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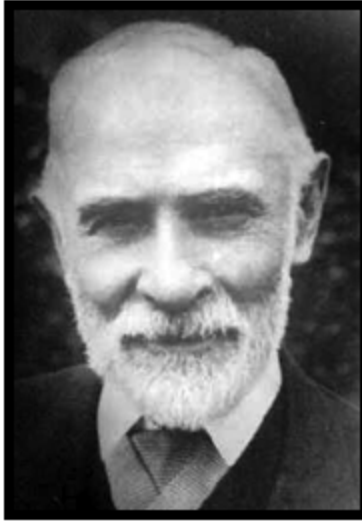
V18 The House of God

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THE HOUSE OF GOD AS MADE KNOWN TO JACOB

Genesis 28: 10 - 22; Genesis 31: 13; Genesis 35: 1 - 15

It is on my mind to bring before you, so far as I am able, some of the important and blessed things connected with the House of God. No one can read Scripture without seeing that the House of God is prominent both in the Old Testament and the New. It is most important to see that God has a place on earth. We all understand that heaven is God's throne and dwelling place, but what I should like to make clear is that God has a place on earth where He dwells in grace and blessing and, I may add, in holiness. He has a place on earth where He is known, and where His testimony is maintained. The House of God is "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3: 15).

The passages we have read contain the first intimation that Scripture affords of the House of God. It has often been said that in connection with the first mention of anything in Scripture we get a key to the whole subject, and I have no doubt it is so in this case. But before looking at these scriptures it may be well to travel rapidly over the previous chapters of Genesis. They are deeply important and instructive.

From the fall to the flood we do not get any thought of God having a place here. Man had been driven out from the garden of Eden, and the cherubim with flaming sword barred his access to the tree of life. The earth was under the curse in consequence of man's sin, and man was a fugitive and a vagabond in it. What marked the men of faith in that day was that they "walked with God". This is said of both Enoch and Noah. They recognised that God had no place here, and they walked with Him apart from the whole course of things in the world of the ungodly. Noah preached righteousness and in building the ark was a practical witness of coming judgment.

The flood came and swept away the world that then was. There was an end before God of the whole state of the world, and of all flesh. Noah and his family were saved in the ark — a figure of the death of Christ — and the first thing that he did when he stepped out of the ark was to build an altar and offer burnt offerings upon it (Genesis 8: 18 - 22). This is the first altar of which we read in Scripture, and I understand Noah's act to mean that he claimed the earth for God, and put it on the ground of the burnt offering. The flood had come upon the earth as under the curse; there was, so to speak, an end of that order of things; and the earth was presented before God in connection with the sweet savour of the burnt offering. (I need hardly say that the burnt offering is a type of the death of Christ.) God smelled an odour of

rest and said in His heart that He would not "curse the ground any more for man's sake". He answers the faith in which Noah had claimed the earth for Him, and takes up relations with it. He promises that "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease". He covenants blessing for the earth, and every living creature upon it. God is the "Lord of all the earth" — a title which occurs again and again in Scripture (see Joshua 3: 11; Zechariah 4: 14; Zechariah 6: 5, etc., and compare Psalm 8: 1, 9, and Exodus 19: 5).

I have no doubt the full answer to Noah's faith will be in the world to come. There is a day coming when all the effects of the curse will be removed, everything on earth will be put into covenant relationship with God, and His Name will be excellent in all the earth.

The time for this had not come in Noah's day, nor has it come yet. From Genesis 8 onward, faith has ever claimed the earth for God, but the time has not come yet for Him to take possession. In His dispensational and governmental ways, and in view of all His purposes of love and grace, He has not yet taken possession. The present world is accurately pictured in Genesis 9: 11. Three things are prominent. Nimrod "began to be a mighty one in the earth", and founded a kingdom. Then men built the tower of Babel, saying, "Let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth". Men took possession of the earth, and sought to make themselves a name. And, what was worst of all, God's servant, who in faith had claimed the earth for Him, failed to hold it for Him, but used it for self-gratification.

Alas! this is very much the history of the present world. It is the time of Nimrod and Babel still. Men are in possession of the earth, and hence it is a scene of confusion. And as for God's witness, Noah's failure is perpetuated in the church. The things of the earth are used for self-gratification instead of being held for God. I speak, of course, of the general Christian profession. God's Name is not yet excellent in all the earth, but it will be in the world to come. It has been a characteristic of faith in all ages to look on to the world to come.

Then God maintains His title to the earth and His right to dispose of it as He will, in the call and blessing of Abram. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee" (Genesis 12: 1). And when Abram reached Canaan the Lord appeared to him, and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (verse 7). Depend upon it that in due time God will dispose of the earth as He will, in spite of men and of all the power of evil. And when He does so there will be blessing for all the families of

the earth (Genesis 12: 3). When man in self-will takes possession of the earth he dispossesses God of all His rights; but when God asserts Himself and takes possession of the earth He will give it to man, and fill it with blessing, so that His Name may be excellent in all the earth. See the promises to Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 12: 1 - 7; Genesis 13: 14 - 17; Genesis 15:7,8; Genesis 15:18-21; Genesis 17: 8; Genesis 18: 18; Genesis 22: 17, 18; Genesis 26: 2 - 4. In making Abraham "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13), God asserted His right to dispose of the earth as He would.

Then in connection with Isaac we get wonderful instruction as to the way in which the promises will be fulfilled. Isaac was to be the heir — the child of promise — type of Christ. And it was on the ground of death and resurrection that He would take the inheritance. In figure Isaac died and rose again. God can only take possession of the earth so as to fill it with blessing on the ground of death and resurrection. Sin had to be put away, which could only be by death, and the power of death had to be broken, which could only be by resurrection. But on the ground of death and in the power of resurrection Christ will take up the earth — so long filled with man's assumption and sin's confusion — and will fill it with blessing and with the knowledge of God. When Christ takes up the inheritance all the families of the earth will be blessed and God's Name will be excellent in all the earth.

Abraham was called to be the heir of the world in faith, but to be actually possessed of no part of the promised inheritance. He owned God as being "the God of the earth" as well as "the God of heaven", Genesis 24:3; he had the blessing of "the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth", Genesis 14: 19, 22. Though he had actually nothing, he was blessed in the favour that would give him everything. In the sense of this favour he was content, though he knew well that there could be no possession of the promised inheritance until the world to come.

When we come to chapter 28 we see God making known to Jacob His purpose about the land and about the blessing of all the families of the earth. Jacob finds himself in the presence of God's grace and faithfulness — in presence of God's thoughts and purposes in all their blessed reality. He was, in a sense, outside the world, and for the time, apart from all the workings of his own mind. Everything that passed before him was of God. Hence he said, "This is none other but the house of God".

In one way Jacob went beyond Abraham and Isaac. No doubt they held in faith the divine communications which had been made to them, and those communications formed the ground of their intercourse with God. They built altars, but Jacob went further — he set up a pillar. God, revealed in grace and

faithfulness, was to have a place here — a testimony here — and this in figure, in the power of the Holy Ghost. “He set up a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel [the House of God]”. A pillar means witness or testimony (see Genesis 31: 52). There was to be a place here for God — a witness to the blessed reality of His grace and faithfulness. He was God of heaven and earth, and He would carry out His own purposes of grace and blessing in spite of all the evil and weakness that was in the world and in man. The anointed pillar was the witness of this on earth. It was the testimony of God here — the witness of His purposes, His grace, and His faithfulness. And thus it presents to us the great fundamental idea of the House of God, God has a place here where He dwells in blessing and testimony; His house is here.

We see three things in Genesis 28 in connection with Bethel which give us a very good idea of the House of God. In the first place a link was established between heaven and earth. The House of God has a direct link with heaven; it is the “gate of heaven”. God in this way makes the gate of heaven accessible to men; that gate is not a long way off; it is here on earth. In Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, over and over again he said, “When they shall pray toward this place ... hear thou in heaven” (1 Kings 8:30; 1 Kings 8:32; 1 Kings 8:34; 1 Kings 8:36; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Kings 8:43; 1 Kings 8:45; 1 Kings 8:49). In that day the House of God was the gate of heaven — the link between heaven and earth. It will be so again in the millennium. All the families of the earth will go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and the House of God will be to them the gate of heaven.

But I do not want to occupy you merely with the past and the future. I should like you to realise that the House of God is on earth at the present moment, and that it is the gate of heaven. Read Acts 2: 1 - 4. The House of God in its present aspect dates from the day of Pentecost. The one hundred and twenty disciples, indwelt by the Spirit, were constituted the House or dwelling place of God. The Holy Ghost came upon them from heaven — from a risen and glorified Christ at the right hand of God — and linked them with heaven. There was a company upon earth linked with heaven in the most wonderful way. But that company is still here; the Holy Ghost has never returned to heaven; the saints have never ceased to be the House of God. When one receives the Holy Ghost — consequent on remission of sins through faith in the Lord Jesus — he belongs to a company which is divinely linked with heaven. He may have everything yet to learn, but he is of the House of God, and the sooner he realises this the better.

It is a blessed reality that heaven and earth are linked together by the fact that the House of God is upon the earth. In Stephen we see that a man full of the Holy Ghost could look up stedfastly into heaven; there was no cloud between him and heaven. By the Spirit we can look up into heaven and see there a glorified Man — the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. The Holy Ghost links us with heaven and with the One who is there. Is it not wonderful to see that there is that upon earth which is directly linked with heaven?

I hope no one will suppose that in speaking of the House of God I have any thought of applying this term to a material building, or even to any particular company of saints. The House of God is composed of "living stones", and every saint on earth indwelt by the Spirit is of that house. Would to God that we all understood this, — and were more exercised as to our behaviour in "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth!" (1 Timothy 3:15).

Another thing in connection with Bethel (Genesis 28) is that God's grace and faithfulness were known there. "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ... and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed". I quite admit that what is said here does not go beyond the earth, but it is wonderful grace. For us everything takes a higher character, for we have to do with "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1: 3). It is not "the land whereon thou liest" now, but God directs our eyes to heaven and to His treasured store of spiritual blessings in Christ. Who can measure the expanse of those blessings? "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Corinthians 1: 20). What transcendent grace to man, who was once persuaded by the devil to believe that God was withholding something good from him! God answers that lie of Eden by bringing in all the blessing of a universe of bliss in Christ and bestowing it as a free gift upon man.

Then God's faithfulness was known at Bethel as well as His grace. "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (verse 15). Along with the unconditional promise of grace there was the assurance of God's immutable faithfulness. All that Jacob would do and be was well known to God, but in presence of all that God's faithfulness was made known as the security of his blessing. It is a great

characteristic of the House of God that His grace and faithfulness are known there.

If you turn to 1 Kings 8 you will see these two things in connection with the house that Solomon built. Read verse 41 - 43. This is a remarkable scripture for Old Testament times, for it contemplates the report of God's Name going out from the house to all people of the earth, so that "the stranger" should come out of a "far country" attracted by that blessed Name. It shows how God would have the testimony of His Name as great in grace to sound forth from His house.

Then the thought of God's faithfulness is also very prominent in Solomon's prayer. Read verse 15, 20, 23, 24, 56. Everything of which God had spoken had come to pass. The house was the standing witness to the faithfulness of God.

Now let us turn to the House of God in its present aspect. Read 1 Corinthians 1: 4 - 9. The apostle is writing to "the church of God which is at Corinth", and we know from another scripture that the church of the living God is the House of God. He first thanks God for His grace given to the saints in Christ Jesus, that in everything they had been enriched in Him, and that the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them. They were in the blessed knowledge of the grace of God, and the testimony of that grace was confirmed in them.

Then he also speaks of the faithfulness of God. They were proving themselves very unfaithful to the grace and light which had reached them, but the apostle fell back upon divine faithfulness as the security of their blessing. He speaks of their being confirmed to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we believe not, God abides faithful; He does not give up His thoughts with regard to His saints. If we are self-willed and wayward we shall come under the faithful discipline of God. Jacob went on in his own course for a long time, but he had to suffer for it under God's discipline until eventually he was prepared to return to Bethel. God is faithful; He will bring His saints — it may be through much discipline — to His own end. He will divest them of all that is unsuitable to Himself so that they may be blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. If our every blessing springs — as it surely does — from grace, our security and preservation in those blessings is altogether of the faithfulness of God.

The third thing in Genesis 28 to which I desire to call your attention is that, in figure, what God had made known of Himself was set up here in testimony. Jacob set up a pillar, and poured oil on the top of it, and called the name of that place Bethel — i.e., the House of God. This was surely figurative of the testimony of God's grace and faithfulness being set up on earth in the power

of the Holy Ghost. We have seen that Solomon's temple was intended to be the testimony of God's grace and faithfulness for all the nations of the earth. And if we turn to Christianity we find how very characteristic this is of the House of God today. Read 1 Timothy 2: 1 - 7; 1 Timothy 3: 15; 2 Timothy 1: 12; 2 Timothy 2: 13, 19.

We see in these scriptures how the testimony of God's grace and faithfulness is in His house today. The testimony of God as a Saviour God is in His house, and it sounds forth from that house that He will have all men to be saved. God is dwelling here in infinite grace to men, so that in His house prayers are made for all men. Spite of man's wickedness and sin's confusion God has a pillar here — the testimony which is maintained in the power of His Spirit, and which not all the power of evil can overturn. Is it not an unspeakable privilege to be part of that testimony, through His infinite grace?

Then in the second epistle the last days are contemplated — times of declension, departure, and even apostasy. In presence of all this, divine faithfulness becomes the bulwark and security of the believer, and of those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. The testimony of God's grace and faithfulness is here, and it will be here so long as there are saints on earth indwelt by God's Spirit. No power of evil can overturn God's pillar. The House of God "is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth". May each one of us get a deeper sense of the blessedness of being identified with this holy testimony!

Now just a few words in conclusion, about Jacob! He got the light of God's house, but for a long time he was not very much affected practically by it. He went down to Padan-Aram, and served there for his wives and his cattle. He was preserved and became fruitful there. God did not leave him, but fed him all his life long, as he said at the end (Genesis 48: 15). But, though prospered and cared for by God, he was a long way from the pillar which he had anointed. He was building up his own house, and not thinking much of God's house. It is one thing to be fed and cared for by God, and another to be near the pillar — to be identified wholly in heart and ways with God's testimony, that is, with God's house.

In the days of Haggai God's people were neglecting His house. They said the time had not come that God's house should be built, but they were dwelling in their own ceiled houses! The result was that they had no prosperity. They sowed much and brought in little, they clothed themselves but were not warm, they earned wages to put it into a bag with holes (see Haggai 1:2 - 9). If we do not make the House of God our chief interest we cannot expect spiritual prosperity.

If God has a house here, that is the true centre for the man of faith. It is a great moment for our souls when we realise that God has a place here, and that we are called to know Him and to have to do with Him as One who has a place here. The House of God is the chief interest on earth for every saint.

The twenty years that Jacob spent in Mesopotamia were years of disappointment and discipline. "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times", Genesis 31: 40, 41. When he came to look back on it all it did not yield him much satisfaction. And if saints live in their own interests and neglect the House of God, they are sure to feel, sooner or later, that their course has been a failure.

God disciplined Jacob for twenty years, and at the end of that time he was prepared for a call to Bethel. God said to him, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred" (chapter 31:13). God does not say, "I am the God of Padan-Aram", but "I am the God of Bethel". If God sets up a testimony in this world He does not depart from it. He never departs from His original thought and purpose. His people may lose sight of His purpose and grace and faithfulness, and be content to be cared for and prospered by Him in their circumstances here, but God never gives up His own testimony, and the true blessedness of every saint is to cleave to it.

There were great hindrances in the way of Jacob's return to Bethel. In the first place there was his bad behaviour to Esau twenty years before. He had taken a human way to get Isaac's blessing, and though he got the blessing he had to suffer for the way in which he got it. If believers take what seems to be a short cut to blessing they always find that it leads them a long way round. Jacob was twenty years away from the promised land and the House of God in consequence of taking a human way to reach a divine end.

We do not like to face things. If there has been a dark page somewhere in our history we do not care to go back to it, and have it all out with God. This hinders many from making spiritual progress. Through the grace of God Jacob faced the dark page in his history. He had to say to God about it in secret, and he had to meet Esau. And in all this he learned what God would be for him in spite of his own failure.

Then there was another thing. It comes out in Genesis 35: 2 - 4 that there were things in Jacob's household and amongst his surroundings that would not do for Bethel. If people have been living at a distance from the House of God

they are sure to have picked up many things which are not suitable to the holiness of that house. It is very easy to pick up such things, but difficult to throw them down. Probably it was the consciousness of this which made Jacob so slow to come to Bethel even after he entered the land. He had to have more and bitter discipline to prepare him for the second call to Bethel.

“And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared to thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be ye clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will there make an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem;” Genesis 35: 1 - 4. Shechem is a fine place for saints to reach. It is the place of uncompromising decision for God — the place where the soul says, “O God, my heart is fixed”. It is the place where Joshua said, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve ... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24: 15).

The “strange gods” and the “earrings” had to be put off. Jacob felt that holiness became God’s house for ever, and he had reached a point when compromise was no longer possible — the House of God must be his chief interest. “The strange gods” and “earrings” were hidden “under the oak which was by Shechem” — suggestive of the cross as that by which the world is crucified to the saint, and he to the world. Then Jacob was ready for Bethel, and there he built an altar. God appeared to him and renewed the promises. The House of God retained its own blessed character as at the beginning; His grace and faithfulness were known and enjoyed there.

And finally, “Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon” (chapter 35: 14). He returned to his original testimony. That is what we have to do today. We have to cleave to the thought that God has a place here. His house is upon the earth, for His saints are here indwelt by His Spirit. God’s house is the gate of heaven, and His grace and faithfulness are known there. God’s testimony is here in the power of the Holy Ghost. May we know what it is to return to that testimony — to cleave to it — to be fully identified in heart and spirit with it! Every saint belongs to the House of God. May that house be more and more our chief interest! Then shall we be happy and

blessed. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" (Psalm 36: 8).

REDEMPTION AND SALVATION

Exodus 15

It has been often remarked that the people never spoke of preparing a habitation for God until they were redeemed and saved. They were in the good of redemption and in the joy of God's salvation when they said, "I will prepare him a habitation". It is a redeemed and saved people who have to do with God's house. I want to speak tonight of redemption and salvation as that which prepares us for the House of God, and I trust the Lord will help me to set this before you.

God has been pleased to take up the children of Israel and to work out in the things that happened to them a series of wonderful pictures for our instruction. The children of Israel were in Egypt as a people set apart for God; that is, they were circumcised, which I take to be a figure of people who are set apart by the work of God in them. This helps us to understand the way in which Egypt is presented in this book. From one point of view Egypt may be regarded as a place of resource — we read of treasures in Egypt, and of the wisdom of the Egyptians. In another aspect we may look at it as a place where the pleasures of sin are enjoyed for a season. But it was not a place of resource or pleasure to the children of Israel; it was the house of bondage. The natural man finds all his resource and pleasure in the world, but those who are born again find it to be a house of bondage. The one born again cannot find satisfaction in the world, for all the things which are found there, and the principles which rule there, tend to keep him in ignorance of God and in darkness as to the grace of God, and thus in bondage of soul. The great object of the enemy is to keep souls in bondage — to keep them as to their own consciousness in the flesh and under the law so that they may never have joy or peace or liberty. In fact the great object of Satan is to hinder souls from coming into the good of the House of God. No greater contrast could be conceived than that which exists between the house of bondage and the House of God. God would have His people to be happy and full of joy; Satan would keep them in misery and gloom. God would have believers to be in divine peace; Satan seeks to keep them in unrest and distress. God would have His saints in the perfect liberty of His holy love; Satan seeks to keep them in the bondage of self-occupation.

The things of the world may seem attractive for the moment, but you will find that they bring you into bondage of soul. If you go in for the things of the world you will find that you cannot enjoy the things of God; you are thus held in bondage by what is paltry and sinful and kept out of the enjoyment of the

blessing of the House of God. Do you think a worldly believer enjoys the blessings of God's house? Certainly not. He is held in bondage by what is really vanity.

Now let us travel rapidly over the way in which God made Himself known for the deliverance and salvation of His people. Read Exodus 3: 1 - 8. God made Himself known as dwelling in a bush, and this in good will to men. You remember the scripture which speaks of "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" (Deuteronomy 33: 16). This is surely a striking figure of the incarnation. God has been pleased to come down in good will to man to deliver men from bondage and to bring them all the blessings of His grace. The Son of God has become man in order to bring about this deliverance and blessing. The incarnation is really the foundation and pillar of all our blessings, for it is that which gives infinite value to the sacrifice of Christ.

Now turn to chapter 4. Read verses 1 - 9, 30, 31. I think we see here in picture what has come to pass by the death of Christ. In the first place Moses' rod was thrown down and became a serpent — indicative of the fact that through man's sin the power that is seen in this world is that of evil. But when Moses took the serpent by the tail it became a rod again in his hand. Christ has come in grace and undergone all the judgment to which man had become liable in consequence of the power of evil, and in this way He has broken that power for ever. Everything that once was the evidence of the power of evil is now the witness of the power of God. It was so in measure when the Lord Jesus Christ was in this world. If men were sick, lame, blind, palsied, leprous, possessed with demons, and even in death itself, all this was the evidence of the power of evil. But in the presence of the Lord Jesus all these things became witnesses to the mighty power of God acting in good will toward men. And all in some way foreshadowed the wondrous triumph of the cross. It was at Calvary the Lord Jesus met the whole power of evil and triumphed gloriously. Now in resurrection He can say, "I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1: 18). All power is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ on the ground of redemption, and it is exercised in grace and good will toward men. It is a great thing to know this. God is acting in infinite grace, but at the same time He is acting in a power that can sweep aside everything that stands in the way of the blessing of His people.

Then the leprous hand represents the defiled state of man as a sinner. To meet this, perfect cleansing has been brought in according to all the value and efficacy of the death of Christ. There is no reason why any defiled sinner under heaven should not be cleansed.

And, finally, the water of the river was turned into blood. The river Nile was the life of Egypt, and in its water being turned into blood I think we see in figure that the whole life of the world, and of man as in the flesh, has come under judgment before God. All this is set forth in the way of perfect grace toward man, and it is in this way alone that the good will of God could reach man in blessing. But it is very solemn because it all shows that if men refuse Christ there is no hope for them.

When Aaron “spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people ... the people believed, and ... bowed their heads and worshipped” (Exodus 4: 30, 31). They heard God’s glad tidings and believed. In this we see an illustration of the hearing of faith by which souls come into the light of God’s wondrous grace.

Now let us pass on to chapter 12. Read verses 1 - 14. There are four thoughts connected with the passover which are of the deepest importance. First, shelter; second, food; third, instruction; and, fourth, that all is in view of a new place.

The passover was the beginning of months to Israel, and it is the true beginning of every soul in the knowledge of Christ. What it sets forth goes beyond believing the proclamation of forgiveness in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is more the personal appropriation of Christ. It is where the soul really begins in its knowledge of Christ. There is no proper start — no true spring in the soul — until we know what it is to appropriate Christ not only as shelter but as the food of our souls. It is one thing to believe the glad tidings and another to appropriate Christ as the satisfaction and strength of our souls. God would have us to begin with Christ. Not to struggle through a thousand exercises and come to Christ, as it were, at the end; but to begin with Christ and go through every exercise in the light of Christ and as those who have fed upon Him. How often it is otherwise with us,

but this is God’s way. We need motive power and spiritual strength if we are to move on in the things of God, and the reason we have so little of this is that we are not sufficiently nourished with divine food.

I will not enlarge at this time on the shelter provided in the blood of the lamb. As natural men we were exposed to the judgment of God. But the blood of Christ is a perfect shelter from judgment, and it is available for every man. Blessed be God for that!

Then there is food. And it seems to me that two thoughts are suggested to us here — contemplation and appropriation. They had to take a lamb on the tenth day and keep it up till the fourteenth day. The lamb without blemish was

first the object of their contemplation, and then as roast with fire it became their food. It is a wonderful thing to contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Holy One of God, the Lamb without blemish and without spot, the One foreordained before the foundation of the world. Then we appropriate Him as having come under judgment on our behalf. "Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire". We feed upon Christ as the One who came in deep divine love under holy judgment for us. He alone could sustain that judgment, and because He has done so the very judgment to which we are exposed has become the evidence to us of the love of Christ, for He has endured and exhausted it. We can never disconnect the thought of the judgment from the divine Person who bore it in the greatness of His love. The judgment of God upon sin is infinite, but Christ has borne it in love that He might become the food of our hearts. God would have us to be nourished upon the love of Christ. Whenever God means to put people in motion He always feeds them first (see 1 Kings 19: 5 - 8; Hebrews 13:8 - 13). We need to be nourished — to have our spiritual affections sustained and invigorated by the knowledge of Christ in the blessed love in which He came under judgment for us. As our hearts are nourished with the personal perfections and love of Christ, holiness becomes a necessity to our souls. Everyone who is affected by the love of Christ feels that he must be apart from that for which Christ died. He eats unleavened bread. It becomes a satisfaction to him to cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Then as to ourselves there is true repentance — eating the bitter herbs. We judge ourselves not in misery of soul but in the presence of divine love and in communion with God. This is the deepest kind of self-judgment.

I come now to the thought of divine instruction. "The blood shall be to you for a token". Not only does the blood shelter me but it speaks to me. The blood of Jesus speaks volumes. The words, "When I see the blood I will pass over you", are often commented upon, but there is another side — "The blood shall be to you for a token". The blood is a token of certain things to us. God would have the death of Jesus to speak to us volumes of divine instruction. I cannot dwell upon it — it is a great subject in itself — but I may say that there are three things of which the blood is a token to me. First, that I am under death; second, that the grace of God has reached me there; and, third, that divine righteousness is in my favour. Our souls need to be instructed in the blessed reality of these things.

The fourth thing about the passover was that it was all in view of a new place. "And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is the Lord's passover".

The soul has to apprehend that it must now take an entirely new place. The shelter, the food, the instruction are not to qualify the believer to stop in Egypt to the glory of God; they are to prepare him to move into an entirely new place. We are to be a marching people. If one really feeds upon Christ and is instructed in Him, it must give the consciousness that one is not of the world, and not under the law, or in the flesh. In spirit we do not belong to this order of things at all. We belong to another system of things altogether — God's system. We begin to see that we belong to a new world. Then we gird our loins and take our staff in our hand.

Now read chapter 14:1 - 16, 29 - 31. Pharaoh and his hosts represent all the power of evil intent upon preventing God from having His people for His own pleasure. The people were made to realise the terribleness of the enemy and their own helplessness, and then they learned God's salvation. What was salvation for them? God made a way by which they could come into an altogether new place — outside Egypt, beyond Pharaoh's power, and in full view of all His gracious purpose, so that they could say that Jehovah was their strength and song and had become their salvation, and that they would prepare Him a habitation.

The staff of Moses was uplifted and the sea divided. This is a figure of the death of Christ as that which has opened a way into an entirely new place. If you have never viewed the death of Christ in that aspect before, it is for you now. The way has been opened up and it is available for everyone. The sea has been turned into dry ground. Naturally, death is a place where we have no footing — like the sea; but in the death of Christ God has turned it into dry ground. There is solid footing on which faith can travel into a new place where divine light and favour and blessedness are known.

What is the character of that new place, and what do we find there? Well, in the first place, I think it is easy to see that if a person touches resurrection ground he leaves sin, the world, and Satan's power behind. When I speak of touching resurrection ground I mean coming to the apprehension of it in Christ risen. I am afraid many Christians have very hazy ideas as to what is beyond death; but God would have us to be well acquainted with resurrection scenes. None of us know anything about resurrection except as we have apprehended it in Christ. The Lord often spoke to His own about resurrection, but they never understood it until they apprehended it in Himself as the risen One. Resurrection is not an abstract idea, but a blessed reality substantiated in the Person of Christ. Christ is beyond death — raised for our justification, raised by the glory of the Father, raised to be our righteousness, our life, our joy, our salvation, for evermore.

Christ fills the resurrection scene, and we come into it as being of Him and in Him. We are brought to a Person who has nothing more to do with sin, the world, or Satan. All these have been judged in His death; and He is now our strength, our song; and our salvation. The power that brings us into the apprehension of our new place in Christ is the power of God's salvation. When Jonah said "Salvation is of the Lord", the fish vomited him out on the dry land — figure of a resurrection place.

In connection with this I will read one or two scriptures from the New Testament. 2 Timothy 1: 8 - 10. God has "saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". Then again in chapter 2: 10 the apostle says, "I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory". And again in Titus 3: 5, 6, we read that "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour".

These scriptures show that salvation is in Christ Jesus and that it is connected with an entirely new order of things. We come into it by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Baptism is in figure burial to the order of things that exists in the world that we may live in another order of things by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is through being renewed by the Holy Ghost in mind and affection that we can enter into those blessed things which subsist in Christ Jesus.

All this is most important in connection with the subject of the House of God. Salvation is in view of the House of God, for immediately after they had said, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation", they went on to say, "I will prepare him a habitation". It is so also in other parts of scripture. For example, in Psalm 27 David says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation", and then he goes on to say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple". Again in Psalm 132 God says, "I will also clothe her priests with salvation". And in Isaiah 61: 10, where we read, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation", the same verse speaks of being decked as a priest [margin]. This shows how intimately salvation is connection with priesthood; that is with the privileges and service of the House of God. Salvation is the garment that fits

one for priestly service, and I think it would be right to say that salvation is enjoyed in the House of God. We come into the House of God in the beauty of God's salvation and enjoy the blessedness of a circle which is morally far removed from sin, the world, and Satan's power. Salvation is the moral beauty of saints in which they are suited to the habitation of God's holiness. It is written that "The Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psalm 149: 4).

The proper effect of the wonderful grace made known in the gospel is that, as nourished by the perfections and love of Christ, and as divinely instructed by His death, we are prepared to leave Egypt, and to come, in spirit, to apprehend Christ risen and ascended. There we find the House of God with all its blessing and privilege. We cannot come into that house in a natural way — , we can only really enter upon the privilege of God's house as those who have been beautified with salvation. May we all know more of the reality of this!

GOD DWELLING AMONG HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 19: 3 - 6; 25

There are two things which it is well to note before passing on to the thought of God dwelling among His people. The first is that He *covered* them in the presence of all the power of the enemy, and the second is that He *carried* them through the difficulties and necessities of the wilderness. In chapter 14, when Pharaoh and the Egyptians were pressing upon the people — the cloud removed and went behind them. We read in 1 Corinthians 10 that they were “under the cloud”. God, as it were, put His wing over His people to shield them from the power of the enemy. “How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings” (Psalm 36: 7).

In Romans 8 God’s saints are seen as under the shadow of His wings, and thus secure from all the power of the enemy. “If God be for us, who against us? ... Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” The whole universe is challenged. No hostile power can touch the saints, for God is for them; every accusing voice is silenced if God has justified His saints. In His sovereign love and mercy He has overshadowed us with His wings. He has blessed, and no power of the enemy can reverse it.

Then in the verses we have read from Exodus 19 God says, “I bare you on eagles’ wings”. This seems to apply to the path through the wilderness. In presence of the power of the enemy they were covered by His wings, but in the wilderness they were carried upon His wings. There was not a necessity or a difficulty in the wilderness but served to prove the care and sustaining power of Jehovah. He did not intend His people to carry the burden of wilderness difficulties; He intended them to prove how blessedly He could carry them through everything. What answers to it for us is “Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5: 7). God’s care is the answer to all the difficulties of the wilderness. Were the people hungry? God gave them bread from heaven. Were they thirsty? He gave them water from the rock. Were they treading the sands of the desert? He took care that their feet did not swell nor their raiment wax old. At the end of the wilderness “garments fresh and foot unwearied” told how God had brought them through. “In his love and in his pity he redeemed them: and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isaiah 63: 9).

Most of us here have, I trust, the joy of knowing that God has covered us in the presence of all the power of the enemy. Now we have to prove how He can carry us through the wilderness.

Then He adds, "And brought you unto myself". This is the secret that lies behind the grace and the ways of God. He wants His people for Himself. Nothing can be more wonderful than that the blessed God should want us for Himself. How could we understand it, if we left out the thought of His love? "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31: 3). And all is in view of our being brought under His control. "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people". God reveals Himself by the gospel in supreme grace and love in order to break down all our self-willed distrust of Him so that we may come under His blessed control.

That was God's thought in reference to Israel, and I have no doubt that it will be accomplished in a coming day. Israel with God's law written in their hearts will become His peculiar treasure — "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" — and they will be in this world for His glory and praise, setting forth His excellencies before the nations. But in the meantime we come into this wonderful place of favour and testimony. Christ has "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18). That gives the idea of being brought into priesthood; the Jews' idea of a _priest would be that he was a man who drew near to God.

It is very interesting to see that in God's mind all the people were to be "a kingdom of priests". The thought of a special priestly family came in subsequently after the failure of the people, but God's mind was to have "a kingdom of priests". And it seems to me that it was from that point of view that God regarded the people when He said, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25: 8). It was His mind to dwell among a kingdom of priests.

The first thing that strikes one in connection with the tabernacle is that all the material was given by the people, and all was directly connected with their affections. "Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering" (Exodus 25: 2). All the precious things which they were to bring represented, I suppose, the preciousness of Christ as known in the hearts of the saints by God's blessed work in them. This becomes the material for the house, if we may so speak. It is said in 1 Peter 2: 7, "To you therefore who believe is the preciousness". God puts the preciousness of Christ and the knowledge of Himself in the hearts of His saints, and it is thus really that they become living stones for His spiritual house. As Christ is built up in the souls of God's children there is divine material for the House of God. (Compare as to this 1 Corinthians 3: 10 - 17).

If God has given us gold, silver, or precious stones — if He has given our hearts the knowledge and appreciation of the preciousness of Christ, and of Himself as revealed in Christ it is not only for our individual enjoyment but to qualify us to be contributors to His house. Of course we have to take up the thought now in a spiritual way. Every saint is intended to be a contributor to the House of God. Each saint contributes according to the measure of His knowledge and appreciation of the preciousness of Christ. This is a very simple yet divinely beautiful thought.

Looking at it in this way how appropriate to our lips are the words of David when he and the people presented their offerings for the temple! "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29: 13, 14). If God had not manifested Himself to us in grace, and made Christ to live in our affections by His Spirit, we could bring nothing to His house; it is of His own that we give Him. And every true saint is qualified, in measure, to contribute to the House of God. The youngest and the feeblest believer ought to entertain the thought of this. We must not think of the House of God in a material way but as a spiritual structure.

Now I pass on to say a few words about the tabernacle, and in venturing to do so I may say that I have no thought of going into the types in detail, nor of speaking dogmatically on any point, for I feel that I have almost everything to learn on this subject. But I should like to suggest one or two thoughts which seem to have a place in connection with these interesting types.

There are two things which I should like to remark upon. (1) The house itself; and (2) what it contained.

As to the house itself, it was composed of boards covered with gold and standing upon sockets of silver. (See Exodus 26: 15 - 30). This seems to intimate clearly that God's house stands on the basis of redemption, and that it is composed of those who are in Christ. No one can really understand his place in the House of God until he knows what it is to be set up on the ground of redemption and to be in Christ. The very basis of everything for our souls is that God has been glorified in the death of Christ about sin and sins; all that we were as in the flesh has been removed from before Him in holy judgment. Then, on the other hand, we are in Christ; our souls have come into the apprehension of Christ as our righteousness and our life; we can be near to God in the blessed consciousness of what Christ is made to us. The saint in all his relations with God realises that he is on a new footing altogether; he is on the footing of redemption and he is consciously in Christ. He is conscious that

his righteousness, satisfaction, sanctification, and strength are not in himself but in another Man — even in Christ. And “if any man be in Christ there is a new creation”. God “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5: 17 - 21). This gives us in New Testament language the thought of the silver sockets and the covering of gold.

It is thus that the saints are qualified to be builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2: 22). Note the words, “builded together!” The saints were never intended to be separate units, nor was it ever in the mind of God that they should be divided into great or small church systems. No natural dividing influence could be stronger than the difference between Jew and Gentile. But the great point in Ephesians 2 is that the Jew and the Gentile were “builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit”. Sectarianism is built up on the recognition of man in the flesh — not on the silver sockets which speak of a holy work in which that man has been entirely set aside by God.

Then in Peter we read, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2: 4, 5). We may not see much of it, but that is the great work of God in this world; He is building His saints together and building them up as a spiritual house that He may dwell in them by His Spirit. It is a great thing for us to see what God is doing and the end that He has in view.

When we come to what the house contained, we find three prominent things which formed what may be called the furniture of the house — the ark, the table, and the candlestick. The golden altar was more connected with approach; hence we do not get it mentioned until after the consecration of the priests. I do not suppose that the children of Israel were capable of entering very much into the signification of these things, but they are full of instruction for us.

It has often been remarked that the things which were in the holy place are rather typical of things which will be taken up in Israel in connection with Christ. I do not doubt the truth of this, but it is also true that these things have a signification which is applicable to the present time. What is set forth in connection with the table and the candlestick is made good in principle in the House of God today.

As to the ark of the covenant, it seems to speak of the setting forth of the glory of God in Christ. The shittim wood suggests the thought of humanity, but

it was all covered over with gold.

“God’s righteousness with glory bright,
Which with its radiance fills that sphere,
E’en Christ, of God the power and light”. (88:4)

God has set forth all His glory in Christ. Psalm 40 naturally occurs to one in connection with the ark of the covenant. Read verses 7 - 10. We get in these verses seven things which to a large extent constitute the glory of God — His will, His law, His righteousness, His faithfulness, His salvation, His lovingkindness, and His truth. All came out in Christ — the ark of the covenant — and all find their expression in Him as the risen and glorified One. It is most wonderful and blessed to see that God has been pleased to make known the glory of His nature and of His attributes in Christ. He has come out in the Person of the Son as Man in this world, and now the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ as the risen and glorified Man. The whole revelation of God is in Christ; the glory of God shines in His face. If God’s will, nature, righteousness, faithfulness, salvation, lovingkindness, and truth are brought to light there is certainly the shining forth of His glory, and our hearts find it all in Christ. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”.

I connect all this with the familiar verses in 1 Timothy, “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (chapter 3: 14 - 16). The mystery of godliness is really the manifestation of God in flesh. And this mystery is enshrined in the House of God. God is known there according to the full glory in which He has manifested Himself in Christ. In another day it could be said, “In Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion” (Psalm 76: 1, 2). But all this is true in a spiritual way in the assembly. God is known there; the ark of the covenant is enshrined there.

And this is the mystery of godliness — the true spring of all piety. There is no true piety except what flows from the knowledge of Jesus Christ come in flesh. Hence the apostle says, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and

this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4: 2, 3). And in his second epistle he warns the elect lady not to receive anyone who did not bring this doctrine of Jesus Christ come in flesh. The spirit of antichrist would take away the ark of the covenant, and destroy all the springs and power of true piety in the souls of men.

Christ is the ark of the covenant; in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2: 9) as the One who has been "received up into glory". And the knowledge of Christ in this blessed way is found enshrined in the House of God. The most prominent characteristic of the House of God is that He is known there according to the blessed revelation of Himself that shines out in Christ. God dwells in His assembly and is known there; the mystery of piety is enshrined there. It is a great thing for us to apprehend that as saints we are brought into a circle where God is known and where God dwells.

It is in Christ that God puts Himself in communication with men. "There will I meet with thee, and will speak with thee". God has spoken in the Person of the Son, and all that He has said is treasured in the assembly. The knowledge of God and of His mind is found in the place where He dwells. (See Psalm 27: 4).

When we come to the table of shewbread it seems to me that we get the thought of the saints being brought into association with Christ. It is noticeable that we do not get the number of the cakes in Exodus. As a matter of fact there were twelve cakes, each composed of two tenth deals of fine flour (see Leviticus 24: 5, 6). It has been often said that the number twelve is connected in scripture with administration — twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve gates, and twelve foundations in the holy Jerusalem — and no doubt the shewbread speaks of the place which Israel will have in a coming day. I do not dwell upon this. There were "two tenth deals" in each cake, and this gives the number twenty-four in connection with the twelve cakes. When the priesthood was set in order by David (1 Chronicles 24), there were twenty-four courses, and this number is taken up in the twenty-four elders (Revelation 4, Revelation 5) who represent, I suppose, the whole company of heavenly priests.

So that in connection with the table of shewbread we may see a figure of the whole priestly company identified with Christ in the presence of God, and covered with the frankincense of His own blessed perfections. Israel in connection with Christ in a coming day will be a kingdom of priests for God's glory and praise; they will shew forth His excellencies before the nations. But

today the saints have a peculiar and blessed place of association with Christ both before God and in this world.

In Hebrews 1: 9 we read that Christ is anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. In Hebrews 2: 11, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren". And again in chapter 3, "We are made companions of the Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end". The wilderness tests everything, but those in whom there is a work of God are companions of the Christ. He sustains them as a sanctified company in the presence of God as those who are in association with Himself. The message He sent to the disciples was, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20: 17).

Then, on the other hand, we have a place of association with Him as God's children in this world. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons [children] of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3: 1). He puts His saints in His own place before the Father, and then He puts them in His own place in this world. Wondrous and precious grace! May we be more willing to occupy the place that really belongs to us, through divine love, as priests and children of God!

If Christ brings us to the Father's presence you may be sure that He brings us there without stain or reproach, in perfect suitability to the Father's holy love, so that we are before Him as objects of delight to His heart. It is a great thing to have this before us and especially when we come together for the exercise of priestly privilege. The Father takes account of Christ in the saints; Christ comes under the Father's eye in the saints, and thus they are objects of delight to His heart. God would not have His children to come before Him as sinners, nor even as failing believers. Of course if there are unsettled questions in the soul, those questions must be settled before one can take up priestly privilege. But it is God's mind that we should know and enjoy our place of association with the Son of His love.

Christ has a sanctified company of those whom He can present holy and unblamable and irreproachable before God for the satisfaction of God's love. God's house is furnished with such a company for His own good pleasure. It may be said that very few have apprehended these great thoughts of divine love! Alas! this is only too true. We do not eat the fatness of God's house. We do not enter into His blessed thoughts. God's house is well furnished; there is no poverty there; it is a wealthy place. May we be more familiar with it!

Now I pass on to the candlestick. It was made of gold and had seven lamps which gave light over against it (Exodus 25: 37). That is, the object of the lamps seems to have been to throw light upon the candlestick itself. The candlestick of pure gold I take to be a figure of Christ as the subject of the Spirit's testimony in the House of God. "He shall glorify me", was the Lord's word with reference to the coming of the Comforter. The candlestick was one thing, the seven lamps another, and, I may add, the light given was a third. For this latter was dependent on the service of the priests; it was their responsibility to maintain the light.

The testimony of Christ is in the House of God by the Spirit, and this is what I connect with the candlestick. It is a wonderful thing to remember that the testimony of Christ is here in spite of all Satan's efforts to dislodge it. The Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians says, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything ye are enriched in him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (chapter 1: 4 - 7). No one could say that the testimony of Christ was very bright at Corinth, but the saints there were God's assembly — God's house — and the testimony of Christ had been confirmed in them so that they came behind in no gift. The candlestick was there, so to speak, with all its vessels, but the lamps very much needed trimming. Fitness for priestly service was wanting and the lamps were burning very dimly. Paul had to use the golden snuffers in writing his first Epistle to Corinth! When he came to write the second it was more like pouring oil into the lamps! He was pouring into their hearts by the Spirit the blessed ministry of Christ well fitted to brighten all their souls in the testimony of Christ.

There had been a want of priestly care and priestly sensitiveness at Corinth, and the result was that, though the candlestick was there, the light was much obscured. The testimony of Christ remains still in the House of God, and saints get the light and gain of it in proportion as they walk in self-judgment and separation from evil. In Christendom generally the Holy Ghost is so grieved and quenched that the testimony of Christ is very little known. But I do not want to occupy you with failure, but with the furnishing of God's house in its own proper and blessed character.

The House of God is the place where the Holy Ghost glorifies Christ. The youngest believer ought to have the consciousness that he belongs to a circle where the Holy Ghost makes everything of Christ. We have to see to it that we

do not grieve or quench the Spirit. Priestly sensitiveness and priestly exercise are needed.

What is the testimony of the Christ? Well, it is the blessed witness in the power of the Spirit that everything for the pleasure of God and the blessing of men is established in Christ. Saints are in Christ Jesus, who is made wisdom to them from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. God has firmly attached His saints to Christ — the One in whom all His promises are yea and Amen. He is bringing those taught of Himself to recognise that man after the flesh has no place with Him, but that Christ is everything, and in all.

To be in the light of all this involves a great deal. If Christ is to be everything the cross must come in on all that I am as in the flesh — it must draw the line between me and the world. If I am not prepared to judge myself and to break with the world the light will burn very dimly so far as I am concerned. There must be the practical acceptance of the cross. The Apostle Paul after speaking to the Colossians about being complete in Christ goes on to speak of circumcision and burial. The Christian to be in the good of the testimony of Christ must put off the body of the flesh and have done with the world. Of course in saying this I am not referring to the Christian's actual departure from this life but to a great moral reality which he comes to in mind and spirit. If I am complete in Christ I must part company in spirit with what is not Christ. It is not that one gives up the world like a monk or a nun, but Christ comes in and displaces self and the world.

These three things present in figure three great characteristics of the House of God. God is known there as revealed in Christ. The saints are before God for His pleasure in association with Christ. And the testimony of Christ is there by the Spirit. What we need is to be more exercised about these things — not to be content to see them in Scripture, or to hear them talked about — but to be exercised as to the blessed reality of them, and as to how far we have entered into these wondrous things which form the divine furnishing of God's house. That house is furnished with things well calculated to fill our hearts with divine satisfaction and joy.

THE ALTAR AND THE CONSECRATION OF THE PRIESTS

Exodus 27: 1 - 18; 28; 29

We have looked at the tabernacle itself and what it contained on a previous occasion. I now desire to bring before you a few thoughts in connection with the altar and the consecration of the priests. One feels a difficulty in taking up subjects so great and suggestive, and can only trust that the Lord may graciously give what will help to feed our souls.

The altar occupied a most important place. It was not part of the furniture of the house, and yet it was not outside the precincts of the house. It formed the connecting link between the house and the congregation. It was where God spoke to the people generally. "I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel" (Exodus 29: 42, 43).

The altar seems to me to represent Christ as the One who has glorified God about sin and sins in such a way that He is now free to approach men in all the blessedness of His grace as a Saviour God. The altar was at the door of the tabernacle; it was connected with God's dwelling-place on the one hand, and it was in view of the people on the other. In that way it corresponds with what is said of the Lord Jesus in 1 Timothy 2, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (verse 5, 6). It is by Christ that God approaches men and speaks to them in grace. If God speaks to men in grace it must be in connection with the One who has given Himself a ransom for all. The furniture of the house speaks of things which are known within the house, but the altar speaks of what is proclaimed, if one may so say, at the door of the house.

The testimony that sounds out from God's house is that God will have all men to be saved, and that the man Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. Christ is made known in the proclamation of grace as One who has had to do with the sins and liabilities of men. There is but one Person in the universe who could sustain the fire of God's holy judgment upon sin, and that Person has come under it in grace to men. His resurrection has proved that He was greater than all the death and judgment that He came into.

It is by way of the death of Christ that God comes out to men in the testimony of His grace. On the basis of ransom He can speak of repentance, and forgiveness, and peace to every sinner under heaven. God views the whole world at the present time from the standpoint of Christ and His death; hence every testimony of God to men is full of grace and blessing. Everything that

God has to say to men in grace is based upon atonement; it is from the altar that God speaks in grace to men.

In chapter 29 we come to the consecration of the priests. I do not go into the anointing of Aaron separately. No doubt in this he is a figure of Christ personally. I pass on to what relates to the priestly household.

In the first place they were brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and washed with water (verse 4). This seems to be a figure of purification from our defiled state as sinners — what is often spoken of as moral cleansing. It is not cleansing from guilt. With reference to guilt we are justified by His blood, but we need to be morally cleansed from our defiled state as in the flesh.

I need hardly say that there is no such thing as being cleansed actually from the presence of sin in the flesh so long as we are here in mortal bodies. But we can be cleansed morally; that is, separated in heart and spirit from the sin that dwells in us, and brought to judge our whole state as in the flesh. We can come into the apprehension of the death of Christ as that in which our sinful state has been condemned and removed from before God in holy judgment. So that it is possible for us to be in moral separation from flesh of sin, and to be in mind and spirit with God on an entirely new ground and in an entirely new state. We cannot bring sinful flesh to God; it has been condemned in the death of His Son.

God effects this moral cleansing by bringing what is of Himself into the souls of His people. We are perhaps in danger of thinking of moral cleansing too much in a negative way, but I am sure that evil is only judged as good is brought in. Job said, "Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42: 5, 6). It was as God was before him that he truly judged himself.

The same thought is suggested in John 3: 5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". What is of God is brought into the soul, and this leads to the judgment of what we are according to the flesh and moral separation from it — it brings about moral cleansing. There can be no true cleansing in this way except as that which is of God is brought in. Hence in John 15: 3 the Lord says, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you". The word which He had spoken unto them was the blessed revelation of Himself and of the Father, and by bringing that in He cleansed them morally from all that was evil here — bringing in the good and thus giving power to judge and separate from the evil.

Then in putting on the priestly garments (Exodus 29: 8, 9) we seem to get a figure of being set before God in a new state. This is a great spiritual reality in Christianity. God brings us to judge ourselves as in the flesh, but that is not His end. His end is that we may be brought into a new state before Him. In Romans 6 after speaking of Christ as having died to sin and living to God, the apostle goes on to say, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord". God would have us to be conscious that we are in relation to Him apart from sin. We judge the world and the principle that rules in it — sin — and we take account of ourselves as being alive to God in Christ Jesus. The saint is thus alive to God on a new footing and in a new state. We could not live to God as identified with sin, but as being dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus we are before God for His pleasure.

In writing to the Colossians Paul develops this further, and speaks of the saints being risen with Christ. If we look at Christ on the cross it is a scene of death; we see there the condemnation and end of all that we are as in the flesh. He has died as having come in grace under all our liabilities, and as having been made sacrificially what we were actually. If we see this how can we want to strut about and hold our heads up as men in this world?

It is well to consider the death of Christ in this way, but we must not stop there. God has operated in that scene of death and has raised up Christ from the dead, so that now a resurrection scene is opened up to us. There is but One Man in that resurrection scene, and by faith of the working of God who raised Him from among the dead we are risen with Him. We get the consciousness that we live along with Christ before God. It is clear that this puts us in an entirely new state and on a new footing, according to which we have priestly fitness to approach God. We appear before Him as in association with Christ, and thus invested with suitability to His holy presence. We are made meet to take a priestly place. The thought of this seems to be suggested by the holy garments.

Then certain offerings had to be presented — a bullock for a sin offering, a ram for a burnt offering, and another ram which was properly the ram of consecration — and in each case Aaron and his sons had to put their hands on the head of the victim. This speaks of our appropriation of, and our identification with, Christ in the various characters which are set forth typically in these different offerings: Aaron and his sons were washed and arrayed in the priestly garments by Moses, but neither the washing nor the clothing was presented to them as an object. Neither the one nor the other was the ground of their confidence nor the object of their contemplation. It is not by these

things that sin is removed from before God, or that sweet savour comes before Him in connection with the maintenance of His glory. The death of Christ was needed for this; or rather I would say, CHRIST in the place of sin and death for the glory of God, and in absolute devotedness and love. This is what was presented, in figure, for the contemplation and apprehension of the priests.

The blood was put on the lintel in Egypt for shelter, but the sinner putting himself under shelter of the blood and the priest putting his hand on the head of the sin offering are two very different things. One is more like the view of the death of Christ which is presented to us in Romans, and the other that which is spoken of in Hebrews. In Romans we are cleared in view of the righteous judgment of God, but in Hebrews we are cleared according to the holiness of the sanctuary. One has to do with relief and the other with approach. Christ has made purification of sins according to the holiness of the sanctuary, so that with purged consciences and hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience we might be free to draw near to God. The priest putting his hand on the head of the sin offering is a figure of the saint appropriating — and identifying himself with — Christ as the One who has glorified God about sin and sins according to the holiness of His sanctuary. The death of Christ has cleared us from righteous judgment, but it is also the ground on which we can approach God in all the glory in which He is known in His sanctuary. Our sin brings no stain to that holy presence; we come there as witnesses to the blessed efficacy of a sacrifice wherein God has been glorified.

Then the ram was slain and burnt upon the altar as a burnt offering. The priestly company was identified with that which was a figure of Christ in all the fragrance and sweet savour of His offering of Himself. Not only has sin been removed, but all the perfection and devotedness of Christ has been placed on the altar fire that the sweet savour of it might come out and ascend with infinite acceptance to God and the Father. "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Ephesians 5: 2). To apprehend this and to identify ourselves with it is an important part of our preparation for the exercise of priesthood.

Then the second ram was properly the ram of consecration. Aaron and his sons had to lay their hands on the head of this ram also, and then its blood was put on their right ear, on the thumb of their right hand, and on the great toe of their right foot. In this we see the precious blood in another of its many and various aspects. Saints must not think that the blood is only for shelter; its meaning and preciousness continue to open out in new and varied forms all through the soul's history. The believer who walks with God has a continually

growing sense of the preciousness of the blood of Christ; his thoughts of the blood are continually expanding; year by year it speaks with fresh power to his heart; it becomes more wonderful and blessed in the vision of his soul. The person who thinks less of that precious blood year by year is certainly travelling on a dangerous road.

It seems to me that the blood of the ram of consecration speaks of the blood of Christ as the witness of His absolute personal devotedness to God. And the putting it on the ear, the thumb, and the toe of the priests seems to suggest that the mind and heart of the saint — to which the ear is the avenue — and his service and walk are all to come under the influence of the devotedness of Christ. We hear a great deal in these days about higher life and consecration, but it is to be feared that in the majority of cases those who take up that line of things are rather occupied with their own consecration and devotedness. But what God desires — and what every believer should covet — is that we should come under the influence of the devotedness of Christ. That is the true and divine power of consecration. The Apostle Paul had come under the influence of the devotedness of Christ when he said, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again". The apostle had come under the influence of the love of Christ — that love held him in its power. The devoted and self-sacrificing love in which Christ had come into death for the glory of God held all the avenues of his soul, was the spring of his service, and the influence that regulated his walk in this world. The blood of the ram of consecration was upon his ear, his thumb, and his foot. This is the man who prays for us in Ephesians 3 that we may "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge". God would have us come under the influence of the love in which Christ came into death so that in result the universe might be filled with the knowledge of God — with His glory and with His love. If we come under the influence of the devotedness of Christ we shall be truly devoted, and at the same time we shall think less and less of our devotedness.

The next thing is that the blood and the anointing oil were sprinkled upon Aaron and his sons (verse 21). The blood coming in in connection with the oil in this way is very instructive. It sets the precious blood before us from another point of view — as the ground on which the Spirit is given. So that in this chapter (Exodus 29) we see the blood in three very distinct aspects. First, as put upon the altar (verse 12, 16)

to meet the glory of God — that is, to make atonement. Second, as put upon the ear, thumb, and foot of the priests — the witness, in figure, of the personal devotedness of Christ. And third, in connection with the oil as the ground on which the Spirit can be given.

The gift of the Spirit is a very great reality, though but little recognised by many believers, and but little understood in its divine greatness by many who have in a certain way recognised it! How could such a thing be except on the ground of redemption? The gift of the Spirit is a most wonderful and blessed witness of the effect of redemption. It is on the ground of redemption that the Christian's body is now the temple of the Holy Ghost and a member of Christ. What infinite possibilities are thus within the reach of saints! Christendom is spiritually withered and dry because of its practical infidelity as to the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. Very few Christians really recognise in a practical way the presence of the Spirit of God. They have certain things in their creeds about the Holy Ghost, but practically they do not recognise His presence. It would be a great thing for us all if we got a deeper sense of the reality of the gift of the Spirit. Who could set bounds to the spiritual blessings and capabilities of people indwelt by the Spirit of God?

Then the fat, and certain inward parts, and the, right shoulder of the ram of consecration, "and one loaf of bread, and one cake of oiled bread, and one wafer out of the basket of the unleavened bread that is before the Lord" were put in the hands of Aaron and his sons and waved for a wave offering before the Lord (verse 22 - 24). The word consecration really means filling the hands. The priests were presented before Jehovah with their hands full of things which spoke of the perfections, devotedness, and love of Christ. All that had gone before led up to this. If we have been morally cleansed from the world and from ourselves according to the flesh, and have been consciously invested with priestly fitness as alive to God in Christ Jesus and risen with Christ — if we have known what it is to contemplate Christ as the sin offering and the burnt offering and to identify ourselves with Him in those characters — if we have come under the influence of His devotedness, and have received the Holy Spirit — and all this sets forth what is true of the Christian as such — it all leads up to our being brought to the presence of God with our hearts full of the preciousness of Christ. It is well for the sinner to say, "Nothing in my hand I bring", but the saint comes with his hands full — God has filled his hands with the excellence and preciousness of Christ.

Then that which had been waved upon the hands of Aaron and his sons was burnt upon the altar, "over the burnt offering" as it properly reads. The sweet fragrance of what Christ is in His own blessed Person and sacrifice and the

sweet fragrance of what He is in the hearts of His saints go up together in the same divine acceptance.

Finally, Aaron and his sons had to eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that was in the basket, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation (verse 31 - 35). They had to "eat those things wherewith the atonement was made, to consecrate and to sanctify them". In Egypt they ate of the lamb roast with fire; this corresponds with the saint feeding upon Christ that he may be spiritually nourished and strengthened to come out of Egypt. But the feeding upon the ram of consecration answers to saints being nourished upon the love of Christ in order to be strengthened for approach. That is, in the one case they ate in view of going out, and in the other in view of going in. I do not think people will move out of Egypt unless they feed upon Christ as the lamb roast with fire, and, on the other hand, I do not think saints will have spiritual energy to approach God unless they feed upon Christ as the ram of consecration.

May we know more what it is to feed upon Christ in that wondrous devoted love in which He has taken up everything for the glory of God, so that in a day that is quickly drawing near the whole universe will be filled with divine glory and with the knowledge of God! God would have us to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge that we might be filled unto all the fulness of God.

As soon as the consecrated company is secured we get the altar cleansed from sin and hallowed (verse 36, 37). Then the ordinance of the continual burnt offering (verse 38 - 42). And finally God says, "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God" (verse 45, 46).

THE HOUSE OF GOD IN CONNECTION WITH THE KINGDOM

1 Kings 4:24, 25; 1 Kings 5:1 - 5; 1 Kings 6:1 - 7

I desire to speak a little tonight about the House of God in connection with the kingdom. This looks on, in great measure, to a day that is yet to come, but there is much in it of present value for our instruction.

The tabernacle was movable and provisional. It was intended to be carried about, and was only for the time. It did not represent an established or permanent order of things. The house, properly speaking, could not be built until the kingdom was established. When the kingdom was established and mount Zion secured under David the house came distinctly in view. In Psalm 78: 68 - 70 we may see the connection between God's choice of David and of mount Zion and the building of His sanctuary. Jehovah dwelt in Zion as the rest of the kingdom (see Psalm 132: 13, 14), and this prepared the way for His sanctuary to be built by Solomon.

The effect of the kingdom being established in the hands of David was that the people were delivered from every enemy. "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree". Jehovah put all the enemies under the soles of David's feet, so that when Solomon came to the throne he could say, "Jehovah my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent".

At the present moment the kingdom is not set up in public manifestation, but it has been established in the victorious power of grace. Christ — the true David — has laid low every enemy and silenced every foe. He has been made sin in order to put it away by the sacrifice of Himself, He has died for our sins, He has annulled death and him who had its power, He has redeemed from the curse those who were under it, He has spoiled principalities and powers, He has put all our spiritual enemies under the soles of His feet, so that we may have "rest on every side". Through redemption the enemy's power is completely broken.

Then, again, the effect of the kingdom being established was that the people were commanded and ordered according to the pleasure of God. You remember how it is said in the book of Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes". God raised up saviours for the people in their distresses, but there was no king to order them according to God's pleasure. The king was placed over the people to rule them for God. We read of Solomon that he was set on Jehovah's throne to be

king for Jehovah his God (2 Chronicles 9: 8). Christ has that place for us now. Not that we know Him exactly as King — He is Lord to us — but I speak of the principle. The day of His glory here — of which Solomon's reign was figurative — is yet future, but we sing oftentimes: —

“Christ of God, our souls confess Thee,
King and sovereign even now!” (464:4)

It is a great thing to come under the control of that blessed One. He has established His right to control us by going into death for us. We must admit that He has a right to command and order us, and it is our happiness and security to be under His sway. We have no business now to do what is right in our own eyes. In the kingdom of God we are put under the blessed control of divine grace and love expressed in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may do what is right in the sight of God.

But what is all this in view of? If the king destroyed the enemies' power, and controlled the people for God's pleasure, it was all in view of the House of God being built. It is interesting to see that from the very beginning of David's history he had the House of God before him. I think we may gather this from Psalm 132. In the time of David's afflictions he devoted himself to “find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob”; and he says in verse 6, “Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah; we found it in the fields of the wood”. When he was living in Bethlehem and wandering in the fields — long before he came to the kingdom — the House of God was before him, and he came to the kingdom really to prepare for the building of the house.

In connection with this read 2 Samuel 5: 3 - 7; 2 Samuel 6: 12. David's first act after being anointed king over Israel was to take “the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David”, and one of his next acts was to bring up the ark of God “into the city of David with gladness”. The LORD had chosen Zion; He had desired it for His habitation. He had said, “This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it” (Psalm 132: 13, 14). David acted in victorious power to secure the place that God had chosen, and then he brought the ark to rest there. Zion spoke of the victorious power and supremacy of David, and it represents all the grace and blessings that have been secured in a risen and ascended Christ on the ground of redemption. God's purposes of grace had to be established in Christ risen and glorified on the basis of redemption before His house could be built.

It may seem in the actual history of things here as though the enemy held the field, and that nothing of God's will was established. But as a matter of fact the enemy's power is completely broken, and God's purpose and grace are

established in the most glorious way in Christ as the risen and exalted One. This is known by faith and in the Holy Ghost, so that it can be said to believers now, "Ye are come unto mount Zion" (Hebrews 12: 22). The House of God is built upon the impregnable basis of a victory which has broken the enemy's power, and a Person who has annulled death and brought life and incorruptibility to light, One in whom God's purpose and grace are established — Jesus Christ the Son of God.

David thought and wrought from the very beginning in view of the House of God, and in this he was a type of Christ. Christ came here to secure a place and material for God's house. He secured a company in order to make them "living stones" for God's spiritual house. Then He accomplished redemption, and went to the right hand of God, in order that the Spirit might be given to those who believed, and that they might thus become God's dwelling place here.

It is well to note that when the ark was brought to the city of David there was "gladness", and the people had a good time (see 2 Samuel 6: 18, 19). They were caring that God should have His place, and the result was that they were blessed and enriched. If we want to have a good time we must be like David, who said, "I have set my affection to the house of my God" (1 Chronicles 29: 3). If we do so we are sure to have prosperity of soul.

In 1 Chronicles 22: 7 - 10 we see that it was in David's mind to build the house, but he was not suffered to do so because he had "shed much blood upon the earth". This is an interesting scripture, because it points to a distinction between two characters which are united in Christ. Christ is the Man of war and the Man of rest and peace — He is the true David and the true Solomon. David came in victorious power to meet and destroy every enemy, and Christ has taken up this character — He has maintained all the rights of God with regard to sin, and in view of the blessing of man Then Solomon [peaceable] was a man of rest, and in his day God gave peace and quietness. Christ is now in the blessed peace of resurrection, having vanquished every foe. As the risen One He said to His disciples, "Peace be unto you". No disturbing element can ever reach the shore of resurrection. There is rest on every side, and neither adversary nor evil occurrent.

One might say that typically David was the king of righteousness, and Solomon the king of peace. Both are united in Melchisedec — figure of Christ as the One who "shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne" (Zechariah 6: 13). In a coming day Christ will be the King of righteousness and the King of peace, and in connection with Him the

millennial temple will be built, the glory will be brought in, and everything on earth will be ordered for the pleasure of God. But in a certain way, as I have suggested, we know Him in these characters now — as the true David who in the victorious power of grace has put every foe beneath His feet so that there might be full blessing for all who believe on His Name, and as the true Solomon in the blessed rest and peace of resurrection. These things are hinted at in picture in the Old Testament; we enter by faith and in the Spirit into the reality of them now; and in a quickly coming day they will be publicly displayed in power and glory.

It was reserved to Solomon to build the house, but David was the one who secured the place for it, and who provided the material. He could say, "Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance: timber also and stone have I prepared". David secured the kingdom when he took Zion, and then all through his reign he was providing for the house — treasuring the spoils of forty victorious years to that blessed end. It suggests to me that all the fruit and spoil of Christ's victory, and all that has accrued to Him as the exalted One, goes to enrich and beautify the House of God. In that way the kingdom contributes to the house.

Then towards the end of David's life he discerned the place for the altar of burnt offering. Read 1 Chronicles 22: 1.

The circumstances were most solemn and striking. David had sinned in numbering the people, and a plague from Jehovah was upon Israel. Everything on the line of man's responsibility had entirely broken down, and the unhappy king could only plead his own guilt and pray that God's hand might be upon him and his father's house, and not upon the people. It was then that in blessed grace and sovereign mercy he was commanded to set up an altar to Jehovah in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and Jehovah answered him there by fire, and bade the angel put up his sword again into the sheath thereof. "Then David said, This is the house of the LORD GOD, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel". It was the place of grace and love and sovereign mercy when human failure was complete and on man's side everything was forfeited. The house as built by Solomon did not therefore stand connected with man's ruin and failure. That failure was indeed complete, but on the ground of the burnt offering God came out in supreme grace and mercy and made choice of a place where He might dwell in blessing amongst His people.

I desire now to point out one or two things in connection with the temple which had no place in connection with the tabernacle. The temple adds considerably to our conception of the House of God, for in connection with the temple we get the thought of God's house as a dwelling place for men. In the tabernacle there was no provision for men to dwell in God's house — there was not even a seat there for the priests. But in the temple there were "chambers" (see 1 Kings 6: 5, 10), which suggest the thought of men dwelling in the House of God. That house was not only to be a place of approach to God, but a dwelling place for men. I need not remind you how often this thought is taken up in the Psalms. "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23: 6); "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty [graciousness] of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Psalm 27: 4); "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (Psalm 65: 4); "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee" (Psalm 84: 4).

I have no doubt that the Lord made reference to the "chambers" of the temple when He said, "In my Father's house are many mansions [abodes]: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 2, 3). The Lord turned from the place on which the dark night of His rejection and death was settling down to speak of His Father's house, and a dwelling place there for His own. He would have companions in the home circle of divine love! He came here to secure those who should be His companions in the blessed abodes of His Father's house. As we trace His holy pathway through this gospel we see how He secured them. It was by superseding everything else in the estimation of their hearts. He was here as the great Object and Centre to which the Father was drawing men. See John 6: 44, 45.

Everything that had attractiveness or dignity in the estimation of pious people, or that was entitled to their veneration, was eclipsed by the Son of God. Moses was a great figure before the mind of the Jew — and rightly so — but he was put in the shade by Christ. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). John the Baptist was a remarkable servant of God, and esteemed to be such by the pious, but he spoke of Christ as One whose shoe's latchet he was "not worthy to unloose" (John 1: 27). The temple is seen to be only a figure of Christ as the true Shrine of divine glory (John 2: 21).

Jacob's well — a great object of regard to the people of Samaria — was superseded by Christ; He could give "living water" (John 4). The pool of Bethesda with its miraculous healing was a striking witness in the midst of all the failure that God's mercy endured for ever, but Christ was greater and better than the pool, for He could make whole one who was not able to benefit by the pool (John 5). Christ was superior to the manna (John 6: 49, 50), and He was superior to the feast of tabernacles, the greatest feast of the Jewish year (John 7). In John 10 as the Shepherd He displaces the fold — the whole organised system of Judaism. Everything that was in any way entitled to have place in the hearts of the people was excelled and displaced by Christ. Then in chapters 11 and 12 we see Him in His own proper greatness and glory. As Son of God He raises Lazarus, as Son of David He rides into Jerusalem, and as Son of man is glorified by going into death that He may not abide alone. He displaces every other object for those taught by the Father that He may hold their hearts entirely for Himself by His own mighty attraction. God ministers Him to us now by the Holy Ghost that everything else may be put in the background for our hearts. God is working to this end, and in this way is securing companions for His Son in the many abodes of His house.

The disciples who were drawn to Christ when He was here gained nothing as to this world. In following Him they came under the shadow of death, and became heirs of reproach and hatred. Instead of coming into the light of the day of His glory they entered the dark shadows of a night which reached its deepest gloom in the garden and at the cross. How solemnly suggestive are those words in John 13: 30 — "It was night!" But in that dark moment the Lord took occasion to speak to them of a new place in His Father's house. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you". It was necessary for Him to pass out of this world through death in order that we might have a place of association with Him in the Father's love. Of course we shall not actually be in that blessed place until we are with and like Him in bodies of glory. But His going through death to the Father has prepared a place there for us. Hence in resurrection He could say "Go to my brethren, and say unto them; I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God". What marvellous grace and love! He has secured companions for Himself in the "chambers" of His Father's house. Our place is there, and it is our privilege to be "in spirit there already".

When the house was built, and the ark and holy vessels brought up into it, "the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 8: 10, 11). And when we consider the Father's house of John 14 we find that glory dwells there. The Father's house is where the Son is, and He says, "Father, I will that

they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24). That is the glory which fills the house. Of old, "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud"; the glory absolutely excluded man in the flesh. But now we find a blessed company secured by divine love and in divine righteousness able to behold the glory without a veil. The glory that the Father has given to the Son is infinitely great. It is nothing less than the glory of giving effect to all the counsels of divine love. The accomplishment of all the unnumbered thoughts of blessing and grace that filled the heart of God before the foundation of the world — of all the holy counsels which originated in the Father — has been entrusted to the Son; and this is the distinctive glory of the Son given to Him by the Father who loved Him from eternity. It is the glory of the Son to bring out and establish the glory of the Father in the fulfilment of all the purposes of His love. That glory fills the "abodes"

of the Father's house, and we are brought there to behold the Father glorified in the Son. Christ's "brethren" are the companions of His rejection and reproach in this world, but they are also His companions in the circle of ineffable rest and love where He is with the Father, and where His glory appears. I repeat, we are not there actually yet, but in spirit it is our privilege to taste the holy joy of being brought by the Son into the "chambers" of the Father's house.

Great is our privilege as called to be dwellers in God's house. We behold there the beauty [graciousness] of the Lord (Psalm 27:4), and we get the consciousness that His place is our place. We have not only a way of approach, but a home — a dwelling place. Christ's place with His Father is ours — the home of our hearts — the place of our rest. The House of God is a place of satisfied desire, of freedom from care, and of continual praise (see Psalm 84:1 - 4). I should like the thought to be deepened in our hearts that we have a place in God's house — in the circle where His love and glory are known — that we may be drawn more in spirit to dwell there, so as to be still praising Him.

This brings me to another thing in which the temple suggests more than the tabernacle. We read in 1 Chronicles 25: 6 of many of the Levites who "were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman". There was no song in connection with the tabernacle. The Levites had to carry the tabernacle and the holy vessels. What was typified in this still continues concurrently with the

privileges of the house. That is, we have to bear the burden of the testimony of the Lord with all its afflictions in this world. If people think they can serve God without having some burden to carry they are mistaken. There is divine resource and power to carry what is of God in testimony through the world, but it is well rightly to estimate the seriousness of being God's servants here.

In 1 Chronicles 25 we find the three families of the Levites — Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun belonged to the three different families — no longer bearing the burden but raising the song. In figure we may say they had reached the favoured hour when their toil was over, and they could happily and restfully raise their song in the House of the LORD. No doubt this anticipates the day of glory, but there is a sense in which our hearts may know something of it even now. It is possible to retire from the pressure and contrariety of the wilderness, and even from the bearing of burdens in service and testimony here, and to reach a spot in spirit where we can sing as those who participate in the fatness, blessedness, and joy of God's house. If we come under the influence and into the rest of divine love there cannot fail to be a responsive song in our hearts. If the Lord says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren", He also says, "In the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee". According to God's Name so is His praise (see Psalm 48: 10).

No doubt there is a day coming when all this will be realised in a wonderful way, when the blessedness of God's house will be the joy of Israel and of the millennial earth. But there is even now what answers to it in a spiritual way. The kingdom of God has been established in Christ at the right hand of God, and in the power of the Spirit down here, and consequent upon this the House of God is here. May we be divinely instructed as to the blessed service and privilege of that house!

A LIVING HOPE

1 Peter 1

In turning to New Testament Scriptures with reference to the House of God, we notice a great contrast between what we find here and what is found in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament things are presented in shadow and in dead types. There was no life in either the tabernacle or the temple; they were material structures of wood, stone, gold, etc., and were only types and shadows, though deeply instructive for us in many ways.

When we come to the New Testament everything is living. That is the great distinction between the Old Testament and the New. The Old Testament had regard to man in the flesh, and we are told here that "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away". There could not be anything very precious in connection with that. But in the New Testament CHRIST is introduced, and that brings vitality into everything. In the Old Testament there are shadows, types, and promises, like so many fingerposts pointing on; but nothing came into divine reality and vitality till Christ came. When He came into this world everything that was of God and for man's blessing was presented livingly in Him.

But we do not begin with Christ here after the flesh, but with Christ in resurrection. As Peter says in this chapter, God has "begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". Resurrection is our starting point; we begin there, because nothing could become living in our souls until the question of death had been settled. Life and incorruptibility had to be brought to light.

When the Lord Jesus was upon the earth all the goodness of God was expressing itself in His beloved Son towards men in their need and condition as sinners in this world, so that wherever there was pressure or distress there was goodness and power residing in that blessed One to meet it. But it was only provisional; the leper was cleansed and the sick were healed, but, after all, the leper died and the sick man died. Death was not removed from man. The children of wisdom were attracted by the goodness of God displayed in His beloved Son, but life could not really be brought in for man apart from the death of Christ. Life and incorruptibility were brought to light in Christ risen after redemption had been accomplished. Hence we start with resurrection, and therefore the apostle uses this wonderful expression, God "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

Everything living is connected with resurrection. It is a great thing to apprehend this. Everything was living in Christ personally when He was here in this world, but life could not be brought in for us until He had gone into death and annulled its power and come out in resurrection. There is now a risen Saviour, and God has begotten us to a living hope by His resurrection from the dead. That is where we start. It has been demonstrated that everything connected with man in the flesh is a failure. People go to work now to build up that man. Everything in the religious world tends to set that man up again, but God does not work to set up man in the flesh; everything of that man ends in death. God said to Adam in the garden of Eden, "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return". That is man's condition and its end. He may be ever so good and religious, but death comes in on him. If we want life we must have a man in resurrection. Even Christ after the flesh had to pass away; the silver cord had to be loosed and the golden bowl had to be broken; everything was scattered that had been in connection with Christ after the flesh (Matthew 26: 31). We can well understand that hope died in the souls of the disciples. Instead of seeing Christ come to the throne of His father David, they saw Him hurried to the cross. But God came in and raised Him from the dead. That is God's great starting point. When we get a sense that God has begun everything in connection with Christ risen from the dead — that He has started on that new ground and in that new place, and has established all His thoughts after such a fashion that no power of evil or death can ever touch them — we come into contact with a system of things where all is living, and we have part in it through infinite grace.

It is thus we are begotten to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you". This is in striking contrast to an earthly inheritance according to the flesh. I think the inheritance in the mind of the Jew would be connected with the fulfilment of all the promises of God; and the Jew had to learn, and so have we, that instead of God's promises being fulfilled in a natural way according to the flesh they are all made good in a spiritual way in Christ risen. Every Christian has to see that before he will make much headway in the knowledge of divine things. Everything breaks down on this side, but everything is established on the resurrection side.

We all ought to be interested in the promises. People do not make enough of the Old Testament promises. The promises display all the goodness of God; it does not lessen my interest in them to see how much they are connected with Israel. When God brings His blessing into the world no doubt Israel will be the centre; but to me the promises unfold what wonderful things the goodness of God will do for men, and that interests me very much, because it makes me acquainted with God and His blessed thoughts of love and mercy. The

promises are all established and confirmed in Christ risen. "All the promises of God in him are yea,

and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us". Instead of looking for things to improve down here — trying to leave this world better than we found it — we look up to heaven for all the blessed things which are soon coming forth from thence. Things are going to the bad here, but what we look out for is the introduction of all that is good and blessed from heaven — things that cannot be corrupted or defiled and cannot pass away. Christ is the great storehouse of divine beneficence, and He is going to bring it all into this world. When the goodness of God comes out it will be glory; but in the meantime we look up there and see it all established in Christ, and that is the secret of our joy.

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations". What a paradox that is! To be greatly rejoicing and at the same time in heaviness through manifold temptations! It is very easy to explain it. We must draw "the vanity line", as an old servant of the Lord used to call it. The man who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes had a good chance of trying what was in the world, and he summed it all up as "vanity and vexation of spirit". But when we cross "the vanity line" we get into a resurrection scene, where all the promises of God are confirmed in a risen Christ. The Christian as to his circumstances and condition is in the vanity scene, but in mind and heart and spirit he is in the resurrection scene. He has his portion there, and knows it, and exults in it, though he may be in heaviness as to this scene in which he is subject to trial and pressure. There are these two things always to take into account. The Christian is in a scene where there are manifold trials, and yet his heart has travelled into another scene where there is nothing but joy. We rejoice in Christ and in all that is established in Him. It is a great thing to know where to turn for joy. If we get a little bit of gratification from things under the sun we pay the penalty. There are always two bitters to one sweet. If we get lifted up by things connected with the vanity scene we get a corresponding depression. What is it worth, if we are only lifted up to be cast down? But if we cross the line and get into the resurrection scene, where Christ is, and see all the blessed goodness of God treasured in Him, we greatly rejoice. It is a joy, beloved friends, which has not a single bitter ingredient in it. There is unmixed joy on that side, though on this side there may be heaviness through manifold temptations. We have to learn how to distinguish between the two scenes. We are strangers in the place where Christ has been rejected, and our home is where Christ is. The Christian in spirit and affection crosses the line into that blessed scene. And he becomes "living" in proportion as he enters into those things.

Then in 1 Peter 1: 8 we have a wonderful setting forth of what a Christian is in his affections. There is no death there; all is living; the fact that the Christian loves One whom he has not seen is a proof of vitality. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory". People say that is transcendental. When anything is presented that lies outside the sphere of man's vision it is called transcendental. Transcendentalism in human philosophy is very like a man trying to fly. Transcendentalists try to rise above the level of things here by the activity of their own minds, but there is a force of gravitation that holds them down. The Christian is not at all like that. The centre of gravitation has changed for the Christian, for it is where Christ is, at the right hand of God. There is a mighty power in the risen and glorified One to draw the Christian up there as to his affections. For the Christian, there is really a greater power in Christ viewed thus, than all the influence of things here. It is a blessed reality, beloved friends; Christ a glorified Man in heaven is a reality, and the great question is, Are we interested in Christ, and in what is established and treasured in Him? It is no good being sentimental; if we really love Christ it will be proved by our wanting to know everything that it is possible to know of Him. Do not tell me people love Christ very much if they neglect their Bibles, or the ministry of the word, or the coming together of the saints. These things are the tests. Psalm 111: 2 says, referring to God's works, that they are "sought out of all them that have pleasure therein". If we take pleasure in Christ and in all that is treasured in Him we shall diligently seek the knowledge of Him. Do you take pleasure in those blessed things, or is Christ very little of a present reality to you? I know very well how it was with myself. I thought of Christ as One who long ago had died upon the cross and cleared away my burden. But when it came home to me that He was a blessed and present reality at the right hand of God I had to confess to myself and to God how little I knew Him. We have to seek the things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, in order to have this joy unspeakable and full of glory. Nothing becomes living in our souls that we do not care to seek after.

This is really the way to soul salvation. Peter speaks of rejoicing in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and then he says, "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls". To be filled with joy in Christ is soul salvation. Many Christians feel the power of things here and try to struggle out of them, but we get soul salvation by being drawn out by the attraction of Christ in heaven. There is a mighty power to lift saints out of things inwardly, and thus we receive salvation of souls, while we are still in the circumstances and condition of men in the flesh. Our hearts are lifted into the blessed scene of liberty and love where Christ is.

Now read verse 13. Here we come rather to the responsibility side of things. The power of what is living is brought in for us in Christ as the risen One, and if we know anything at all about it, we find that every influence in this world is contrary to life. We have to learn that this is a death scene, and death marks all the influences of this world. So that if a Christian knows what it is in spirit to cross the vanity line, when he comes back to his responsible life here he has to gird up his loins. Every influence here tends to draw us back into death and darkness. I have no doubt the great danger for the Jewish believers to whom Peter was writing was that they might be drawn back into earthly religion. When he speaks of the "former lusts" he probably refers to lusts which worked in connection with religion; when he speaks of "fleshly lusts" it probably has a more general application. "Your vain conversation" was their religious life. The reason why they had to be redeemed from — it was that nothing will do for God but what is living. If people drop into earthly religion they fall back into what is dead. Judaism had its divinely instituted forms and ordered services, but it was dead. So we read in Hebrews of being purged from "dead works". People try to imitate Judaism now; Christendom at the present day is an imitation of Judaism. If the real thing was dead what must the imitation be? We have to be redeemed from all that kind of thing.

Many Christians are in the habit of using forms of prayer, and I do not question the piety or the propriety of the expressions used, but such a practice does not indicate spiritual vitality. People are often very sincere in using these things, and true piety gets mixed up with them, but you cannot possibly prescribe forms for life or for the infinitely varied exercises of the soul as divinely taught and led by the Spirit. Life must be free to take its own course; you cannot anticipate its movements. A machine goes on with undeviating exactitude always the same way; you know exactly how it will go, but it is dead. God would have His people redeemed from everything like that.

Some one may say, I do not use a form of prayer. Perhaps you have not a form printed in a book, but if your prayers always take the same shape it is very much the same thing. They once expressed the living exercises of your soul, but you have got into the way of using them now that the exercises are no longer present. God wants us to be redeemed from all that; He wants living material in His house. Nothing has place in the House of God but what is living. There is so much religiousness in us — dead religiousness! I should like to see more and more the efficacy of the blood of Christ — to see that the man who can take up religious forms has gone from before God. Nothing counts now but what is living and, as I said before, you cannot anticipate the movements of a living thing. It moves in the energy of its own vitality. I feel what a lack of spiritual vitality there is, and yet nothing else really has place in

the House of God but what is vital and in the energy of His Spirit. Nothing but living material is found there. If God uses what comes before us tonight to awaken exercise as to the spiritual vitality that belongs to His house it will be a great gain to us all.

God brings us out of dead religiousness into the vitality of divine love, as we see clearly in verse 22. I cannot help thinking that is a deeply important verse in relation to what comes out in the next chapter, where he speaks of living stones and about their coming to the Living Stone, and being built up. Being built up gives the idea of all the living material being bound together. How is it bound together? In connection with the tabernacle I was struck by the fact that all was held together by rings. The ring is the symbol of divine love. Now, it seems to me the apostle is putting the rings on here. He is, so to speak, preparing believers to be put together. And what is the power to hold them together? Love. Religiousness makes self the centre. Even the prayers that are taken up by religious flesh all revolve round self. But divine love always embraces others — it binds us to the brethren. It does not say “unfeigned love of divine principles”, but “unfeigned love of the brethren”. It is all very well to love principles; but what strikes me here is that I see a living company — the brethren. There are not only divine principles but a living company in this world. Do we love the brethren? It is easy to get attached to a system or a peculiar set of doctrines, but the great point is, Do we love the brethren?

Exercise is called for in relation to this, for we have to lay aside what hinders the activity of love. This is where the test comes to our hearts; are we prepared personally — am I prepared — to lay aside what hinders the activity of divine love towards the brethren? There are certain things mentioned here, “malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings”. These things are contrary to brotherly love. They have to be laid aside, and in this way we are tested as to how much we love the House of God. We may admire the truth of the House of God, but the test comes when we have to make some sacrifice — to go through some exercise — when we have to lay ourselves out for its prosperity. We were seeing how David laid up vast sums of money for the House of God. Are we prepared to lay aside things that hinder the exercise of brotherly love? That is how things become living.

I suggest these few thoughts as to the way in which God brings what is divine into the hearts of His saints; He thus delivers His people from what is fleshly in order to introduce them to a circle where divine love can be active. All this is in view of the structure in the next chapter. Things are acceptable to God in proportion to their vitality; He has no pleasure in what is dead. May God save us from dead religiousness!

LIVING STONES AND A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

1 Peter 1: 22; 1 Peter 2: 1 - 10

Last week we looked at the first chapter as bringing before us different things which give character to the saints as living stones. I now pass on to show how the living stones are brought together so as to be built up a spiritual house.

It seems to me that the first chapter might be summed up as putting off the old man and putting on the new, in the way in which Peter presents this great truth of Christianity. In the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians it is taken for granted that saints have put off the old man and have put on the new. Of course we have to begin with forgiveness of sins, but we do not stop there. The great turning point in a soul's history is when he puts off the old man and puts on the new.

There was a time when we regarded ourselves as in the flesh; we cultivated and gratified ourselves in that character; that was the time past of our lives. Now having been born again by the incorruptible seed of the word of God we view ourselves in a different light altogether. If I look at myself as in the flesh I cannot see a point upon which my eye can rest with any kind of satisfaction. I see every form of corruption developing itself; the old man corrupts itself according to the deceitful lusts. It would be dreadful for us to think we were identified with that man before God. I know of no anguish more terrible than of one finding out what he is according to the flesh and thinking he is identified before God with that old state. It is enough to sink one into the depths of despair in the experience of his soul. But what a relief to awake to the blessed fact that our old man has been crucified with Christ; that man with all his corruption and depravity has gone from before God. Thank God for it! Seeing this, we put off the old man. How do I look at myself now? Well I regard myself as a subject of the gracious work of the blessed God. I have been born again, I have been brought into the blessing of the gospel, I have received the Spirit, I am now being formed in holiness and love as one of God's chosen and redeemed people, I have put on a new character. It is a great moment when the soul comes to that point.

And all this is very practical. People may say these things are not practical. I grant they are not exactly practice, but they are very practical. We must be practical before we can practise. We put off the old man, we take the ground of not belonging to that man any more; we are born of incorruptible seed; we are God's redeemed people, and we are being formed in holiness and love as our true character according to God. It is a great thing to start thus, and the effect is we are empowered to lay aside what is connected with the old man.

So the second chapter begins by saying, "Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings". These five things have to be laid aside; they do not belong to the new man. If I have put off the old man how can I go on with his deeds? A great many Christians try to correct the old man without putting him off. You first put him off and then you lay aside his deeds. If Christians do not lay these things aside, they will not make any headway. All these habits and dispositions of the old man must be laid aside, and the effect is that as new-born babes we desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby up to salvation.

It is very serious that there is not a greater desire amongst the children of God for the sincere milk of the word. It shows that many who take the place of believers have not put off the old man with his deeds, nor have they come into separation from the world. We shall not desire the sincere milk of the word if we are not prepared for separation from the world. The sincere milk of the word nourishes the soul in the knowledge of things that subsist in God's resurrection world — things that are established in Christ at His right hand. How can a worldly person take any interest in these things? It is a very serious thing to be worldly; it brings death into the soul. We cannot afford to be worldly, we cannot afford to waste our time thus.

If we desire the sincere milk of the word I am sure we shall get it, and our souls will be nourished in the love of God, and God will bring us intelligently into that world of which Christ is the Centre. If we love Him we shall surely desire to apprehend all that blessed system of things of which He is the Head and Centre. But if people are not prepared to leave the old world they will never reach the new. If Columbus had not left the old world he would never have discovered the new. Anybody can see that. But who is going to leave this world till he gets some idea of a better one?

The way God gives an appetite for the sincere milk of the word is by causing us to taste that the Lord is gracious. That is what it begins with. "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious". What does that mean? Well, it seems to me that the graciousness of the Lord — His goodness comes out in a special way in the Gospel of Luke. Just look at a section of it for a few moments. Read Luke 7: 11 - 16. It has been said that the woman represents humanity. Here the Lord was looking upon humanity in presence of the terrible reality and desolation of death, and His heart was touched with compassion. He was good. The presence and pressure of death is a great reality, but the Lord came down from heaven to meet it all and He has abolished it in His own goodness by going into it for us. We have found out His goodness in compassion. He has placed Himself in contact with death and has annulled its power.

Now read Luke 7: 36 - 50. Here we find the question of sins, and the Lord is good; He comes with frank forgiveness for all His debtors — for Simon as well as the poor woman. What a wonderful thing that the Lord should bring forgiveness for every debtor! We have tasted of that; we have tasted of the goodness in which He said, "When they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both".

Then in chapter 8: 26 - 37 we get Satan's power in the man possessed by demons. Some may say that people are not possessed by demons now! There is no demon I am more afraid of than my own will. Satan gives energy to the will of man. Man in himself is a very impotent creature, but he becomes the agent or instrument of mighty forces of evil. The Lord delivered that poor captive of the power of evil, so that he was found sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and in his right mind. The Lord was good. And we have tasted of that goodness. We have proved how He can deliver from all the power of darkness here.

Then in Luke 8: 43 - 48 we get the woman with the issue of blood. That seems to be figurative of the weakness of the flesh. Virtue went out of Him for the healing of the woman. There is power in the Lord to make us superior to the will of the flesh and to its weakness. How good He is!

In chapter 9 we see in picture that the world is a desert; it does not afford satisfaction to the heart. But the Lord made these five thousand sit down, and He gave satisfaction in the desert. We may have had to say many times, "We are here in a desert place", but have we not proved the Lord is good? Have we not tasted that He is good?

Then the goodness of the Lord is brought out beautifully in the good Samaritan in Luke 10: 30 - 35, where He puts Himself in contrast with man. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side; they were not good; they would give nothing to a penniless and perishing man. But the Lord was good; He would give everything, and charge Himself with the care of such a one. How blessed to know Him in His supreme goodness! We shall certainly not know what it is to come to Christ as the Living Stone, if we have not tasted and proved His goodness. And the effect of this is to make us independent of anything in this world, and conscious that we have a resource in Him for everything. Would not that give us a desire to pass into God's world? He comes to us in goodness and in relation to our need, and then we are called to leave what is of the world and go to Him in His own circle of things.

That is what we get in verse 4, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God, and precious". I do not think any

one will enter into the blessedness of this until his heart is free to be attracted to Christ as Mary's was in Luke 10: 39. No doubt she had first tasted that the Lord was gracious, and the result was she was attracted to Himself. Then we get another side. Tasting that the Lord is good comes out very fully, as I have said, in the Gospel of Luke, but coming to Christ as the Living Stone answers more to what we get in the Gospel of John. Turn to John 1: 10, 11. I read these verses to show that this gospel views Christ as being rejected by man from the very beginning; He has no place here. The world does not know Him, and His own people according to the flesh will not receive Him, but He becomes the subject of divine testimony as in verses 29 - 34. Here we see the Lord presented in quite a new character. He is the One who takes away the sin of the world and who baptizes with the Holy Ghost; He is the Son of God. That is, He is not looked at here in relation to man's need but in relation to God's thoughts. He comes into the world to take sin out of it, and then He gives the Holy Ghost, and as the Son of God He becomes the subject of testimony. When John said "Behold the Lamb of God", it was the sincere milk of the word. All the word of God bears testimony to that Person. The two disciples spoken of in verses 35 - 39 had their hearts nourished by the sincere milk of the word, so that they left John and came to Jesus. They came to the Living Stone. John the Baptist's ministry had been the best thing on earth to their hearts, but they came into the presence of what was superior — they came to the Living Stone. Then when Peter was brought to Christ (verse 40 - 42) the Lord said to him, "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone". Those who came to Christ were living stones; and as we have Him presented in this gospel the Father was drawing the living stones to Him.

We see in John's gospel very plainly that Christ did not get a company from the world. The world did not know Him and His own would not have Him, but He got a company from the Father. It is very important to see that. So we get in chapter 6: 37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out". And in verses 44, 45, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him", etc. The Father gives, and the Father draws, and the Father teaches. That is how Christ gets a company; He gets them really from the Father.

If we look to ourselves as living stones we have to trace our origin to a divine source; we had our origin in the Father's purpose. We are told that the Lord knew what was in man: He never trusted anything but what was of the Father; and that is the only thing that can be trusted. Everything that is of man breaks down. The great point is that the Father introduced a Person into this world who had no link with the world. He was altogether distinct from the world. His disciples never suggested that He should take a place in this world.

They were ignorant in many points, but they were conscious that He had nothing to do with the course of this world. I believe if any person got a sense of who Christ is it would be impossible for him to connect Christ with anything in this world. In Christendom Satan has worked from the very first to connect Christianity with this world, so there are religious bodies with fine buildings, and they vie with one another as to which can make the best show in this world.

Coming to Christ as the Living Stone is the outcome of the fact that Christ has an attraction for our hearts that draws us away from everything in this world and of man. It is impossible to bring a risen Man into connection with things here. Are we prepared to come to Him outside everything in the religious world? "To whom coming as unto a living atone disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious". God has singled Him out in the most wonderful way. In Psalm 89 we read, "I have exalted one chosen out of the people". God sent that blessed One into this world, and when here He singled Him out and exalted Him to His own right hand in glory. It is to that One we must come in order to being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. We come to Him in the affection of hearts that have been taught of the Father. God is now bringing something to pass in this world far more glorious than Solomon's temple. That was a poor thing compared with God's mind for His saints today. How sad it is that so few of God's children know what it is to get away from man and man's world and to come to Christ and God's world!

God would have us built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. He would bring our souls into intelligence of His delight in Christ, so that all that Christ is, and all that He has made known to us of God, might become the material of praise before Him in His house.

And then, having taken our place inside, we shall be able to go out as in verse 9 as royal priests, to "show forth the virtues of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light". The holy priest goes in, and the royal priest comes out in testimony here. The only business of a Christian here is to show forth God's virtues or excellences. We are put in a place of priestly testimony before the world. The only knowledge this world gets of the virtues and excellences of God is what it sees in the saints. Let us see to it that we come out as royal priests, so that there may be a witness for God in the midst of a world that has cast off the knowledge of Himself and rejected His beloved Son. May we know what it is to taste that the Lord is good, and to see how He ministers to our every need, so that we may be free to come to Him as the Living Stone and be built up a spiritual house for God's glory and praise!

THE HOUSE OF GOD IN 1 TIMOTHY

1 Timothy 1: 5 - 11; 1 Timothy 2: 1 - 10; 1 Timothy 3: 14 - 16; 1 Timothy 4: 1 - 5

I want now to bring before you five things that have a place in the House of God as presented in this epistle. The first is that *the gospel of the glory of the blessed God is the test of everything*. It is the light in which everything is discovered in its true character and it becomes the test of everything. In the verses I have read from chapter 1 the apostle speaks of many different kinds of wickedness which are exposed by the light. And then he goes on to say, "If there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God", or as it should read, "The gospel of the glory of the blessed God". I want you to consider that the glory of the blessed God has come out in glad tidings to men, and that in connection with the House of God.

In Old Testament times there was no shining forth of the glory of God in relation to man. There were gleams of light sufficient to make a man like Moses pray, "Show me thy glory". But the glory of the blessed God was hidden at that time, and it is important to see why. It was really in the goodness of God that His glory was hidden. The fall had taken place at the very beginning of man's history, and all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. Now, if the glory of God had come out in the presence of corrupted flesh it could only have been for its destruction. Therefore in the goodness of God the glory was hidden. The glory was veiled because God was dealing with man in the flesh and, in a certain way, making allowance for man in the flesh. We cannot help seeing that in the Old Testament. For example, the Jews spoke to the Lord about divorce, and the Lord said,

Yes, Moses allowed you to put away your wives "because of the hardness of your hearts". There was an admission of man's state and provision made for it in that way. But there could not be anything like that in Christianity. God makes no allowance for the flesh now; there is no provision now for allowing the hardness of man's heart. It is very helpful to see that, because it shows the great privilege to which we are called — to walk in the light of the glory of the blessed God. Nothing could be more wonderful than that.

Read in connection with this Isaiah 40: 3 - 9. That is a very remarkable scripture, because it indicates the way in which God would provide for the comfort of His people on the one hand and the display of His own glory on the other. The chapter begins, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people", etc. Many of God's children have not divine comfort, because they are still entangled with

the flesh. They are conscious of a thousand imperfections in themselves, and are made to realise every day of their lives what poor failing creatures they are, and how unsatisfactory their ways are to God, and having all this before them they do not know much of divine comfort. But God would comfort His people by showing them how He has set that imperfect and corrupt flesh entirely aside, so that everything might be placed upon a new footing. In a certain way that was so when His Son came into this world. The presence of the Lord Jesus here — the Son of God, the Holy One of God — was morally the setting aside of every other man. There was no man after the order of Adam to the pleasure of God. That came out in the Old Testament; there was “none that doeth good, no, not one”. But God brought His own beloved Son into this world, and the moment He came into view at His baptism the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended and rested upon Him, and the Father’s voice said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”. The glory of God was there, and, for the first time, the Godhead was revealed; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all brought to light in connection with CHRIST, not in connection with man in the flesh.

John the Baptist had come, according to Isaiah 40, to cry that all flesh was as grass, and to call people to repentance. And then this blessed One, God’s beloved Son, appeared, and in Him the glory of God in grace. So, as we read in the Gospel of John, the apostles could say, “We beheld his glory”, and in the second chapter He “manifested his glory”, and in the eleventh chapter He said to Martha, “Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?” The glory of God shone out in that blessed Person. In Him we see God’s glory in the midst of a scene of evil, and of Satan’s power, a scene of distress and ruin and death. The glory of God shone out in grace in all its blessed supremacy in the Person of Jesus. It is a great thing to see that, because the effect is we do not think much of any other man, and we think a very great deal of Christ.

But there is another thing. The bringing into this world of the glory of God in the Person of His beloved Son did not settle the question of sin and sinful flesh. The cross was needed for that, and that blessed One by His own death glorified God in regard to sin, and made an end of that sinful flesh which is such a discomfort to every saint. It may work out in a different way in each one of us, but the great source of discomfort with us all is the flesh. The Holy One of God was made sin so that sinful flesh might be condemned and cleared away. And not only that, but in the very place where sinful flesh was cleared away the glory of God in holiness and love shone forth in all its brightness. We see the glory of God at the cross, coming out in all its holy splendour in the

very place where sin was being judged. The glory of the blessed God came out in that wondrous death. Flesh was removed in judgment; God was revealed in holiness and love!

And then, further, we find in Isaiah 40 that the Spirit of the LORD was to blow on the flesh. That carries us a step farther. That is what the Spirit of God does in your soul and mine. He brings us to God's mind about the flesh. What is God's mind with regard to my flesh? It is that it must needs come under condemnation and death; and it has done so in the Person of Christ upon the cross. And now, as a believer on the Lord Jesus, having received forgiveness through His Name, God has given me His Spirit to blow upon the flesh in my heart and mind, so that I may see the worthlessness of it and the impossibility of improving it. We are thus brought into concert with the mind of God, and then there is no hindrance to our souls being in the light of the glory of the blessed God. If I want to go on with the flesh, to gratify it or to display it, I am hindered from being in the light of the glory of the blessed God. But God works by bringing in Christ, and by condemning the flesh in the death of Christ, and by giving us the Spirit to blow upon the flesh in order to bring us into harmony with Himself that we may be in the light of the "glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God".

Then it necessarily follows that those glad tidings become the standard of everything. It is very different from having the ten commandments or merely rules and regulations of any kind. Our souls are put in the presence of the holiness and love of the blessed God, and we are now called, as Paul says to the Thessalonians, to "walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory". That is the only standard in the House of God. Many of us are content to walk like decent men and women in this world, and satisfied if we carry out certain precepts and do not step across a certain line which we draw for ourselves. But true Christianity is very different to that kind of thing; it is that we are brought into the light of God's holy love, and that becomes the standard of everything. Hence the apostle says, "If there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

according to the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God". Everything contrary to that standard is condemned in God's house. I cannot enlarge upon it, but the importance of being in the light of God is incalculable. We are not in the House of God in legality but in perfect liberty, and joy, and blessing, because of the way God has made Himself known in Christ and by the cross and by giving us His Spirit, and then our knowledge of God becomes the standard of everything.

Then in chapter 2 we get a second thing that is in the House of God. *The testimony of God is there*. We read, "God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time". That is God's testimony. The first thing is that God should be known in the hearts of His people, that we should be in the light of the glory of the blessed God. And that is preparation for testimony. The testimony, so far as I understand it, consists in giving a true account of God in this world. That is really the testimony of saints as forming the House of God — we have to give a true account of God. Remember the terrible state this world is in. It is ignorant of God, and has refused Him in every possible way. God has been turned out of this world, so far as men could do it, but there is a divine Person here who cannot be turned out of the world, and He forms the saints into God's dwelling-place, and the only knowledge of God in grace and righteousness and love the world gets comes through God's house, which is the place where His testimony dwells, and from whence it goes forth. God is a Saviour God who desires that all men should be saved, and the Man Christ Jesus is the Mediator through and in whom all His grace has been expressed. The Mediator gave Himself a ransom for all, and this is the manner of God's approach to men in grace. The full glory of the blessed God has come out in the way of grace to men; and the testimony of it is maintained in the House of God. Nothing could be more wonderful.

Through the failure of man and the ruin of the church the light has been greatly dimmed, but I am inclined to think that God has maintained His own testimony all through from Pentecost until now. Not that you are likely to find the record of it in church history, for if the testimony of God was maintained in the dark ages it was probably in those who were not much in view of the world or of ecclesiastical historians. People are very much mistaken if they suppose that church history can be relied on as giving a true estimate of what there has been for God during the nineteen centuries of Christianity. We may look at the history of the dark ages and think there was nothing for God. But we are not justified in coming to such a conclusion. I admit there was very little public proclamation of the gospel, but God's house was here, and His testimony was here in the power of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps only a few obscure individuals, entirely unknown to fame, were in it, but God's testimony was in this world.

I dwell upon this because I want to ask every one here, Do you covet to be in the line of this blessed testimony? The great thing is that we should be in the testimony of God — that it should be the earnest desire of our souls to be

expressing somewhat the true character of God in this world. That is the great dignity that saints have as forming God's house. We are here to present God in His proper character and true light as a Saviour God — One who will have all men to be saved, One who is approaching men by a Mediator and on the ground of ransom. We are here to render testimony to what God is in blessed grace to men. He dwells here in His saints in grace and blessing towards men, and it is impossible to be spiritual or pious without being evangelistic. It is the true testimony of the church of God. The truth of the church and the truth of the gospel have sometimes been regarded as though they were two different lines. But the true note of the church in this world is its testimony to the blessed God — that it is here sounding out the grace of the blessed God amongst men. Man may dislike the testimony and turn from it with contempt, but to be identified with that testimony is the great dignity that the saints have as forming the House of God. When I speak of the House of God I do not mean any particular company of saints. It requires every believer in the world who has the Spirit to make up the House of God; it would be incomplete if you left out one believer indwelt by God's Spirit.

Now there is another thing. The third point that I want to touch upon is that in the House of God *man gets his right place*. I do not think that man is in his proper place and dignity anywhere but in the House of God. What we see in the second chapter of this epistle is man restored to his proper dignity. Man has fallen and become alienated from God, but is seen here in his true dignity. What is the dignity of man? So far as I understand it, the true dignity of man is to be in intercourse with God. People think very much of being presented at court. A person admitted to intercourse with the king is looked upon in the world as a person of dignity. But the greatest dignity is to be admitted to intercourse with God. I think we sometimes look at prayer too exclusively on the side of our need and dependence; that side is perfectly true, but think of the great dignity and blessedness of being admitted to have personal intercourse with God! "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour". "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting". The saints are to occupy this wonderful place of intercession, and I think the best time of one's life is the time spent in intercourse with God. That is the time of real honour and dignity. If you see a man who is accustomed to have intercourse with God you see one who is in the greatest dignity that is possible for a creature. We are called to be so in the liberty of intercourse with God that everything that comes under our eye

becomes an occasion of intercourse with Him. You look around in the world and everything becomes an occasion of intercourse with God — whether it be men, or kings, or the mercies of the way, or its trials. You sit down to your meals; they become occasions of intercourse with God. I am referring now to chapter 4: 3 - 5, "Meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer". One might think that partaking of food was a very common-place affair, but the wonderful thing is that God puts His people in such nearness to Himself that there is not a single thing that comes under their notice that does not become an occasion of intercourse with Himself. I think in that way man is recovered to his proper dignity and maintained here for the good pleasure of God. This is characteristic of the House of God; these things cannot be sectarianised; they cannot be limited to anything less than the whole company of saints. I put it to myself and to you, Are we really exercised to maintain individually what is proper to God's house; or are we content to live on a lower platform than that to which grace has called us? There is nothing legal or burdensome about it; God has thrown round our hearts the golden chain of His blessed grace and love that we might be drawn to Him and bound to Him, and that it might become the joy of our hearts to be in intercourse with Him and intercession before Him as to everything here.

I now turn to the end of the third chapter. The apostle's object in writing was that Timothy might know how to behave himself in the House of God. We are not Timothys, but we all have a place in the House of God, and it is as important for us as for Timothy that we should know how to behave ourselves there. Saints often forget that they have a place in the House of God, and it is well to have our minds stirred up by way of remembrance. We belong to the House of God not only when we come together but at all times, and we have to behave ourselves as those who belong to that house. After speaking of the House of God as the pillar and ground of the truth Paul passes on to speak of the "mystery of godliness [or piety]: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory". It has been said that *the mystery of godliness is enshrined in the House of God*. I cannot go into this wonderful verse in detail; it is too big; but it is deeply interesting and profitable to see what is the mystery of piety. A mystery means something that is hidden — something that does not appear on the surface. Piety has its own secret and divine spring. If we look at the clock we see the right time indicated by the hands, and that shows that the spring and mechanism within are working properly. The motive

power is hidden, but can be recognised by its effects. Piety is that everything in our lives down here is regulated according to God, and this will only be as our hearts are under the power of the mystery of piety. Now that is what we get in this verse. In one word it is CHRIST — He is the spring and energy of all true piety. The great thing is to have CHRIST dwelling in the heart by faith. The form of piety can be very well imitated, and in the second epistle the Holy Ghost tells us of some who have the form of piety but deny the power thereof. They have not got the true spring of it.

It is important for us to see how to get our piety invigorated.

I think there is room for more piety in every one of us; but how is it to be brought about? If the clock is out of order will any amount of tinkering with the face and hands put it right? No, you must get to the spring and the works — to the hidden part — and put that right. It is no good trying to put right this detail and that in a legal kind of way. The great thing for us is to know and have more of Christ — to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. If we get more of Christ in our hearts there will be more of Christ expressed in our lives. Christ expressed in the life is true piety. There was in that blessed One the expression in this world of a life that had all its springs in God. And now He has been received up into glory, so that in the power of the Spirit He might become the divine spring of everything for God's pleasure in the hearts of His saints down here. You will find practically, beloved friends, that when Christ holds and occupies your heart it is very easy to live piously. You do not find it a great effort to keep clear of the snares of the world or the lusts of the flesh. But when Christ declines in the heart it becomes difficult to keep on the right side of the border line, and not to drift with the desires and lusts of the flesh and of the mind. We need more of the mystery of piety — Christ Himself in the heart as the regulative power of everything.

Now a few words on the fifth thing. *In the House of God the Spirit speaks.* Chapter 4 begins, "The Spirit speaketh expressly". This is characteristic of the House of God; there we get the voice of the Spirit. No doubt the epistles are the voice of the Spirit in a certain way, but it is important to remember that only the Spirit of God can give application to things at the moment when they are needed. A man of ability might commit to memory the whole of the New Testament so far as the letter is concerned, but this would not give him any idea of its divine application. The Spirit of God is the only One who can give present application of the needed truth at any particular moment. The Spirit spoke in the early days in the assembly and He has not ceased to have a voice in God's house. The Holy Ghost is here and has a voice on behalf of Christ in the assemblies. Of course I am not supposing for a moment that He makes

new revelations now; there is no such thing as that. The whole truth has been set forth in the holy Scriptures, and we can thank God that the form of sound words is with us in Scripture. But then we need particular truths at particular moments; we need things to be divinely applied to our souls, and the Spirit gives a voice in the House of God to that which the saints need — that which is consistent with their present condition, and with the ways of God in leading them on in their souls. We shall have that to the end.

It is of immense importance that we should hear what the Spirit says to the churches, as in Revelation 2 and 3, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches". When God speaks of having an ear He certainly means a moral condition — a state of soul that can discern what is of the Spirit. Nothing could be more sad and solemn than the deafness of God's people. There is nothing more solemn than to find believers — those you cannot doubt are children of God — deaf to the voice of the Spirit. We need exercise about this. In the epistles to the seven churches, it has often been pointed out that in the last four churches the word, "He that hath an ear" comes after the promise to the overcomer. That implies that only *the overcomer* will have an ear for what the Spirit says to the churches. What is it to be an overcomer? It is very simple: an overcomer is one who responds to Christ. There are no two saints exactly alike in their circumstances, or condition, but there is not a saint in the world to whom the blessed Lord does not present Himself, and those who respond to Him become overcomers. If Christ presents Himself to a soul and there is response to Him it necessitates that the soul should break away from what is not Christ. If He presents Himself and there is no response, how sad it is! Christ does not fail at some time or other to present Himself to every one of His own in the world, and if there is response to Him it brings the believer into some degree of separation. Then there will be a further presentation of Christ to the soul, and if there is response to that a further manifestation still, and thus the Lord would lead on and draw His own to Himself. If there is response to Christ in our hearts I am sure we shall be overcomers, and the effect will be that we shall have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.

Let us remember that the living voice of God by the Spirit is in His house today. There is such a thing as divine ministry in the House of God, and the voice of the Spirit is heard there. What we need is an ear to discern that voice. We are not to receive everything as truth; we ought to be discriminating, and full of discernment. Would to God that the saints were more critical in a spiritual way! Every kind of error is presented now, and Christians do not seem able to discern it. We do not want the carping criticism of the natural mind that makes a man an offender for a word, but that spirit of discernment that

knows how to separate what is human from what is divine. God says, "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth" (Jeremiah 15: 19). We need to be particular and critical in that sense. We have to exercise our senses upon things, and not go on as if everything we heard was sure to be right. On the other hand, it is a very poor thing to be merely acute in the discernment of what is wrong. We need to gain increasingly an appreciation of what is of God; we need an ear for the voice of the Spirit, and exercise so that we turn away from that which is not according to the Spirit. In that way we should distinguish between good and evil, choosing the good and refusing the evil.

These five things characterise the House of God. The glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God is the test of everything there; God's testimony is there — the testimony of what He is in grace as the Saviour God; men have their true dignity in God's house, as being admitted to intercourse with Him; then the mystery of piety is there — Christ is there in the hearts of the saints; and finally, the Spirit has a voice there.

THE CALLING WHEREWITH WE ARE CALLED

Ephesians 2: 13 - 22

We are exhorted to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called, but we shall not be able to do so unless we have some idea what that calling is. The calling has to do with the present time; it is the mind of God as to His saints now.

I cannot enlarge much upon it, or even give a full outline of the calling, but I may suggest that three things, at any rate, have a prominent place in it. (1) The thought of "one new man"; (2) The fact that we "have access by one Spirit unto the Father"; (3) The truth that the saints are "builded together for an habitation of God in the Spirit". I should like to say a few words on these three things.

We may not be up to our calling, and that to our own great loss, but the calling remains. The moment we speak of our calling we are looking at things altogether from a divine standpoint. The calling of God's saints is always perfect in itself, and worthy of God. And our knowledge of God is very much dependent on the manner in which we apprehend our calling. It is a great thing to be in the intelligence of our calling. We may feel that we are "less than the least of all saints", but it is blessed to be taken into the secret of God, and made to know His thoughts with regard to His saints.

The first thing to apprehend is that a new man has come into being. We shall not advance very far into Christianity if we do not apprehend this.

As to the actual condition of the world when Christ was here we may say that there were two men on earth — the Jew and the Gentile: the Jew, as such, making his boast in the law of commandments in ordinances, and professedly drawing nigh to God according to his privileges; the Gentile, on the other hand, openly giving himself up to "lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4: 19). Outwardly there was the greatest possible difference between the Jew and the Gentile, but in reality they only presented two phases of the behaviour of the same man. See chapter 2: 2, 3. Both were characterised by "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts". This was fully brought out by Christ's presence here, and by His cross. The Jew was no more prepared to receive God than the Gentile.

God must have a "new man" — a man of an entirely new order. Hence the necessity for the death of Christ. The new man could not be linked with the old. If there was to be a new man there must be an end of the old. If the Gentile is made nigh in Christ Jesus it is "by the blood of Christ". It is by that

which bears witness of death — of the end of man after the flesh. The enmity between Jew and Gentile is annulled really by both being set aside. If the Messiah went into death as rejected by His people, what became of all the pretensions of the Jew? The same death which removed everything that disqualified the Gentile for approach to God has set aside all the pretensions of the Jew. Man in unrestrained lust, and man subject to commandments in ordinances are alike ended in death, to make way for "one new man".

Christ and the cross are God's great tests for men. Christ crucified is a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks; but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1: 23, 24). The cross brought to light that there was nothing in man for God. "If one died for all then were all dead". Man is often large before our eyes; we are easily influenced by what is of man in the way of wisdom or religiousness. But the cross is the power of God to deliver us from all that. Our every blessing is in CHRIST, and we have also found in Him the perfect revelation of God. The testimony of God, in one word, is CHRIST, and God is forming a new man to be morally descriptive of Christ. In the cross there is the entire setting aside of man in the flesh, that there might be a new man with a new mind (1 Corinthians 2: 16).

It has been brought before us that the death of Christ is not only the end of man in the flesh, but that the *love* revealed in His death is the formative power of the new man. We learn the love of God in that precious death, and as we learn it we are formed by it according to God (see Ephesians 4: 24). The effect of the love of God is to form us in "righteousness and holiness of truth", and this is the character of the new man.

In Ephesians 3 we get the state that corresponds with our calling, and here the apostle prays, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (verse 17). All that subsists in Christ as the Head and Centre of God's blessed world dwells in the heart, and no other man has any place there.

As having heard Christ, and been instructed in Him as the truth is in Jesus, the Christian has put off the old man, which corrupts itself according to the deceitful lusts; and, being renewed in the spirit of his mind, has put on the new man, which according to God is created in truthful righteousness and holiness. The Christian definitely parts company morally with the old man, and puts off all his habits and ways.

Instead of Jew and Gentile there is now "one new man" formed after God. It takes all the saints on earth to make up that "one new man". In the calling wherewith we are called differences of nationality, race, or colour have no place. There is "one new man" formed in Christ, and if this were entered into

in faith and by the Spirit it would necessarily bring about practical unity and peace amongst all saints.

Now a few words as to "access by one Spirit to the Father". What strikes one in this statement is the fact that it con templates the saints quite outside the range of the flesh. We are viewed as in a circle of things where everything is of God. It is blessed to know that if we have access to the Father it must be so. We could not bring any imperfection to the Father. It is through Christ; it is by one Spirit; and it is unto the Father. Divine Persons, if we may so say, fill the scene.

We have access to the Father as those who can be in His presence entirely upon the ground Of CHRIST. We approach according to the blessedness of our calling and acceptance as it is set forth in Christ, and thus we come to the Father as worshippers. Then it is "by one Spirit". The Spirit is necessarily exclusive of the flesh in every form of its activity. And inasmuch as it is by *one* Spirit that the whole worshipping company has access to the Father, there must be in that circle perfect and divine accord. One could not think of a jarring note in the Father's presence! Jars proceed from flesh, and flesh can never have access to the Father. Any movement of flesh — any wrong feeling, etc. — should be thoroughly judged and set aside, or it will certainly hinder us from having access to the Father. A saint in whom there is the activity of unjudged flesh should beware of coming to the assembly. It is a very solemn thing to bring unjudged flesh before the Lord. The Corinthians found this out to their cost.

In chapter 3 what corresponds with access to the Father is "being rooted and grounded in love", in order that ye "may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height" (verse 18). That is, Paul would have us become capable of apprehending the whole scope of the Father's counsels, of which Christ is the blessed and eternal Centre, that we may be thus enlarged in worship and praise before Him.

Then I am sure that the practical outcome of having access to the Father by one Spirit would be that, we should become very diligent in endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. It would tend greatly to promote practical unity amongst saints.

I have dwelt upon these parts of the calling because they are connected in an intimate way with the fact of God dwelling here in His saints. This comes out very distinctly in the last four verses of the chapter. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the

building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2: 19 - 22).

The way in which the spiritual house is looked at in 1 Peter does not go beyond what was realised on the day of Pentecost. That is, the remnant of Israel was added to the 120 disciples and, as indwelt by the Spirit, constituted the House of God. But this did not suffice to give full expression to the truth. In order to present the House of God in its complete character it was necessary that Gentiles should be brought in. This did not take place historically until Cornelius and his friends received the Spirit as recorded in Acts 10, and afterwards Paul was expressly sent by the Lord to the Gentiles. So that, as in the scripture before us, Gentiles can now be addressed as being "of the household of God", and as being "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit".

The whole company of saints on earth indwelt by the Spirit are builded together, so that God may dwell here. He dwells in His saints in the way of blessing and testimony. His grace, His attributes, and His nature are known in His house, and are expressed there in testimony. It would be well if we were more impressed by the seriousness and blessedness of this part of our calling. So that, as partaking of His character, and formed in His nature, we might be able to give a more true expression here of what God is as revealed in grace in Christ.

We are exhorted to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. This involves that we become "followers [imitators] of God, as dear children, and walk in love, even as Christ also hath loved us" (Ephesians 5: 1, 2). Nothing could be more blessed than to know God as those who are in the full light of His favour and love, and then to be here to give expression to what He is in the midst of a world of selfishness and hatred and lust — a world, too, where all are in darkness as to God, and where every serious mind feels the darkness, though pride of heart and will often prevent the acknowledgment of it. We are put in the light in order that the light may shine from us. The House of God is filled with divine light, but the light is there that it may shine forth in blessing and grace towards men. The work by which God brings us to the knowledge of Himself is a hidden and secret one, but it is intended to be manifested and to come abroad in testimony (see Mark 4: 21, 22). The divine candle is not to be put under a bushel or under a bed, but to be "set on a candlestick".

It is said of the holy Jerusalem that "the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof", and what follows is, "And the nations of them which

are saved shall walk in the light of it" (Revelation 21: 23, 24). What the holy city will be in the coming day of glory, the House of God is morally now — the light of the world. Hence the apostle prays that we might be "filled unto all the fulness of God", so filled with the knowledge of God that we might be capable of giving a true and full testimony to Him now morally, as we shall in the ages to come.

In connection with this it is very interesting to notice the purpose for which the gifts of the ascended Christ are given. Read Ephesians 4: 7 - 13. Now turn to Psalm 68: 18. I want you to notice the words, "That the LORD God might dwell among them". In the New Testament we read that the gifts are "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ", etc.; but in the Old Testament they are connected with. God dwelling amongst men. The two thoughts go together; the saints are the body of Christ and they are also a habitation of God in the Spirit. The perfecting of the saints goes on as they increase in the knowledge of God, and all the gifts further this. The substance of all true ministry is the setting forth of divine Persons in their manifold activities, and in all the varied grace in which they have been pleased to make themselves known to men.

Apostles have a special place as sent by Christ to make known in unity of testimony the whole truth of Christianity. Whatever we know of Christ, and of God as revealed in Him, we have got in one way or another from the apostles. Prophets are those by whom the truth is brought home in present application to the consciences of men; evangelists make known the grace of God which brings salvation to all men; and pastors and teachers feed the flock of God, and nourish souls by the ministry of the word. But the action of all these gifts is to the end that God may be known and expressed in His saints — that He may dwell here in blessing and testimony.

God is near to us in the utmost conceivable favour. All the action of the Spirit, and every exercise of divine gift, tends to make this more and more a reality to us. There is no shade of distance between God and His household, no cloud upon the favour in which He dwells in His saints.

I am perfectly conscious how feebly I have entered into the great reality of the fact that we are a habitation of God in the Spirit, and how little I have apprehended all that hangs upon that fact, and hence I can only put it before you in a very feeble way. But I desire to know more of it in spiritual intelligence and power, and I believe there is the same desire in your hearts, by the grace of God. I trust we may with prayerful exercise meditate upon these things, and be greatly enlarged in our knowledge of God, and of the wondrous way in which He is near to us in blessing and love!

The first thing for us is to get an apprehension of the calling wherewith we have been called, and then it is important that we should give good heed to the exhortation of Paul, who could say that he was "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4: 1 - 3).

THE HOUSE OF GOD AS PRESENTED BY JOHN

1 John 3; 4

John presents the truth of the House of God in a different way from either Peter or Paul. He brings before us God's house viewed as a family of children — a household. He speaks of saints as children of God, and shows that God dwells in them. In that way they form God's house. It may be well, perhaps, to glance briefly at what is presented in the first two chapters.

We are living in a wonderful moment, for "the Word of life" has come very near to men in the Son of the Father. That holy One was heard, seen, contemplated, and handled by a chosen company of men called to know Him and be with Him in the days of His flesh. They saw in Him eternal life with the Father, and had fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. What they saw and heard they have made known to us, that we may have fellowship with them, and that *our joy may be full*.

The apostles were privileged to be in peculiar nearness to divine Persons with a view to their subsequent testimony. They learned that "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John 3: 35); and they contemplated One who loved the Father, and who was here in infinite devotedness and capability to carry out in every way the Father's pleasure and to glorify Him. Fulness of joy is connected with the apprehension of this. It is not now demand on God's part and utter failure to meet it on man's part, making it necessary that God should be hidden behind a veil and surrounded with clouds and thick darkness. All that is in God's mind and heart has been told out by the Son of His love, found in this world as a Man: One able also to secure a perfect answer to it all on the ground of redemption in the deepest blessing of man. So that now God is in the light, and there is eternal life for men in His Son.

All this has now become the light of men. Light has come into the world. All that goes to make up the light of God — love, holiness, righteousness, etc. — has shone forth, and we now walk in the light as He is in the light. The effect of doing so must be profound self-judgment, for we find everything in ourselves (according to the flesh) which is contrary to the light. Men love darkness rather than light because they do not wish to judge themselves; but the Christian does not shun the light, he loves to walk in it; and the more light he gets the lower down he goes in self-judgment. And so, as a beloved servant of God used to say, repentance goes on deepening all through the lifetime of a saint. But along with this there is the deepening consciousness that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin". The

consciousness is maintained in the soul that everything we have to judge has been removed by the death of Christ. Our consciences are purged, and we have "no more conscience of sins" (Hebrews 10: 2); we have the abiding consciousness that everything which the light of God exposes as being contrary to Him has been taken away by the death of Christ.

If we sin there is necessity for confession on our part; we must have it all out with God, and "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9). The advocacy of Christ comes in here. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (2: 1). If a believer sins it becomes a matter of consideration with divine Persons how he can be brought back to the proper state and feelings of a child of God. The question is not taken up in a judicial way, but in the home of divine affections — it is "with the Father" — in order that the one who sins may be restored to the right feelings and conduct of a child of God. It is not a question of clearing the conscience, but of rectifying the state of soul, and all is founded on the fact that Jesus Christ the Righteous is the propitiation for our sins (chapter 2:2). So far as propitiation is concerned everything is settled, and now the One who has settled everything is entitled to speak in love to the Father about the one who sins, because He has maintained righteousness with regard to the sin. This is in view of our moral cleansing from all unrighteousness.

The effect of walking in the light and of being cleansed from all unrighteousness is that divine love becomes active in us. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (chapter 2: 10). What we have heard from the beginning is the presentation of Christ, and He has become the commandment to us. He does not enjoin anything that has not been exemplified in Himself. He could say, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you", and immediately afterwards, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you" (John 15: 9, 12). The one who says that he abides in Christ "ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked".

The children of God are characterised by these things — they have joy in the knowledge of divine Persons, and they walk in righteousness and love. But in these things there is growth, hence we find three different classes addressed — fathers, young men, and little children or babes. The fathers have known Him that is from the beginning. They have come to the apprehension of CHRIST as the starting point of every divine thought. The purpose of God was formed in Him before the foundation of the world. Whether we think of creation, redemption, the peculiar blessings of the assembly, or what will

characterise the world to come, everything has its beginning in Christ. He is the origin and starting point of everything that is of God in the universe. To know Him is to be put morally outside the whole world of human thoughts, and to see everything in relation to Him who is the Beginning and Head of God's universe. In that circle there are no snares or dangers; all is blessed and perfect and of God. Hence there is no warning addressed to the fathers such as is addressed to the young men and babes.

To the young men he says, "Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2: 14, 15). The young men are regarded as strong — as being what we might speak of as established believers. There are a good many who are well-grounded in the truth of Scripture, and the testimony of God has its place with them, but with whom there is danger of the truth failing as to practical application. It is one thing to be able to expose error, or refute a gainsayer, by Scripture; but quite another to apply the truth in self-judgment to all one's ways and associations so as to be kept in entire separation from the world. Many of us can understand this very well. We are informed about a great many things that have not yet had their divine application in our souls so as to practically affect us in our walk and ways. It is astonishing how much one may know of the truth, and how diligent and faithful one may be in refusing anything like bad doctrine, and yet at the same time many links with the world and its things may be kept up, and the door may thus be standing open for the introduction of much that is not at all of the Father. The spirit of the world may come in with those who have much, light — nothing really keeps it out but CHRIST — and the world is the sphere of sin. If a man loves the world he sins.

It is sometimes supposed that the babes are most in danger of worldliness, but as a matter of fact it is the young men who are warned against the world. Young souls fresh in the joy of grace are not so much in danger of the world as those who perhaps know more, but whose joy has somewhat declined. It is then that the spirit of the world very often asserts itself again. It is the *spirit of the world* — the inward working in our hearts of the principles which make up the world — that we have to watch against. It is easy and convenient to many of us to stand apart from gross forms of worldliness. But there may be outward separation and yet much of the spirit of the world in our hearts. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are things that work in the heart — the very principles of worldliness within. These are things we have ever to be on the watch against. This corresponds very much with the word in verse 1, "These things write I unto you that ye sin not". The world is

the sphere where sin works; it is really *sin systematised*; it is the sphere where provision is made for the gratification of every lust of man. Let us beware of the spirit of it! It is most important that the light of God should have its practical application in the way of separation from the world.

With regard to the babes, what is said is that they know the Father, and that they have received the unction, thus becoming the subjects of divine teaching. The youngest babe in the family of God is on this footing. He knows God in grace, and he is taught by the Spirit to find all truth in Christ, and to abide in Him. Seducers may seek to move him away from the grace of God, and to turn him from Christ, but, having the Spirit, he is able to discern that this is the enemy's work. He may not be able to answer subtle arguments, but he knows God in grace, and he realises that to give up Christ is to give up everything. He abides in Him.

All this is introductory, and the moral effect of it is developed in chapters 3 and 4. The Father has in love given us the place of children of God. We have kindred nature with God, as born of Him. The fact of one really appreciating Christ is the proof that he has kindred nature with God.

Men in the flesh do not appreciate Christ. Hence we read, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons [children] of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 12, 13). If Christ is received and appreciated it is evidence that one is born of God and has kindred nature with God. God has pleasure in those who appreciate Christ; it is a delight to him to see hearts that really value Christ. The Lord said, "The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (John 16: 27). In that way we come under the Father's love; we come into view as children of God. He has given us capacity to appreciate and love what is delightful to His own heart. Is it not amazing — if we think of what we were — that the Father should have wrought in us so that we might be according to God in nature and able to appreciate His beloved Son? We may well say, "Behold what manner of love!"

We are children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been manifested. When Christ appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. We shall be like Christ in the circle of divine love and complacency for evermore. We shall be divested of every trace of that which we derived from the first man, and we shall be like Him — the Heavenly One — who is soon coming out of heaven as the Second Man. We shall be in every way suited to the Father's eye and heart *like Christ*.

Then "every man that hath this hope in him [Christ] purifieth himself even as he is pure". This blessed hope has an intensely practical effect in moral cleansing. The purity of Christ is the standard. It must be so, for if we derive morally from God as being His children, nothing will really satisfy us short of what is altogether delightful to God. This is found in full measure in Christ. Purity and righteousness are found absolutely in Him. We cannot be too simple in making Christ our only standard; we must not allow the religious world, or even our brethren, to become in any way our standard. If others are content with a lower measure of purification than that of Christ Himself we must not drop down to their level. We must keep the eyes of our hearts simply and steadily upon Christ. Those who abide in Him do not sin; they are not lawless. The only *right* thing is to abide in Christ, and the one who does so escapes from the power of evil and comes under the blessed influence of good. He practises righteousness and loves his brother.

It is thus that the children of God come into manifestation here. A people marked by righteousness and love must be the children of God. They are begotten of Him, and He abides in them, and they know it by the Spirit which He has given to them (chapter 3: 24). "God is in the generation of the righteous" (Psalm 14: 5). It is a very wonderful thing that there should be a company of people in this world in whom God dwells. He dwells here in His house, and His house is composed of His children, who come into manifestation as those in whom righteousness and love are expressed. They manifest God's blessed character in this world, where lawlessness and hatred abound. I know of no more practical truth than this, that we are called the children of God, and that as such we are to come into manifestation here. Love is the spring of righteousness. All that is *right* is the outcome and activity of the divine nature; it all springs from love.

Love is a thing we have had to learn, because naturally we had no idea of it. Natural love never gives people a true thought of divine love. We have to learn that love in the death of Christ. "Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us". In chapter 4 John enlarges upon it. He speaks of love absolutely — "God is love" — and then he shows how it has been manifested toward us. "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (verse 9, 10). In God's house we find ourselves in an atmosphere of love; it is the home of love and the school of love. We may only be on the lowest bench in the school, but how blessed it is to know that God has brought us into His house that we may learn and experience His love! In natural things the home circle is where a child learns love. Children are born with capacity for affections, but the

affections have to be developed in an atmosphere of care and love. Many a one goes through life with a hard and loveless nature because he was brought up in a cold, hard way. But no one could say that the House of God is a cold place; it is filled with the warmth of His blessed love. We are brought into the family of God — into the children's place — that we may learn those deep affections that have their spring in the Father, and have had their manifestation and expression through the Son, and which are known now in our hearts by the Spirit. As we thus learn divine love and live in it we become capable of expressing it towards one another, and, "if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us". This is how John presents the truth of the House of God; he speaks of God dwelling here in His children. Is it not wonderful that God should be dwelling here in His saints? — that His nature should be coming out in all our relations one with the other? In John's gospel when it is said "No man hath seen God at any time" it is added, "The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". But in the epistle it is, "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us". The same blessed God who was declared by the only begotten Son now dwells in His children who love one another. In this way God is set forth in a world where no man has seen Him at any time. His nature and character are expressed here in His children, who form His house. Then there is also the testimony of His grace towards men in general. "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world". John is in perfect harmony with Paul. Paul speaks of the testimony that sounds out from the House of God when He says, "God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2: 3 - 6). John speaks of the same blessed testimony when he says, "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world". That is the testimony that sounds out — the evangelical testimony — the blessed witness of grace towards all. The youngest babe in the family of God knows the grace of God, for it is said to the babes, "ye have known the Father". The Father is that blessed Name in which God is revealed in grace. Those who know the Father are left here in testimony to His grace. God's house is here as a living witness to Himself in this world. He dwells here in blessing and grace towards men; what He is as the Saviour God is expressed by and in His saints.

In God's house His love is known and believed, and His children abiding in love abide in God and God in them. Fear dwells not in that holy circle; perfect love has expelled it. God was the first to love, but the effect of His love known in our hearts is that we love. This great miracle God has brought to pass on

earth, that there are those who love Him and His children, and who keep His commandments without finding them to be grievous. What victory over the world is seen in this! What a setting aside of lust and lawlessness! What a blessed witness for God! And all this is morally the outcome of believing that Jesus is the Son of God. For this involves the entire setting aside of man in the flesh, and our moral purification from that man by the water aspect of Christ's death as well as expiation by blood. He came by water and blood, and the Spirit bears witness.

It is by the Spirit that we understand in our souls the meaning of the water and the blood. The Spirit is the truth of it in our souls, hence the one who believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself. The effect of the presence of the Spirit here is that God's witness is here. The witness is that God has given to His saints eternal life, and this life is in His Son. May we ponder much these great and blessed realities, and know better what it means to be able to say, "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we should know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life". Nor let us forget that last solemn word, "Children, keep yourselves from idols!"

GOD'S DISCIPLINE IN HIS HOUSE

Hebrews 12:1 - 14

I desire to say a little on the subject of discipline. God disciplines His household, and in thinking of the House of God we must not leave Out the chastening that is exercised there. It is one immense gain of being in the House of God that we come under His discipline.

The exhortation, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" (Hebrews 12: 5), is quoted from Proverbs 3: 11. The word "chastening" in that verse is one which often occurs in Proverbs, where it is generally translated "instruction", but a few times "correction". It is noticeable that it often occurs in connection with "wisdom". "To know wisdom and instruction" (chapter 1: 2); "To receive the instruction of wisdom" (chapter 1: 3); "Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (chapter 1: 7), etc.

Christ is the wisdom of God, and in blessed grace has been made wisdom to us. Man in the flesh was an offence to God, but Christ the wisdom of God removed that man by death. Then, on the other hand, every thought of God has been established in Christ at His right hand, so that He may be known in the glory of grace by man — known in the beloved Son, who alone could reveal Him. Christ is the wisdom or resource of God to bring all this about. He has removed what was offensive to God, and in Him is established everything that is pleasurable to God, and He is the revelation of all the fulness of the Godhead.

But this entails the practical setting aside in God's children of that which is contrary to His nature and pleasure. If everything unsuitable to God was condemned and removed *sacrificially* at the cross, it is necessary that everything in us of that character should be set aside *morally*. That is why instruction — chastening — come in. God is bent upon having His children in moral correspondence with Himself. It is not enough that we should see that He has effected certain things by the cross, and established certain things in Christ. We are to be in moral correspondence with God and with what He has effected. He wants us to know the power and reality of these things in our souls, so that we may be "partakers of his holiness". So chastening comes in. God deals with us so that the flesh may be practically set aside, and Christ formed in us under His eye. "Wisdom" is the mind of God set forth in Christ, but then "instruction" comes in on our side that we may be in moral correspondence with "wisdom".

There is a verse which brings three very important things together. "Buy the truth, and sell it not; wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Proverbs 23: 23). *Wisdom* is presented to us in the ministry of Christ; *instruction* is that moral process by which God brings us into accord with what is ministered to us; and the result is *understanding* "the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9: 10) — we are brought into the knowledge of God, and of those holy things in which He finds pleasure.

Discipline affects us in three distinct ways; it is either preventive, or corrective, or instructive. The same discipline may affect us in all three ways, or one element may be more prominent than the others. Generally the three things go together, more or less.

I will give an example of *preventive* chastening in the case of people who were walking wrongly, and another in the case of one who was walking well.

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths" (Hosea 2: 6). When God's people get into a wrong path He often comes in and puts a hedge across the way. He builds a wall that we may not be able to proceed farther in the road where the folly of our own hearts is leading us. Many of us have deep cause for thanksgiving that God has blocked up our way. We do not always see where our way is leading us, but God regards our way. He has regard to the moral consequences of things, and in mercy He blocks up many a road that seems all right to us. He takes notice of things which are likely to turn us aside. There is that element in God's chastening; it tends to preserve us from evils or dangers that, perhaps, we do not anticipate. In that way it is preservative.

We see another instance of preventive chastening in the case of Paul. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12: 7). We might have supposed that Paul would not need discipline of this kind! But after he had been in the most wonderful divine privilege God anticipated a danger, and discipline came in to prevent the working of the flesh. If Paul needed preventive discipline it is pretty certain that we do. God graciously preserves us by His chastening from things which we do not ourselves anticipate. The thought of this is very encouraging to a true heart; we are under the blessed supervision and care of God. It delights my heart to know that God guards me by His gracious discipline from unknown dangers, and checks my proneness to turn aside and give place to the flesh. I do not know where I might have got to but for the discipline of God.

Another distinct action of discipline is that it is *corrective*. There is an element of correction — that is, of setting right — in all discipline. There is always, to some degree, the thought of rectification in it. We see this in Psalm 119: 67. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word". The Psalmist was corrected by the discipline of God;

he was recovered from going astray. Very often there is something in us, or in our ways, that is not pleasing to God, and He discovers it to us by some form of discipline. He alone knows the true state of our hearts, and how to touch us in a corrective way. We note many of the faults and failings of our brethren, and we think we can weigh them up, but, after all, we know very little about them! It is wonderful to think that God takes account of us, and knows how to touch us for correction. I do not mean punishment by correction, but *setting right*. God's object is always to put us right.

Then again we read, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119: 71). There we get the thought of *instruction*. God wants to bring us into the knowledge of Himself, and of His mind with regard to things. If our ears are open to discipline (Job 36: 10) we get instruction in the mind of God. It is not only that our evil ways are corrected, but we gain in our knowledge of God and of what suits Him; we acquire knowledge of His perfect ways. David, disciplined by the death of Uzza, learned God's statutes (1 Chronicles 13: 7 - 14; 1 Chronicles 15: 2). There is sometimes a good deal of levity about us in regard to divine things, and we have to be sobered by affliction or sorrow, so that we may learn what is according to God's mind. We are apt to be influenced by others, and to shape our course on the model of what we see round about us; but this will not do in divine things. God calls us apart by discipline that we may learn His mind, and be prepared to act more entirely with regard to His will.

The discipline of God is preventive, and corrective, and instructive — it tends to make us more intelligent in the mind of God. These three things go together.

It has been observed that there are three distinct kinds of chastening. We may suffer from things which are common to men, or we may suffer trials which are peculiar to the path of faith, or we may have to suffer in different ways the consequences of our own wrong-doing.

There are many trials that are not confined to saints. Trying circumstances, suffering and weakness in body, and the sorrow of bereavement are common to men generally. The unconverted have these trials as well as believers. But the blessed thing is that God takes up all these things, which are connected

with the wreck and ruin of things in this world of sin and death, and makes them work divine profit and benefit to His beloved children.

I do not suppose there is one here without some kind of sorrow or trial. God's discipline is a matter in which we are all personally interested; it has a practical bearing upon every one of us. How blessed to know that these sorrows and exercises are instruments in our Father's hand to bring about the profit of our souls! Men of the world in presence of sorrow often harden themselves to bear it in a stoical way, but if we get hard and callous we miss the good of God's discipline. God would not have us to accustom ourselves to trials and get hard under them. There is nothing stoical in Christianity; every proper natural feeling and sensibility has its place, but these feelings become the occasion for the development of tender and precious spiritual affections — the sensibilities and feelings of Christ.

We may see an example of beautiful divine tenderness and care in Philippians 2: 25 - 28. "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again,

ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful". All this exercise and care, called forth in Paul and in the Philippians by the sickness of Epaphroditus, and the grief of Epaphroditus himself, not because he was sick, but because the Philippians had heard of his sickness, is perfectly beautiful. Spiritual affections came into exercise all round. This is a very blessed result of God's discipline, of which we do well to take account. Times of sorrow and suffering give opportunity for the love and care of the saints to come into activity. It is a common thing to hear one say, in reference to some season of great pressure or sorrow, "I never knew before how much love there was in the saints". We find the compassion and care and love of God in His children, and in this way we are spiritually enlarged in the very moment of pressure. We get this in Psalm 4: 1, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress".

God cares for us in every detail. He cared that an old man should have his overcoat before winter (2 Timothy 4: 13). He keeps His eye on us in all the discipline that we suffer under His hand. There is always the care of His love behind it all. May the comfort of this be ever in our hearts!

Then, again, it is in trial and sorrow that we learn in an experimental way the sympathy and succour of Christ — His love as Priest. He enters into every

feeling of weakness and suffering. When He was here, healing thousands of people of various diseases, He felt and bore in His spirit all that He removed by His power. And even if it were death itself, we see Him in that matchless scene at Bethany — how can one speak of it? — in company with a bereaved heart; the blessed Son of God entering into it all and weeping with those who wept! And now He has gone up to the right hand of God to intercede for His tried and disciplined saints down here. The intercession of Christ ever goes along with the discipline of God, to the end that it may effect a divine result in our souls. It is all in deep, divine love.

The pressure of sorrow turns one away from the world and rebukes the natural self-importance of the flesh, and this leaves room for the blessed Lord to come to the heart in all the tenderness of divine sympathy and love to establish a personal link between Himself and the Borrower that could not be formed in any other way. The Psalmist could say, "Thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities" (Psalm 31: 7). A friend who comes near to you in time of pressure or trial makes himself very dear to you. A poor mortal like yourself cannot do much for you, but you feel the preciousness and comfort of a friend who in some way feels for you in your sorrow. But think of the blessed Lord, with perfect knowledge of your sorrow, and of all the detail, of which you would be ashamed to speak to a human being, because it would so expose your weakness that you could hardly expect to be understood, coming near to you in perfect divine love and sympathy *to endear Himself to you* in your need and pressure! Of what deep and precious value is that holy discipline which thus becomes the occasion for our hearts to make personal acquaintance with Christ!

It might, no doubt, be said that in the enjoyment of proper Christian privilege we should be found in a divine and heavenly sphere of blessing far above all pressure and trial and sorrow! Blessed be God, there is a sphere where no trial or sorrow can come, but how do we reach it? There is but one way, and that is *in company with Christ*. But how and where do we first learn His company? Let us take the two going to Emmaus as an illustration. They were filled with grief, and were going back to their own things, far away in heart from the resurrection sphere in which Christ was. His love was set upon leading them to Himself in that new place upon which He had entered as the risen One. But His way of doing this was first to come near to them in their sadness, that He might establish a link between Himself and their sorrowing hearts. He knew their grief far better than they could tell Him about it, and He came near to them to lead them from the place of their sorrow to the circle of His own joy and peace in resurrection. That is how He brings us to His own side. He comes to us in priestly grace in our circumstances of need and sorrow, and makes

Himself known to us there that He may draw us to Himself in a sphere where need and sorrow can never come.

We get the thought of this in Revelation 3: 20, "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". Divine love in Christ touches me where I am in all the reality of my weakness and need, compassed with infirmity, and feeling every sorrow and trial. I need Him to sup with me — to succour me by His grace, and thus to make Himself precious and indispensable to me. There is this wonderful thing about God's discipline, that it furnishes opportunity for the love of Christ as Priest to touch us where we are, and to so knit us to Himself in affection that we may travel in company with Him to a spot where sorrow and sin can never come. It is good to contemplate this. We sometimes look at the discipline of God too much in a judicial way, as if one did wrong and got a thrashing for it, as he deserved. We need to consider the blessed results which God intends to bring to pass by His discipline.

In this connection I may say that we are dependent upon Christ as Priest to give us divine understanding of the discipline of God. "There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (2 Samuel 21: 1). I suppose that, according to the due order, David inquired of the Lord by means of the priest (see Numbers 27: 21; 1 Samuel 23: 9; 1 Samuel 30: 7, etc.). It is only as we are in nearness to Christ that we have divine intelligence as to God's discipline. He can give us understanding in all things, and enable us to discern why we are under discipline, and what is the instruction or correction which it is intended to effect.

I have referred to things which are common to men — trial in circumstances, sickness, and bereavement — but in Hebrews 12 it is another order of discipline that is more especially in view. The Spirit of God has before Him a kind of discipline which is peculiar to saints. We may see a sample of it in Hebrews 10: 32 - 34. "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance".

These beloved saints had to pay a great price for being Christians. The fact that they took their stand as confessors of the Lord Jesus cost them a good deal in their circumstances here. It must be remembered that they had been

accustomed to look for the manifestation of God's favour in their circumstances here. It must have been a peculiar trial to them to find that, after becoming Christians, they had so many hardships to suffer. But the things that befell them were on account of being in the path of faith. Many sorrows and difficulties are escaped by those who do not tread that path. Paul would not have had such a long catalogue of hardships to recount (see 2 Corinthians 11: 23 - 27) if he had not been in the path of faith.

There are many exercises and sorrows which are only felt by those who seek to walk in the will of God and to be agreeable to the Lord. The enemy would seek to use such things to dishearten and discourage us, and if possible to divert us from a course which is pleasing to God. But the great thing for us is to remember that all these things are really helpful discipline for us. The hand of God is in them, and the love of God, and our exercise and prayer should be that we might have grace to profit by them. We are sometimes so anxious to escape from pressure or trial that we have not patience to learn the lessons God intends to teach us by these things. We should always count upon it that there is great gain in being disciplined by God, and we should seek to secure it. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm 94:12). The particular exercise of the present moment may never return again, so that if we do not get the good of it now we may miss it for ever. If we looked at things more from that point of view, we should desire with diligence of heart to learn the divine lesson in things that happen to us along the road.

Another kind of discipline is when we suffer the governmental consequences of our own sin and folly. There are also moral consequences which we suffer in the experience of our souls, as when joy and peace are lost in consequence of getting away from the Lord. "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6: 7, 8; see also Romans 8: 6, 13).

If we give place to that which is of the flesh we have to suffer for it. We may often learn the moral nature of things by their effect upon us. If we discover that certain things take us away from our joy in the Lord it is a solemn warning to us. To suffer in that way is a very serious discipline — more to be deprecated than any other kind of affliction. We ought to be wise, and observant of the moral effect of things, so as to take warning as soon as we find that they bring a shade upon our spiritual joy and communion. If we find that something brings what is, morally, death and corruption into our souls we

ought to turn from it at once — we have learned its character by its experimental results. If we continue to trifle with it we play the part of fools.

Many things can be judged by their results. If we find that a certain line of things tends to biting and devouring one another, we may be quite sure that it is the line of the flesh. If we find that another line of things tends to develop love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, we may be equally sure that is the Spirit's line. We prove things by their moral effects.

If God deals with us governmentally on account of our wrong-doing it is our wisdom to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. The same remark applies to discipline exercised in the assembly, whether it be admonition, rebuke, or withdrawing from a wicked person. If I am admonished or rebuked by my brethren I ought not to resent it, but to be thankful for the occasion it gives me to be exercised about my ways. When under all discipline, of whatever kind it may be, it is important to keep in mind that God has said, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66: 2).

All discipline is to the end that we may be partakers of God's holiness. Wonderful activities are going on in connection with the saints. CHRIST is being ministered to us through gifts and in the power of the Spirit; then there is the work of God in us, and His ways with us, working together to bring about self-judgment and separation from the world, so that CHRIST may be increasingly magnified in us. The holiness of God absolutely rejects the world and the flesh, and finds its complacency in Christ, and the object of all God's discipline is that we may be partakers of His holiness. The great end of discipline is to make room in our hearts for Christ. As He is formed in us, and as we grow up into Him, we become partakers of God's holiness, and thus more and more suited to His house, of which it is written, "Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever".

THE SON OF GOD AND HIS ASSEMBLY

Matthew 16: 6 - 18; Hebrews 2: 11, 12; Hebrews 8: 1 - 3; Hebrews 10: 14 - 22

The scriptures before us should awaken profound interest in the heart of every Christian, for they speak of the Son of God, and of the saints as forming what He calls, "My assembly". Though Christ was cast out of the world nearly nineteen centuries ago He still has a place here, for His assembly is here, and in that assembly He has a place and a voice. In Christ's assembly He is necessarily supreme, and this in a way that is exclusive of everything not of Himself.

I desire to say a little about the foundation on which Christ builds, the material with which He builds, and the character of the structure which results from His building. Then I hope to show how Christ's assembly really gives character to the House of God.

Many at the present day seem to think that Christianity is a development of Judaism, but there could be no greater mistake. Christianity is the introduction of what is wholly new and altogether divine in the Person of the Son of God. We are slow to get hold of this. We do not readily perceive that "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matthew 16: 6), and human sentiment (verse 22, 23) are things of which to beware. But if we savour the things that be of men we are far from the savour of "the things that be of God". The leaven of the Pharisees is human religiousness, and the leaven of the Sadducees is human intellect working in connection with divine things. Both are to be dreaded and shunned as elements ever opposed to what is of God, and human sentiment is no better in result, however well it may appear on the surface. In contrast to these the confession of a divine Person come in flesh into the world is the Rock on which the assembly is built. When Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", the Lord said to him, "Thou art Peter [a stone], and on this rock I will build my assembly". It is impossible for the power of evil to prevail against a structure founded on that blessed Person and the confession of Him. "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it".

The first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews correspond in great measure with what we get in Matthew 16. The Person of "the Christ, the Son of the living God" is brought out there in a wonderful way, and we also get what answers to "My assembly" (chapter 2: 11, 12). It seems to me that Christ's assembly is to the House of God what the inner shrine was to the temple, and that it corresponds with what is spoken of in Hebrews as the

sanctuary. It has not to do with testimony manward so much as with service Godward. But this I hope to touch upon presently.

The full revelation of God has come out in Christ the Son. This gives Christ an altogether unrivalled place in the estimation of every one who has been taught of the Father! Godhead glory shines out in Him before our adoring hearts! I do not speak of this merely as christian doctrine, but as something which has become a very great reality to us. It is our deep joy to know the blessed God revealed in His beloved Son. God has spoken to us in the Son, and He would have us to look at the wonderful record contained in the gospels in the intelligence of the Holy Ghost to see the revelation of Himself in it all. God has set Himself forth here; He has spoken in the Person of His beloved Son in order to win the hearts of His poor fallen creatures.

Then whatever came out in the life of Jesus here was uttered in a far deeper way at the cross. What a telling forth of God's heart was there! The death of the Son of God is the mighty voice of divine love to man. The ruin, need, guilt, and condemnation of man the sinner only serve as the dark background to show in stronger light the love that would reach him and bless him in spite of it all. When all were in utter darkness and ignorance of God He spoke in that amazing hour of Calvary, so that He might be known and loved and worshipped by all who have ears to hear what He has told of Himself in the Person of the Son.

The revelation of God necessarily carries with it salvation for man. God has spoken to us in the Person of the Son (Hebrews 1), and the "great salvation" began to be spoken by the Lord (Hebrews 2). Salvation is man's inheritance according to the grace of God. The portion of men in God's mind is to be "heirs of salvation", and those who despise their birthright are profane persons like Esau, entirely alienated from God. Salvation for man is bound up with the revelation of God because that revelation has come out in the way of redemption. The heart of God was toward man, but certain terrible questions stood in the way. Sins, death, and the curse seemed to bar the blessing of man, but the Son has removed them all out of the way. "When he had by himself purged our sins" He "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1: 3), and men can now find salvation in the knowledge of God.

Then there is another thing — the rights of God are all taken up in His beloved Son. There are two things in this connection — the inheritance and the throne. God has appointed the Son "heir of all things"; He will take up His inheritance in the Person of the Son. Then the throne — the rule of God — will also be taken up in the Son, so that God's inheritance may be filled with order and

blessing under His rule. The glorious Person who is great enough for all this, and the knowledge of Him by the Father's work in souls, is the Rock on which the assembly is built.

When we come to Hebrews 2 Christ is viewed more on our side. He presents in Himself all the great and glorious characters which were set forth in typical persons of the Old Testament. God was pleased to make certain men prominent in Old Testament times in order to set forth in them something of what Christ would be. It was only an outline, but Christ fills it up.

For instance, Psalm 8 is quoted. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet". Adam was a figure of this, as head of creation, with everything put under him, but Christ fills it up in a far deeper way than was ever true of Adam. Christ is the true Head, and everything in God's universe is put under Him, though we do not yet see this actually brought to pass. In the meantime "we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour". Solomon was figurative of this; no king had glory and honour as he had, but Christ is the true Solomon. Then He is the Captain of salvation; that answers to Joshua. Joshua was the captain of salvation to bring the children of Israel into the land, but he was only a type; Christ is the great antitype and reality; He leads the "many sons" to glory.

Then in verses 11 and 17 Christ is the true Aaron — the One who makes reconciliation, and the Head of the priestly family. In verses 12 and 14 He is the true Moses to declare God's Name to His brethren as Moses made known Jehovah's Name to the children of Israel (Exodus 6: 1 - 9), and as the One who brings God's people out of the house of bondage that they may be in relation to the House of God. Then we read, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee". In this He takes David's place. David gave a voice to God's praise in the midst of Israel, but David — though a wonderful figure — was only a failing man after all. Christ in perfect devotedness to God has occupied every place between the throne of glory and the dust of death, that He might fill all things with the praises of God. Ere long He will be the Singer of praise in a reconciled universe, but at the present time He sings God's praise in the midst of the assembly. Then in verse 13 He is the true Abraham — the Head of the family of faith. This wonderful divine Person, known in souls by the Father's work, is the Rock on which the assembly is built.

I desire now to turn for a few moments to the consideration of the material with which Christ builds. This is a great and interesting theme, because it brings before us the whole subject of the Father's work in souls. The Lord said,

"Thou art Peter" [a stone], indicating that Peter was a bit of the material with which He would build His assembly. Peter got this character in two ways; first, by divine calling, as we see in John 1:42. "When Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone". Then in Matthew 16 he is addressed as Peter — a stone — in consequence of his confession of the Christ the Son of the living God, and this confession is attributed not to Simon's discernment but to the Father's revelation.

All saints are living stones for Christ's assembly by divine calling. That is what we are in the thought and intention of divine Persons. But we have to become living stones characteristically, if I may so say, and the Father's work is essential to this. Peter was a kind of pattern man: he confessed the Christ the Son of the living God by the Father's revelation; but no doubt he had afterwards to reach what was involved in his confession in the history of his soul. We often get things first as divine light, and then we have to be brought into the spiritual reality of them by the work of God in our souls. These two things must ever be kept in view — what we are by God's calling, and what we are by God's work. The first is all that is in God's mind for us;

the second is the measure of our experimental entrance upon it. The first is altogether divine and perfect; the second is often very imperfect, because the Spirit is grieved and the work of God hindered.

A beloved servant of the Lord, now with Him, used to speak of Matthew 14 and 15 as being the soul's education for the assembly. We learn by the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist that lawlessness and lust are in the ascendant in the world and will not tolerate any divine restraint. Jesus departs into a desert place; He leaves the ordered system of things, where lawless lust refused God, and in the desert He heals the sick and feeds the hungry multitude. As the righteous One He withdraws from all the lawlessness that is here, and as the gracious One He attracts need to Himself and satisfies the desire of the needy. He becomes the resource of needy man, outside the world as a lawless system. Each of us has to learn Him thus.

Then He walked on the sea to the disciples whom He had sent "before him unto the other side". He made Himself known to them in a power and supremacy that could attach to none but the Son of God (see Matthew 14: 33). Peter recognised that the Lord could not only walk on the sea Himself, but He could empower Peter to walk there too. Nothing would satisfy the ardent affection of the disciple but to be in association with the blessed One who attracted his heart. The truth was not yet made known that "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (Hebrews 2: 11), but

Peter anticipated it in his affections. It is affection such as this which constitutes one a living stone for Christ's assembly. The soul under the power and attraction of the Son of God is prepared to leave everything that is suited to man naturally, in order to be in association with One who has become its supreme object! How much we know of that attraction, and how much we possess of the ardent affection that thus responds to it, let each heart answer for itself!

Then in chapter 15 the Lord exposes the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, and shows the impossibility of anything for God coming from such a defiled source as the heart of the natural man. But if there was nothing for God in the heart of man, there was everything for man in the heart of God, and this appears in the healing of the daughter of the woman of Canaan, who had not the slightest claim to anything, and again in the healing and feeding of the multitude. How blessed it is to be thus turned altogether away from man to God! No one is prepared as material for Christ's assembly until he comes to this. "The leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" clings to one until by a divine work in his soul he turns altogether from man to God. It would be a pity if we deceived ourselves by supposing that we knew all about this. Most of us, perhaps, are only beginning to see the necessity for this great conversion, and how much is involved in it. Thank God if we have got so far!

Do not be deceived by orthodoxy. The Pharisee was orthodox to the backbone, but he would ally himself with the free-thinking Sadducee in opposition to Christ! Christ is the only one who is of God and for God, and the introduction of Christ means the setting aside of man in the flesh altogether. Neither the Pharisee nor the Sadducee will hear of this for a moment, and hence they are ever in deadly hostility to the Christ of God. If anything has place in our souls which is of man, whether it be ritualism, rationalism, or human sentiment, it is a point of weakness which Satan can attack and overcome. But if we are brought in the consciousness of our souls to realise that everything of man as in the flesh has been set aside in the holy judgment of the cross, and that everything that is of God and for God subsists in Christ, there is no point of attack furnished for Satan. He finds nothing in Christ that he can work upon or overthrow. The assembly, as built by Christ, is composed of those who are in the life of Christ by the Spirit and who own no other, and therefore the gates of hades cannot prevail against it. Satan can overthrow everything that is of man, but he cannot prevail against what is of Christ.

The Lord said to Peter, "Thou art Peter [a stone], and on this rock I will build my church". There is something in common between a stone and a rock; a stone is a small piece of the same material as a rock. Peter was a bit of the

Rock, and that is what saints are. As taught by the Father to appreciate Christ, and to turn from what is not Christ, we are of kindred nature with Christ. "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified, are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2: 11).

If we look around in the world we see that people generally have little or no interest in Christ; His things are dry and unmeaning to them. But there are hearts that thrill with joy in the sense of His blessedness and love. What makes the difference? Just this, that it has been well-pleasing to the Father to reveal something of that blessed One to babes (Matthew 11:25). It is infinitely better to be the smallest, feeblest babe, to perceive the greatness and glory and love of Christ than to be the most honoured person in the world without any appreciation of Him. It is good when Christ can say to one, Thou art Peter — you are of kindred nature to Myself! Of course it is necessarily so if He is our life, and in the Spirit we own no other. The Father has taken us up to bring this about in us. If Christ has thrown self and the world and man in the flesh into the shade in the estimation of our hearts it is clear proof that we have been the subjects of a divine work. It is as being such that we are material for Christ's assembly — divinely formed material for a divine structure. The Christ, the Son of the living God, is now before us, and the consciousness of belonging to Him and being of Him puts us in spirit outside things here and in moral separation from man in the flesh and his world.

I have no doubt it was as the ascended One that the Lord built His assembly. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God" (John 20: 17). This was the message He sent by Mary after He had made Himself known to her in resurrection. He had secured the living stones, and now He placed them in a new and wondrous association with Himself outside the whole course of things here. His death had severed all their links with the world, and now He opened up another scene before them, in which He placed them in association with Himself in the presence of His Father and His God. It is as being in this holy and divine association with Christ, morally outside and apart from everything that is of man in the flesh, that Christ's assembly subsists for His pleasure. He has secured a sanctified company of brethren, "all of one" with Himself before the Father. Brought into His life and into His relationship, to have part with Him in the Father's love — sons with Him who is "the firstborn among many brethren" — His assembly shares His place and glory as the risen and exalted Man. What an immense compass of blessing and privilege is brought before our hearts if we ponder the fact that we are Christ's assembly — appropriated in a peculiar and special way as His own by the risen and exalted Man!

Then if we participate in His life and place Godward we are also His assembly for His service and interests here. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20: 21). He was here altogether for the Father; we are to be here altogether for Christ. As of His assembly we know and own no man after the flesh. We belong to a circle where "Christ is everything and in all", and where we lose sight of all national, religious, and social distinctions. We only recognise Christ, and His saints as having Christ in them, living in His life. We have no one to consider or think of but Christ, no interest but Christ's, nothing to display but Christ. We are outside everything selfish and sectarian;

we, as in the flesh, have disappeared, being not only dead with Him but buried. As quickened with Him and risen with Him we live in His life, and are His assembly. Beloved Christian, let this thought take possession of your heart, and see if it does not make the things of earth very small for you! You belong to a circle where Christ is everything as object and in all as life, and no other man has any recognition. You are of Christ's assembly.

Ever since that resurrection day of John 20 Satan's energies have been put forth to hinder saints from getting a true appreciation of the greatness of the Christ, the Son of the living God, and from getting a divine appreciation of what it is to be His assembly. Satan knows that if these blessed realities were known by the Spirit in our hearts there would be something there against which no power of evil could prevail. What is of Christ cannot be overthrown by the gates of hades. May our hearts be thoroughly arrested and held by the power of this great fact, that we are called to be of Christ's assembly.

Turn now to Hebrews 3: 1 - 6. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end". We have already seen that Christ is the builder of His assembly, and in the scripture before us He is spoken of as the builder of God's house. God in the Person of the Son is the builder of His own house, and when it is built the Son is over it. This suggests a close correspondence between Christ's assembly and God's house, as viewed in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Christ is in relation to the House of God in two characters, of which Moses and Aaron were types. He is Son over God's house, and in this He takes the place of Moses, and He is also the "great priest over the house of God" (Hebrews 10: 21) — the true Aaron. He orders and maintains everything for the pleasure of God in His house. It must be clear to everyone that if Christ has an assembly He will certainly maintain in that assembly everything that is of God and for God, so that in Christ's assembly everything is maintained that is proper to the true and blessed character of God's house.

Christ the Son is supreme over the House of God. He is the only One who has authority there — the only One who can appoint and order whatever has place there. Everything that has not its source in the word of the Son is in one way or other the outcome of the action of man's will, and it has no place really in the House of God. For Christians to act in their own will in connection with God's things is like the sin of Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against the authority of Moses. Christ is the true Moses, and it is a serious thing to rebel against or slight His authority.

Then in Hebrews 8: 2 He is spoken of as the "minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man". The service of God is all ordered by Christ in this character. There were holy vessels of old in the sanctuary; we read of five thousand four hundred "vessels of gold and of silver" brought back from Babylon when those returned to Jerusalem who had been in captivity (Ezra 1: 11). The saints as sanctified ones are now the holy vessels. We are set apart in all the efficacy of Christ's death, and brought into association with Him as risen, so that we may be holy vessels for the service of God in His sanctuary. We are morally formed as holy vessels by being brought into the knowledge of God according to that declaration of His Name which has been made by Christ in resurrection. It is most blessed to see that there is a circle where the Son of God is Minister; to see this gives us a great thought of the assembly — it helps us to realise what He meant in saying, "My assembly"

He ministers to the satisfaction and joy of God His Father, and there are two sides of His ministry. First, He has declared His Father's name to those whom He has sanctified by His death. He has made known God's name in all its blessedness as known by Himself. We know the Father by the One who has glorified Him, and on whom His affections rest. He has brought out all the Father's glory and He is the Object of the Father's love. How the consideration of this takes us outside the circle of our need, and carries us into the circle of the Father's love! He said, "I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare

it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17: 25, 26). It is in this way by the ministry of the Son that we are morally formed as holy vessels for the sanctuary. If the Father's love, and Christ the blessed Object of that love, are in us we are morally qualified for the service of God in His sanctuary. But it is by the ministry of the Son that this is brought about; He is "the minister of the sanctuary"; He orders everything in that holy circle.

Then the other side of His ministry is, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee". There is first the making known the Father's name, and the formation of holy vessels by that revelation, and then there is a response. According to God's Name so is His praise (Psalm 48: 10). The revelation is declared by the voice of the Son, and the response to it is also voiced by Him. Have our souls ever been exercised about entrance into a circle where the voice of the Son of God is heard? He sings in the midst of His brethren who form the assembly. If we are His brethren He is in us, according to John 17: 26 — "I in them". His singing is the suited and divine response to the Father's name and love. If we have a place in the sanctuary it is because we have been formed by the declaration of the Father's name made by the Son, and we are there to hear how the Son praises in the Father's presence, that we may sing as He sings. Do we know anything of what it is to be thus formed and filled by Him who is the "minister of the sanctuary"?

What would a company thus formed and filled be to the Father's heart? It would be a worshipping company such as He seeks (John 4: 23). The Son of God presents His brethren in the sanctuary, all of one with Himself, for the satisfaction of the Father's heart. May we understand better what it is to be His brethren, and to belong to the circle where He ministers. Then we shall know better the meaning of the words, "MY ASSEMBLY".

In conclusion I desire to say a few words about Christ as the great Priest over God's house. He is presented in that character in Hebrews 10: 19 - 22. This is in connection with our privilege of drawing near. God delights to have His saints near to Himself, enjoying the liberty of His house. He has not only manifested His love in the gift of His beloved Son, but He has given the Holy Spirit as the powerful Witness of His love in our hearts. We are assured by a divine Witness of the efficacy of Christ's work, and of the unspeakable love of God as the source of all our blessing. There is not a cloud on the love of God, or a spot on our consciences to keep us from enjoying it. There is nothing to keep us at a distance from the blessed God, but everything to attract us into nearness to Him.

Everything connected with our old state and history was dealt with and removed in the death of Christ, but that is not all. *The revelation of* God has come out in the death of His Son, who came into death, not only to banish every cloud and remove every spot, but in order that there might be a way paved with divine love over which our souls might travel adoringly into nearness to God. It is "a new and living way"; it lives in all the blessedness of divine love, and Christ is the One who has opened it up. He had to remove in holy judgment all that we were, but in the very place where He did so He disclosed the depths of the heart of God, that we might live in the love of God.

The One who has done all this is the "great priest over the house of God". He is the great Centre and power of attraction by which those who love Him are withdrawn from every rival influence and led into the blessed privilege of approach to God. He attracts those whom He has sanctified — His brethren — because they are kindred to Himself, and in being drawn away from everything else to Him they give spiritual evidence of being, in truth, *His assembly*.

It is as we "draw near" that we realise the blessedness of Christ the Son as the "minister of the sanctuary". He leads our hearts into the holy love of God, and into the vast and glorious purposes of that love which find their Centre in Himself and their circumference in a universe of bliss filled by Him with the knowledge and praise of God. He thus secures a company in the intelligence of what is in the mind of God, and knowing the love of God, and therefore capable for the service of God in praise and worship. Thus the House of God is furnished with a company morally suited to its greatness. Nothing less than *Christ's assembly* would be morally suited to the greatness and blessedness of *God's house*. God's house is *filled*, in the sense that there is a company there capable of entering into His mind and the thoughts of His loveable to trace adoringly the perfection of His ways in Christ — and thus able to give Him now the praise and glory that is due to Him. Those who thus fill God's house are the sanctified company of which Christ speaks as "MY ASSEMBLY".

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

I desire to encourage myself and you as to the reality of the presence of the Lord with His own. I believe it is a great characteristic of faith, and particularly in a day of general failure, to stand in the consciousness of this. I do not mean merely holding to the statements of Scripture, or regarding the words in Matthew 18: 20 as a principle or ground of gathering. What we need is to be encouraged in the sense of the Lord's presence in the way of support.

In Matthew 18, the Lord speaks of being with His saints in the way of support. When the Holy One and the True says to Philadelphia, "thou hast a little strength", it is not reproach but commendation. The secret of having strength is the consciousness by the Spirit of the Lord's presence with us. When Paul was before Nero no man stood with him, but he could say, "the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (2 Timothy 4: 17). Others failed him, but the Lord did not fail him. He had the consciousness of being supported by the Lord. We, in our day, are in difficult times, but it is our privilege to be here in the blessed sense of the Lord's support. The Lord is here to support His own. I dare say you have noticed that there is no ascension recorded in Matthew. The Gospel ends with, "lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age". "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" — to support His saints and servants.

There are certain things in the world that are of the deepest interest to the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish we were more conscious how the heart of the glorified One is interested in what is going on down here. His Name is here; His interests are here; and His saints are identified with His Name and His interests. If we are in affection and purpose here for Christ, we need not have any misgiving, however great the difficulties may seem to be. Let us be encouraged in the Lord; He is with His saints. He will not abandon what is so dear to His heart. He takes pleasure in seeing His saints cherishing His Name and interests, and He delights to give them the support of His own presence in so doing. He is with His saints to protect us from the power of evil, and to encourage our hearts in all the blessed resource that is in Himself.

He says, "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18: 19). It is "two of you" — that is, two of Christ's assembly. He had before spoken of His assembly, saying "I will build my assembly, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16: 18). In Christ's assembly no other business is entertained but the interests of Christ. He has called us out from this world that He might entrust us with His interests, and that we

might be wholly for Him in the day of His rejection. And if we ate on this line it is impossible that He should fail to support us. The weaker we are the more necessary and certain is His support if we are set for Him.

May we be more familiar with His blessed presence.