

A
NOTE ON THE
HOUSE OF GOD

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The assembly of God upon earth, whether looked at in its local or general aspect, is His house, and His temple. Viewed *locally*, I Cor. iii, 9 and 16, are Scriptural grounds for the statement. The Corinthian assembly was God's building, and God's temple. Viewing the assembly in its *general* aspect, viz., comprising the whole professing company on earth, I Tim. iii, 15, and II Cor. vi, 16 (accepting the reading there by many accredited as correct, "We are the temple of the living God"), are Scriptural authority for saying that God's assembly on earth is His house, and His temple. As the house it should be ordered as He directs. It is for the owner of the house to say how he will have his own house ordered. Has not God done that for His? As His temple holiness should characterise it. Hence Scripture, not expediency, is our only right guide in this matter.

Viewing the assembly in its general character, as there is but one assembly, so there is but one house. For however many local assemblies there may be on earth, each privileged to call itself God's building and God's temple, when we think of the whole professing body on earth, we think of it as one assembly, one house, and one temple.

Now this truth will be found to throw great light on much that to some seems so perplexing. Since the whole assembly is but one house, and that God's house, it is plain that what He enjoins and approves of in connection with the government and holiness of one part of His house, He will not teach His people to ignore or resist in another. The fact of there being only one house forbids the thought of divergent principles or opposing rules being sanctioned by Him who owns it. Hence, if discipline has been rightly carried out in accordance with Scripture in any local assembly, the members of which form part of the assembly in its general character; and thereby part of the house of

God, the discipline so carried out should be upheld in every part of the house. This is obvious. And were it not that another line of action is by some contended for, it would seem superfluous to insist upon it. It is fully granted that the local assembly should be willing to allow its acts to be examined and its reasons investigated. How could it do otherwise, seeing its members, in common with all other professing Christians, form one assembly and one house on earth?

What, however, has been Scripturally done in one part of the house, should be owned and upheld throughout the house. The figure of the house surely requires this. And what is rightly done will, upon investigation, commend itself as such to the "many" (2 Cor. ii. 6), if party feeling, or self, etc., be not working.

Were this seen a world of misunderstanding would be removed. People talk of other assemblies. This is true in one way; but do not those who thus speak too often forget that the members of *all* the local assemblies *together* form one assembly of God, and one house of God? The existence locally of assemblies must be admitted, and their competency and responsibility to act locally must be upheld, if Scripture is to guide us. But when we get beyond the local into the general, it will not be of assemblies, of houses, or temples that we are to speak, but of the assembly, the house, the temple, if at least our thought and speech are moulded by the divine word. Now who would contend that in any local assembly, after a matter has been Scripturally decided, or discipline carried out in accordance with the word, that those within its limits, who chose it, might ignore all that altogether, and remain in full fellowship with the offender? How would such be regarded? And if they persisted in their course, how would they be treated? it would be a house divided against itself, if such conduct was allowed unchecked. Now a house divided against itself, the highest authority has told us, cannot stand. Shall, then, what would not be permitted in the house viewed *locally*, be permitted in the house viewed *generally*? To ask

the question is surely enough.

Is it not clear now that the term *house of God* is calculated, when thought upon, to condemn that looseness and licence which is but too often pleaded for, under the mistaken thought of showing Christian charity? We should indeed cultivate largeness of heart in the direction of all saints, the largeness of desire for the spread of the Gospel far and wide under heaven. We may need much stirring up as to this. The tendency of man's mind too often is too narrow, and the spirit of man *naturally* is generally a sectarian one. But let it be remembered that we are part of God's house, and we cannot get out of it; hence submission to His word about it is to be rendered, and it is to be understood that contradictory rules and opposing practices in the one house cannot for a moment be entertained.

Doubtless the mass in Christendom has never thought of this. The divided state of the professing body is but too manifest. The re-union of Christendom is a dream, which its advocates will never see realised. All this is fully owned. But are we to advocate a policy of despair? Are we to drift with the tide and to float with the stream? Is the house of God upon earth? So long, then, as it remains, it is for us to own it, and to act in accordance with Scriptural teaching in connection with it, and, as we can, to help others to learn about it also. It is a key which can unlock more than one difficulty; and it can be a guide to souls in perplexity as to Christian fellowship, in more ways than one. It is a house, so opposing rules cannot be sanctioned in it. It is God's house, so His mind about it should be sought for in His word; and this last thought should surely guard us from settling down into quiet indifference, as was the case in the time of the judges in Israel.

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