *with all saints* [taking in the whole unity in which the Holy Ghost dwells] what is the *breadth, and length, and depth, and height*.

He has now got into the *infinitude* of all God’s thoughts and purposes of blessing, and he cannot say of what. Just as the groanings could not be uttered, so the thought cannot be uttered. It is God that has come in, and Christ fills all things, according to the power of redemption, from the throne of God down to the dust of death, and from the dust of death up to the throne of God. Having all things, and filling all things, he says, here I am placed in the midst of this *infinitude*. And then he adds, “And to know the love of Christ, *which passeth knowledge*.” He could go to no place, but there he found *infinite* love and *infinite* power -- the love that brought Christ down, and the power that took Christ up again.

This meets all the exercises of the heart. If brought down even (as Christ came down) into the dust of death, the Holy Ghost comes down to the poor man who feels this power of death in his soul, and dwells in Him, and carries him up, by the knowledge of redemption, into all the fulness of God Himself.

Well that, beloved, is the result of the dwelling of the Holy Ghost down here, consequent upon redemption accomplished by Christ. The Holy Ghost can come and bring peace to our souls; and the effect of that peace to our souls is to make us pass through all the evil around “according to the power of God.” When the apostle speaks to Timothy, he says, “Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel *according to the power of God*.”

Where shall we stop? The soul rejoices in that which must be the joy and gladness of the heart that knows God has come down to dwell in it, the immutable blessedness of God’s presence. Then, whatever the circumstances in which we are placed, if they be only those of sorrow and trial, what is the consequence? God ministers of the fulness of the sympathy of His love to our souls; and thus they become, so to speak, as a door, or a chink, *to let in God*. All the riches -- “the unsearchable riches of Christ” -- are ours. And Christ fills everything. There is not anything we can think of, but we find there of the fulness of Christ. If we think of *death*, we see Christ there; of *sin*, we do not know what sin is fully, until *we* see Christ “made sin”; of *God*, it is only in Christ we can know God; of *man*, it is only in Christ we can see man raised to the height of his blessing; *peace*, it is through Christ we know the peace of God; *life*, Christ is our life; *glory*, it is all in Christ. There is not any thing, no matter

what we think of, whether in creation or above it, or between God and man, but we must think of Christ in it all. He is the

head of His body the Church, which is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all {Eph. 1:23}.

We can turn our thoughts to no one thing in which we do not find the fulness of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Ghost our souls are brought into the joy of this fulness, as that to which we are, through living union with Him, everlastingly and perfectly united.

There is another point which I have not touched upon, the practical effect of this. What would the effect be on our souls if we really felt we were “builted together,” &c.? if we felt that in the whole world Christians were in truth the *dwelling-place* of God? What a thought should we have to act upon as to every thing. That by which the Church of God has been corrupted, ordinances and the like would disappear as clouds before the presence of the sun. And what thoughts of glory should we have; what thoughts of holiness; what peace as to practical circumstances; what jealousy of grieving the Holy Ghost; what love towards all saints; what joy; what confidence; how we should bear the mocking of all our enemies (Isa. 37:22, 23); how live and act among men as “sons” and “heirs” of God! What power for every thing in short would be ours, if we remembered the completeness, the peace-giving completeness of redemption, and could really say that God was dwelling with us.

This is our portion; and whatever our weakness and infirmity (and, alas! it is very great), whatever our failure, still it remains true. Though we grieve the Spirit, and weaken the consciousness of our joy, still God is with us. The Holy Spirit dwells among us.

May the Lord give us to know, and to own, what this presence of God in the earth is, and that with men, by reason of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

From *The Christian Friend*, 1876, pp. 317-333.

## Chapter 3

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### {Extract from *The Mystery*}

{As Christians} . . . it clearly behoves us, not only to inform our minds as to its {the mystery's} true character and objects, but also to fashion our conduct in accordance with its order and aims. God never reveals truth to us for the mere gratification of our curiosity, but in order that it may exercise a formative influence over us, molding us into agreement with itself.

If God has revealed to us, that the order and plan of the dispensation in which He has set us is that Christ should, by His death, not only save our souls, but should “gather together IN ONE the children of God that were scattered abroad,” so that there should be “ONE FLOCK and one Shepherd” (John 11:52, 10:16); that in reconciling men to Himself, by the cross from among Jews and Gentiles, it was His will that this should be effected, not as scattered units, as in former ages, but that those so reconciled, should be found in unity -- “in one body” (Eph. 2:16); that this “body,” of His divine purpose, *has been* formed by the “one Spirit,” by whom all are baptized into it (1 Cor. 12:13); that He “has tempered the body together,” and “has set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor. 12:18, 24), in order that

the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, should make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16);

and that, for this reason, His will is “that there should be no schism in the body” (1 Cor. 12:25). If, I say, such is the revealed mind and will of God, as concerning ourselves, and the dispensation under which He has placed us, then clearly all action on our part that does not conform to this truth, and has not this principle as its basis, must be in contravention of His plans and in opposition to His will, and therefore SIN. Had we not from Him one single word beyond the simple announcement, “There is one body” {Eph. 4:4}: the divinely-communicated knowledge of that fact would put us under as complete a moral obligation as any amount of preceptive teaching could do; for

divinely-constituted relationships are quite as valid a ground of moral obligation, as divinely-given precepts. A Jew was as truly under obligation to “honor his father and his mother,” while dwelling in Egypt, before he, or any one else, had heard a commandment on the subject, as he was after God thundered it forth from Sinai; though the command gave an additional clearness, and added an additional sanction to the obligation. If he failed to do it in Egypt, he sinned; if he failed to do it in Canaan, he both sinned and disobeyed.

Now God has both revealed to us the fact, and enjoined on us the conduct befitting us, as arising out of the fact. He will have us to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called” (Eph. 4:1); and inasmuch as we are not only called with a holy and heavenly calling, but are “called in one body” (Col. 3:15); accordingly, among the instructions in detail, which follow, a most prominent position is given to the duty of “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace {Eph. 4:3}”; and this, as arising out of the truth, that there is one body and one Spirit, even as the hope of our calling (the glory) is one, and unity characterizes all that pertains distinctively to it -- “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” {Eph. 4:5}.

To act then in any manner contrary to this divinely formed unity, is to walk unworthily of the vocation wherewith we are called; and to set oneself in opposition to the whole order and plan of the dispensation; the very thing the entire Church of God has been doing for centuries. What doctrine, in all the range of truth, has been so trampled under foot -- so daringly and systematically set aside, as unity? Who, that lets the eye range over Christendom, would suspect for a moment that it was a fundamental truth of Christianity, that these people were professors of a calling to be one body, and that on their unity {oneness}, its founder relied (John 17:21) for the standing evidence of His divine mission? What a multitude of bodies stand out on the platform, with their various names and characters. Look for unity anywhere but in Christendom. Judaism is a unity, though the nation be scattered . . .

Popery, the earliest parent of schism, is the only sect that has retained even the shadow; while Protestantism, yielding to the exigencies of its own position, has adapted its doctrine to these; and for the most part, laid claim to the liberty of ignoring the obligation entirely; with at best but an occasional sigh over unity, as a thing of the past. How few have had the courage, or the faithfulness, to look the obligation in the face; to go down to the root of the evil; to judge it, and to return to the old paths. Perhaps the most subtle snare and obstacle, to which enquirers after this truth are exposed, is the apparent impossibility of turning aside from the pathway of schism, without thereby increasing the very evil disclaimed, by adding another to the number of the already too numerous

divisions. Most specious is this difficulty, and many a soul does it hold back from taking the stand for God; but it is as unreal as it is specious. To separate from schism is not schism. To withdraw from that which has itself withdrawn from the order of God, is not to divide the Church of God, but to renounce that which has already divided it. Let us suppose a ship's company to have mutinied, taken possession of the ship, and turned their captain and officers adrift, as the mutineers of the *Bounty* did. Would it be mutiny, for an individual, or individuals, of their number, to repent of their share in the crime; to protest against and separate from fellowship with the unlawful acts; and, at the risk of life or liberty, to insist on maintaining and owning only the Queen's right of ownership, and seeking to recall the others to duty? Would these few repentant loyalists, be chargeable with another mutiny; or would they only be doing the right thing under the circumstances?

But mark here a distinction. Supposing these individuals, instead of withdrawing from the others, in order to return to their allegiance to the Queen; separated, merely on the ground of some difference of judgment or will, as to the navigation, movements, or destination of the vessel; how different would be the case!

Just such is the distinction between return to unity and sectarian division.

The origin of all sectarian divisions has been diversities of judgment or will, as to points of detail, in principles, doctrine, or customs. No doubt, in many of these cases, there has been a conscientious desire, for the glory of God; supposed to be involved, in the maintenance of this or that peculiar tenet; but in no case have the reformers gone to the root of the matter. In no case, until very recently, has there been a sifting of the question to the bottom -- a digging through, and clearing away, of the rubbish, right down to the foundations; that God's own foundation might be reached again, and built on. Each fresh sect has but modified or patched up the form of things it has been used to; and so, in coming out from one sect, has done so only to form another. *So long as one item of unscriptural human corruption is clung to* {as the basis of the gathering or fellowship}, *sectarian ground is still maintained* no matter what the pretensions may be.

When, however, the divine foundation has been reached; the divine ground once more taken up, this is not schism, whatever men may say; but obedience, and faithfulness to God. This, and this only, is to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called"; this only is honestly to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

What! exclaims some startled reader, do you mean to call it endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to break peace and disunite yourself from every body, or from all but a mere handful of people as mistaken

in this as yourself? Yes, I answer, I do. I mean unhesitatingly to say, that the Spirit has formed, and does form, no unity on any other ground, than that of scriptural obedience to God. The unity of a sect, or of all the sects together, could they, to-morrow be compressed into a gigantic Evangelical or Catholic Alliance, is not, and would not be, the unity of the Spirit. Did the whole of Christendom succeed forthwith in arranging a platform on which they could once more unite, and form a single body, I should spurn it, and stand aloof from it, as much as I stand aloof from a divided Christendom this day. Every platform of union, other than that which renounces all that is of man -- and with the rest all principles of voluntary association -- is of man, and not of God -- is the unity of the flesh, and not of the Spirit.

From *The Christian Friend*, 1876, pp. 91-96.



## *Chapter 4*

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### *{Endeavoring to Keep the Unity of the Spirit}*

Ephesians 4:3-6

by T. B. Baines

The believer is, as we have seen, entreated to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called.” Owing everything to grace, and nothing to self, “lowliness and meekness” are obviously becoming, and these are therefore the first qualities he is exhorted to display. Long-suffering and forbearance in love, as the close, and indeed inseparable companions of lowliness and meekness, are also enjoined along with them. These characteristics should under all circumstances distinguish one who is saved by grace, and we shall see how their manifestation is urged in each of the various positions in which the believer is looked upon in this epistle. In none, however, are they more important than in that relationship which takes the first place in the practical exhortations here given; for nowhere does the working of self-will and self-assertion produce such disastrous consequences as in the assembly of God.

We are called through grace into oneness with Christ, as members of His body; and into oneness with each other, as united in Him. If, then, we would walk worthy of our vocation, we must, in accordance with the next practical exhortation, be

endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

How closely this is connected with lowliness and meekness, how constantly it calls for the exercise of long-suffering and forbearance, is too evident to need further remark. If self is made much of, the unity of the Spirit cannot be preserved. It is only as self is dropped out of sight, and Christ becomes the prominent object before the eye, that this exhortation can be followed. But as the Church-relationship is the first here taken up in the practical portion of the epistle, and as this exhortation is the first given with reference to the Church,

it is clear that it demands an especially close and careful examination.

The preservation of unity is obviously the point which the Holy Ghost is here pressing, and the importance attached to it is somewhat intensified by the word which is translated “bond,” but which should rather be rendered “the uniting bond.” The believer is not told to keep the unity of the body, or even the unity of the Spirit, but to *endeavor* to keep the unity of the Spirit. The word “keep,” however, is here used in the sense of watching over or caring for, rather than in the absolute sense of maintaining. This latter is clearly beyond man’s power, and can be done by God only. Thanks be to His name, it is safe in His keeping; and however grievously man may have failed in His responsibility, the unity of the body and of the Spirit cannot really be broken. What, then, is the meaning of the exhortation here addressed to the believer? It is manifestly not to maintain that which can be maintained by God only; and yet it is manifestly something after which the believer is to strive. The unity of the Spirit exists, and can never cease to exist; but it may cease to be held, guarded, and watched over by us. It is to this, then, that the exhortation of the apostle is directed.

But how is this to be accomplished? Most Protestants say that the unity here spoken of is an invisible unity in Christ, and that it is quite consistent with sectarian divisions; though believers thus outwardly separated, being really one, should cultivate peace towards each other. This interpretation, however, makes peace the object, and leaves oneness, as a thing which we are to strive after, entirely out of account. Now we are not told to endeavor to keep the bond of peace, but to endeavor to keep “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The unity of the Spirit is what we are to endeavor to keep, and the bond of peace is the means to be employed. The Holy Ghost does not press that peace should be kept amidst divisions, but that oneness {unity} should be kept by peace. How, then, can this oneness {union} be the invisible oneness {union} which exists in Christ? How could believers be told to endeavor to keep that which is solely in God’s keeping? They might as well be told to endeavor to keep the earth revolving on its axis. If they are exhorted to do something, it is because there is something for them to do. And what there is for them to do here is quite plain. Being called into the unity of the Spirit, they are to watch and guard it, to endeavor to keep it in the bond of peace. It is not an invisible unity which they can neither keep nor lose, but something which can be kept or lost according to their watchfulness or negligence. The preservation of this outward unity is to be the object of striving and effort.

If this be so, it is clear that the present divided condition of the Church is not according to the mind of the Spirit. It may be well, however, to look at some other scriptures bearing on this subject. In John 17 we find that, whether

our Lord was praying for the disciples then with Him, or whether He enlarges the sphere to the whole of those who should believe on Him through their word, in both cases the first petition that He presents concerning them is for their oneness. <sup>39</sup> In v. 21 He prays, “That they all,” that is all believers,

may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Here, then, the special object for which the Lord desires this oneness is that it may be a testimony to the world. No invisible unity can be this. The world can receive no evidence but that presented to it, and unless the oneness of believers is a thing discernible by the world, the testimony here spoken of is not given. The Church indeed was not formed when these words were uttered, but they were uttered in full view of the fact that the Church was soon to be formed; and the formation of the Church could not dissolve, but rather cement and define the oneness here spoken of.

In 1 Cor. 12:12, 13, we read that

as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

This is clearly the same unity spoken of in Ephesians (Church unity), the whole being one with and in Christ. It cannot be said that the unity here named is merely spiritual, and that nothing is said about its practical manifestation to the world; for the very same chapter declares that

God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked, *that there should be no schism, [or division] in the body* (1 Cor. 12: 24, 25).

Other parts of the same epistle bring out the same truth with even greater clearness. Thus in 1 Cor. 10:17, which speaks of the Lord’s Supper, we find that the reason for our all partaking of one loaf is that our oneness in Christ may be signified.

For we being many are one bread [i.e., one loaf], one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf.

In the first chapter we find divisions denounced in the most solemn and

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39. {It may help the reader to think about using the words “union” and “unity” in connection with the truth of the one body united to the Head, and “oneness” and “one” in connection with the truth brought out in John’s writings. In John 12:24 the Lord uses the stalk of wheat to show the oneness in life that we have in the Risen Stalk, so to speak. It is eternal life in the Son. The resurrection life in the Risen Stalk is in the grains, forming one plant with Him. Thus, we have His resurrection-life, eternal life in the Son.}

energetic way. The apostle beseeches the believers to

speaking the same thing, and that there be no divisions [or schisms] among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now thus I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Now what do we find here? Just the same thing as in modern Christendom. Different sects had already begun to exist in principle, different human teachers or schools of theology to be regarded as rallying-points. True, they had not yet gone the length of separating from one another, and they still, as to outward form, recognized no center of gathering but Christ. But what does the apostle say about it? He asks, "Is Christ divided?" These words can have but one meaning. They show that the division of Christians into different schools or sects, even in the mild form which it had then assumed, was a contradiction of the oneness {union} of the Church as the body of Christ. To set up Paul as a rallying-point was like saying that Paul, rather than Christ, had been crucified for them. If they used Paul's name as a party cry, they should, in consistency, be baptized in Paul's name too. Every Christian must be shocked at the thought of Christ being divided, of Paul being crucified for him, or of being baptized in the name of Paul. But the Holy Ghost declares that the divisions of the Corinthians are just as shocking as these suggestions say, that nothing but the truth of these suggestions could justify their divisions. Surely a more emphatic condemnation of sects, even in the mildest and least offensive form, it would be difficult to conceive.

But the powers of the human mind are illimitable in escaping unpleasant conclusions. Thus it has been urged that though the divisions of the Corinthians were doubtless wrong, what the apostle condemns was not the divisions themselves, but the spirit in which they were carried out; that the rival schools were probably very bitter, and that it was this bitterness which the apostle censures; whereas modern sects are so loving and amiable, that had he lived in our days he would have commended their spirit, and sanctioned their separate organizations. Now, nothing is more dangerous than seeking to blunt the edge of Scripture so as to escape the wound to our own consciences. The apostle does not say, "I beseech you that ye all speak different things in a friendly way"; but he does say, "I beseech you that ye all speak the same thing." He does not say, "Let the divisions among you be amiably conducted"; but he does say, "Let there be no divisions among you." He does not say, "Let there be peace among those of different minds and of different judgments"; but he does say, "Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

“Oh, but,” it is objected, “these persons were all in one assembly, and of course their divisions were wrong! But this is quite different from the state of things now.” No doubt it is different; but when the apostle blames them for saying, “I am of Paul, and I of Apollos,” does he mean that the followers of Paul ought to form one sect, and have one sort of meeting, and the followers of Apollos to form another sect, and have another sort of meeting? When he says, “Is Christ divided?” does he mean that the evil ought to be cured by believers widening their divisions, and splitting into different denominations? Surely such reasoning is trifling with Scripture! And is it not a solemn thing to see believers willing to trifle with God’s word for the sake of hiding from their gaze the evidence of the ruin which stares them in the face? The Pharisees boasted while they were groaning under the Roman yoke: “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man” (John 8:33). But would they not have been wiser if they had owned their ruined condition, and searched into its cause? Is it not the same with modern believers? Surely it would be better to bow to God’s word instead of seeking to torture it into sanctioning the Church’s failure!

Who can, without stifling his own conscience, maintain that the state of things reproved by Paul at Corinth was wrong, and that the state of things now prevailing around us is right? If the apostle says to the Corinthians,

Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? {1 Cor. 3:3}

if he asks,

While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? {1 Cor. 3:4}

is it not self-evident that he would have regarded those who are now divided into all sorts of sectarian combinations as carnal too? No doubt this is deeply humbling. It is far pleasanter to be flattering ourselves that we are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” than to be owning that we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked {Rev. 3:17}.

But if this is our real condition, what do we gain by concealing it? We gain nothing, and we lose everything. In the things of God, to judge ourselves is the sure precursor of blessing. If once the conscience is brought into exercise about our state, whether individually or collectively, we are on the way to discover God’s mode of deliverance. Among the Jews of old, as among ourselves now, the most fatal thing is that slothful acquiescence in the confusion and ruin around us; that readiness to accept present ease, and to drift on with the current of the day, which at once closes the heart against the entrance of God’s truth, and shuts out self-judgment on account of our own failure. We are quick enough in detecting the folly and fatal results of this conduct among the Jews. How little we often suspect the same blindness among ourselves?

The apostle goes on to enlarge on this subject of “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” He gives as a reason for this effort the various unities into which we are brought. These may be divided into three classes, comprising, as it were, three concentric, but not co-extensive, circles. “There is,” he says, “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” Here we have the innermost circle, consisting only of true believers, those who are really members of the body of Christ, really sealed by the Spirit, and really possessed of the hope of God’s calling as unfolded in the first chapter. Besides this, however, the believer is brought into another circle, including, but far overlapping, the first, the circle of outward profession and privilege, the circle which owns the “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” All Christendom owns, however little it may submit to, the lordship of Christ, and the authority and truth of “the faith,” while by far the greater part of Christendom is baptized. There is yet another circle, with wider circumference still, presented to us in the words, “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.” Here we have the whole race included, God being the common Father, in the same sense in which Paul elsewhere quotes the Greek poet as saying, “We are also His offspring” (Acts 17:28). As such He is “above all,” and His providence ranges “through all,” but it can only be said of believers that He is “in all”; hence in this case only do we find in some of the best texts that the word “us” is introduced.

But why is this sevenfold oneness here urged? As a reason for “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “There is one body”; what more unseemly, then, than the divisions by which the unity established by God is obscured and practically denied? There is “one Spirit”; why, then, the endless diversities of judgment, of practice, of order, of doctrine, indicating the multiform action of man’s thoughts rather than the operation of the one Spirit here spoken of? There is “one hope of our calling”; whence, then, the conflicting ways and purposes of men who should all be marching to the same goal? There is “one Lord”; how shocking, then, the setting up of every species of human rule, dividing those who own His lordship into different camps, each under a government of man’s invention. There is “one faith”; alas! what a multitude of faiths and creeds, confessions and professions, have sprung up to hide and choke that one “faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” There is “one baptism”; how sad, then, that those who profess to be “buried with Christ” should be splitting into sects and divisions which show that they are “carnal, and walk as men.” Lastly, there is “one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all”; how bitter a satire, then, on the faithfulness of the church, that even believers, who know this Father, should exhibit, not the reflection of divine order and oneness, but the picture of confusion and division which we see around us in Christendom.

But if sects are thus a denial of God's teaching concerning the Church, what are believers to do? The only organization which claims catholicity is so evidently corrupt that its pretensions to be the one Church need scarcely be discussed. Evangelical believers, admitting the practical evils, though denying the unscriptural character, of the divisions in the Church, have sought to mitigate them by various devices for friendly co-operation among the sects. Of the kindly feeling thus evinced, and the sincere expressions of brotherly love thus called forth, we would certainly not speak in slighting terms. But a false diagnosis necessarily leads to false treatment. The disease is not the ill-feeling existing among the sects, but the sects themselves; and this disease is neither removed nor altered in character by the occasional "exchange of pulpits," united prayer-meetings or communions, joint committees and societies for common objects, by which modern evangelical Christians so earnestly seek to promote religious fellowship and good feeling. We have seen that sects are condemned altogether, and no mere rubbing off of their angles will therefore restore the order enjoined in God's word: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" A mortified limb may exhibit certain superficial wounds; but the most careful dressing of these will not obviate the necessity for amputation. Excision of sects, not removal of a few of their worst features, is what is needed to revert to God's order.

But here the question necessarily arises, Is this possible? Granted that the unity ought never to have been broken, surely it cannot now be regained. This is quite true; and the Holy Ghost does not therefore exhort believers to keep it, but to endeavor to keep it. Each person is responsible to do all in his power; and though, when ruin has come in, he cannot reconstruct, he can at all events revert to the principle on which the unity was founded. The passage already quoted from 1 Cor. 1 shows us how the departure took place, and therefore gives some indication of the way of return. What, then, was the manner in which the ruin commenced? By the believers in Corinth setting up party names and rallying-points. It is clear, therefore, that the first step back towards the original ground is the abandonment of all party names and rallying-points. We are told to gather to "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and are assured by Himself that those thus gathered have His presence in their midst.

It is possible however, as this passage proves, to use the name of Christ as a party name; and no distinction in built {sic} is made between those who thus used the name of Christ, and those who thus used the name of Paul and Apollos. It is not enough, therefore, merely to renounce all other names, and to meet in the name of Christ only. What, then, is required besides? The apostle exhorts the Corinthians not only to have no party names, but all to "speak the same thing," and to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Man cries at once that this is impossible; and if man's mind and

man's judgment are allowed, undoubtedly it is. But surely it is a solemn position to take, thus to challenge God's word, and to charge the Holy Ghost with urging impossibilities. Where, then, is the solution of the apparent contradiction? Clearly in the fact that man's will and man's judgment are not here allowed, but that God's will and God's judgment are put in their place. The same chapter which tells us to be joined together in mind and judgment pours contempt on all human wisdom, and especially declares the incompetence of that wisdom to deal with the things of God. It asserts that God hath "made foolish the wisdom of this world," and that "the world by wisdom knew not God." What, then, has God substituted for it? "The foolishness of preaching"; "Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Thus He has "chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." How clear, then, that in the things of God man's wisdom can have no place! His mind and judgment are set aside, and the word of God is given as the only rule.

This brings out the second thing which is needed, if we would escape the evil of sectarian division. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ must be the only center around which we gather,<sup>40</sup> and the word of God the only guide by which we are led. It is these two things, and these two things alone, that amidst much weakness, and in the absence of any special works, draw forth the Lord's commendation of the church in Philadelphia, and cause Him momentarily to drop the judicial character elsewhere maintained throughout these addresses, and to declare, concerning this assembly only, "that I have loved thee" {Rev. 3:9}.

Are these two things sufficient, then, to remove us from a false sectarian position, and to put us on a true scriptural foundation? Amply sufficient. They are all that the Lord finds in the church in Philadelphia; they are all that can be expected or attained in an age of failure and ruin. They are the two things that lend such a beauty to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, who, amidst all the failure and weakness of the day in which their lot was cast, were kept in the path of obedience and blessing by no other means than their faithfulness to the name of Jehovah and their subjection to the written Word. All the errors that Christendom has fallen into have begun by altering, adding to, or taking from, the Scriptures.

Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were all honored servants of God; but God had given to each his own special line of truth. What, then, was the first error? Believers, instead of taking the truth from all, took only that portion of the truth

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40. {Matt. 18:20: "are gathered together." The Spirit gathers saints together to Christ; He does not gather into sects.}



ministered by one. Instead of recognizing that all things were theirs, “whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas,” their narrowness would only receive one; and in receiving one, rejected and opposed the others. Here we have the root of nearly all doctrinal error. It is almost invariably, at least in its origin, a partial, one-sided application of truth. Instead of the many-sidedness of Scripture, man has generally preferred to build upon some special doctrine; and all the rest he has either wholly neglected, or worked into the shape most suited to harmonize with his peculiar and partial theological system. His faith has not been sufficient to persuade him that all the different lines of Scripture truth are really harmonious; that their reconciliation depends on their origin in God’s wisdom, not on the powers of his own intellect.

The same want of faith has operated, though in a different way, in matters of church order. Instead of believing that God cares for His Church, and has left ample rules for its government, man has sought to form a code of his own; and as human wisdom has been the source of this code, each man has had his own judgment; so that in proportion to the freedom with which man could act, different codes and different sects have multiplied. Every departure in this way has been by the addition of something to the word of God -- the assumption of powers which the word of God does not give, or the adoption of rules which the word of God does not enjoin. The simple faith which could receive what God has said, leaving difficulties to Him, would have prevented the schisms caused by various theological schools. The simple faith which could accept the teaching of God’s word as sufficient guidance on all matters of church order would have prevented the schisms caused by various denominational schools. There would still, of course, have been different measures of intelligence; but even the most unintelligent, if subject to Scripture, would have seen that these furnished no excuse for sectarian separation.

Admitting, then, most fully that any attempt to re-construct or to imitate the original unity is out of the question, the exhortation to “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” is still perfectly practicable, and indeed binding. To say that because the Church of God has become broken up into sects, there is no possibility of taking an unsectarian position, is, in fact, to say that God has shut us up to the path which He has expressly stigmatized, and that He exhorts us to a course which He foresaw to be impossible. Anything more dishonoring to Him can scarcely be imagined. There must be some way of walking in obedience to God’s word, and the way is clearly pointed out to us. The refusal of every name as a center of gathering, save the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and an entire subjection to the word of God, will place us, not in the original church unity, but on the divine principle on which that unity was founded, and by the observance of which it could alone have been preserved.

It is objected, however, that in dividing from fellow-believers those who thus gather only form another sect. To this however it is sufficient to answer, that they do not divide from other believers. They find believers divided, each sect meeting round a center of its own, and they say, "This division is wrong; we cannot sanction it or become responsible for it by going on with any of the sects, but we come out from them to the common ground on which all believers are told to gather." This is not separating from fellow-believers, but separating from that which divides believers, and going on to the ground which condemns such divisions as unscriptural, and a denial of the oneness of Christ. The sectarian position in which other believers still remain may make a separation, but that separation is not caused by those who refuse such a position, but by those who retain it. If only two or three persons are gathered {together; Matt. 18:20} on true scriptural ground, they are met on the principle of the church, and not of a sect. There is a center round which all believers ought to be gathered; and if the majority are absent, preferring to meet round other centers, the charge of sectarianism and division lies against them, not against the few persons assembled in the Lord's name.

T. B. Baines, *The Christian Friend*, 1876.

## Chapter 5

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### *"That They All May be One"*

by A. J.

The Good Shepherd -- He who gave His life for the sheep -- foretold that there should be one flock, and one Shepherd {John 10:16}. He died, not for Israel only,

but that also He should gather together in one, the children of God scattered abroad {John 11:52}.

Before His death -- even upon the self-same night in which He was betrayed -- Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven, and prayed, not only for those whom the Father had already given Him (John 17:9,10), but also for *all* who should believe on Him through their word (vv. 20, 23) --

that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us.

At the moment when He thus pleaded with His Father, concerning us who believe, He knew perfectly well that, after He had died for our sins, had risen again for our justification, and had ascended to the right hand of God, the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, would come. He had so taught His sorrowing disciples (John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7). He also knew (although he had not revealed this result as yet), that at the coming of the Holy Spirit, all that believe would be baptized into one body, and be thus brought into special relationship with Himself, as also with one another; every one members of that one body, He Himself the glorified Head, and they, in Him, members one of another (Rom. 12:5). To this unity {union}, so wholly of God, and by the power of the Holy Ghost, for the glory of the risen and ascended Christ, *man's* will or power can have nothing to say, any more than he can have to say to his own salvation.

Did any earthly parent ever express a wish that his sons and daughters might become members of one family, and be brought into relationship one with another? They are this already by birth. What a parent desires is, that his family

may be manifestly one in everything answering to, and corresponding with, their relationship to himself, and with one another. And it rejoices his heart if he finds, in the course and actions of every member of his household, the practical fulfilment of so cherished a desire.

Before, then, the full result of the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth was made known, our Lord Jesus, in infinite wisdom and infinite love, prayed the Father that *all believers might be one*. Not simply that they might be *one* in purpose, *one* in desire, *one* in action, of *one* accord, of *one* mind, of *one* heart and of *one* soul, but above and beyond all these, that

they might be ONE, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee,

-- and this on earth, that the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus. ONE not so much for their peace and blessing, as for His glory. So blessedly and practically ONE that their every thought, word and deed might not only beautifully answer to the exalted relationship into which they should be brought, but be a standing witness to His praise in a world that crucified Him.

Although the *family unity* {oneness} (i.e., the unity {oneness} of the household of God), is not to be confounded with the "unity of the Spirit," or the truth of "the one body," the former must never be lost sight of in zeal for the latter. We are as children of God, responsible to promote family unity, for if discord and strife divide the children of one family, it is in vain to hope that that family can be recognized as *one* in any other relationship.

Our Lord has commanded us to love one another, as He loved us. If we keep His commandments, we shall abide in His love, and our ways, words and actions will testify to our unfeigned desire to promote the family unity, as an essential element in the endeavors to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" {Eph. 4:3}. Let us never forget we are children of *God*, as well as members of the body of *Christ*.

Historically, we know that the church was no sooner formed, than the adversary commenced to attack it. Despite all his efforts, as detailed in Acts 4, the multitude of them that believed were of *one* heart and of *one* soul . . . and great grace was upon them all.

Foiled, yet determined if possible to thwart the purposes of God, he attacked it with deeper subtlety from within (Acts 5 and 6). After this Stephen was martyred, and those that believed were scattered abroad by persecution, but Saul's conversion showed that the Lord was working with them, and we read,

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified: and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Thus far, all who believed were *one*, not intrinsically only, but practically.

It was after God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles that the enemy imagined a mischievous device. He would raise a question, by pressing which, he hoped to break up the family unity, and to sow discord among brethren.

It was *by the enemy* (Gal. 2:4), and not by *the Spirit of God* that the question of circumcision was raised. Though division appeared imminent, the Lord Himself directed the way for its settlement (Gal. 3:1, 2; Acts 15:2), and the Spirit of God so guided and controlled "the Apostles and elders, *with the whole assembly*," that the question was divinely settled to the great comfort and joy of all (vv. 22-31). The church then knew her responsibility to act as "*the whole church*" in the locality in which God had gathered it; and, despite the enemy's malice, if the church had never left her "first love," never abandoned her first principles, she would have continued as "the whole church {practically}," even though, as in Jerusalem, there were many thousand believers meeting in private houses or in upper rooms. Only unbelief can say, How could it possibly be? Is God the Holy Ghost unequal to maintain the integrity of that for which Christ died? for He died, not only to save, but to *gather into one* those whom He saved. Has the Head ceased to care for His body? Has the Father provided ought for one member of the household of God, which he has not provided for all its members? "Drink ye ALL of it," said the Lord Jesus Christ, as He gave the cup to those beloved ones who were gathered round Him, when He instituted the feast of remembrance (Matt. 26:28). "And they ALL drank of it" (Mark 14: 23). So the Apostle --

For we being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are ALL partakers of that one bread {1 Cor. 10:17}.

Is it asked who now are the "all"? None less, and none more, than those who by one Spirit are ALL baptized into one body, and have been ALL made to drink into (or of) one Spirit {1 Cor. 12:13}.

The Word of God alone gives the charter of privileges to the saint of God, and *can alone rescind any of them*. Disobedience to the Word of God, persisted in, calls for separation.

I have given them Thy Word, . . . *they have kept Thy Word*, the Lord could say of His own in John 17. No less is worthy of Him now, and no less will satisfy His heart now (Rev. 3:8).

Men press for a slight departure from the Word, but the point once conceded, the path is downward. It was the devil who first raised the question, "Hath God said?" We are not ignorant of the enemy's devices. If he can foster a sectarian spirit, and tempt saints to act as if the narrow path is narrower than it really is, or if he can lead them to count the narrow path wider than the Word of God declares it to be, is it not that souls may be entangled in a yoke of

bondage, or seduced into walking disorderly, contrary to the written Word? Or further, if he can beguile souls into unduly exalting some favorite doctrine as a rallying point instead of CHRIST, and shutting out or shutting in all outside or within the rays of that particular doctrine, does he care what that doctrine may be? Nay, the higher the truth the better suited for his purpose; for the body gathered round it must be less than the “one body,” and that is division, not unity.

There were at least four parties at Corinth, but Paul made no attempt to decide between them. He sharply rebuked them all by the Holy Ghost, and met the whole question by asking, “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:13; 12:12). To this church, in which “heresies” were imminent, for schisms were rampant {1 Cor 11:18, 19}, the apostle wrote:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread {1 Cor. 10:16, 17}.

Alas! is not this Word and will of the Lord everywhere set aside most grievously? Not only in large towns, but even in small villages, believers, all “members of that one body,” are content to meet in separate communities, as if these had *a* cup of blessing, and those *a* cup of blessing. Beloved brethren, there is simply “*that one bread*,” and “*the cup of blessing*,” provided for all the members of the body of Christ. Where is the authority for diverse loaves and diverse cups? <sup>41</sup>

And, as there is simply “*that one bread*,” and “*the cup of blessing*” for all saints, so they have but one Head. The external sign is valueless without the vital reality. While the Corinthians were saying, “I am of Paul, and I of Apollos,” &c., they were drawing their own circles round their own centers, and separating themselves not only from other Christians, but, what was far more Christ-dishonoring, --

*not holding the Head*, from which all the body, by joints and bands: having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God {Col. 2:19}.

How solemn was the fruit of such ways the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter {of 1 Cor.} vividly portrays. How much was there at Corinth which the Spirit could not sanction, and which the Corinthians were to put themselves to the test as to any complicity with. But, blessed be God, it was the Word of God then, as it is the

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41. {The reader is mistaken if he thinks the writer refers to a “communion service” where individual wafers and cups are used, though he would not approve of that either. The thrust of what he writes is that loaves broken in separation do not testify that we are one loaf.}

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same Word now, that settles all questions. It is our only safeguard, as the Spirit is our almighty power. Paul, when writing to the Galatians, would not yield an iota of the one, or limit the power of the other (ch. 2). He withstood Peter to the face when the truth of the Gospel was imperilled by him (v. 14), but he gladly acknowledged how the Spirit had wrought by him unto the apostleship of the circumcision (v. 8). This was grace and truth, and this only comes, and can come, from Jesus Christ. Grace might have tried to spare Peter the public rebuke, but truth with grace met all; and Peter retained his honored place among the saints, and, in the fulness of a restored heart, could only write of Paul as "our beloved brother Paul" {2 Pet. 3:15}.

A. J., *The Bible Herald*, New Series 2:95-100.

