

The
Disciples' Conduct during
Christ's Absence.

NOTES OF ADDRESSES

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LONDON :
G. MORRISH, 20, PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

1900.

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THE DISCIPLES CONDUCT DURING CHRIST'S ABSENCE.

I.

THE PERIOD OF CHRIST'S ABSENCE.

(MARK XIII.)

I AM not going, beloved friends, to give you a prophetic lecture from this chapter, though there is prophecy in it: for the main subject is not, as in Matthew xxiv., prophetic and dispensational; it more refers to the *conduct* of Christ's disciples in the circumstances mentioned in it. It depicts three distinct periods between the Lord being rejected here and His coming again. We are in one of those periods at the present moment, as I will seek to shew you presently. There are also three things which concern us because we are in this moment of our Lord's rejection.

The three periods are (1) the period of the overthrow of God's centre upon earth, it was consummated at the destruction of Jeru-

salem ; (2) a very indefinite period as to duration, briefly described as a time of wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom—earthquakes, famines and troubles. This state of things goes on indefinitely. (3) We reach a very definite moment marked out by the setting up of the abomination of desolation. This leads to that special period of tribulation which immediately precedes the coming of the Son of man. This period is referred to in Hebrews xii., “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven ; and this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” The Spirit of God draws from it a very great inference for us, “Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved (or shaken) let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” The immovable elements of that kingdom are the righteousness, faithfulness and truth of God.

I will now briefly mention the three things which concern our conduct as Christ's servants. The Lord first warns His disciples that many would come saying, “I am Christ,” and would deceive many. No doubt in the early days there were those who personally set up to be Christ ;

such a thing would not affect us, but we are warned elsewhere as to the principle and spirit of Antichrist, and I will try and shew you directly how the Lord's warning here affects us. The second thing is that the Holy Ghost is here to render testimony to Christ. The disciples are first warned against the pretension of that which is *not* Christ, and then they would be enabled in the most difficult circumstances to bear testimony for Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. This testimony is only alluded to in our chapter in an elementary way. It was when the Lord was pleased to convert the apostle Paul that the testimony of Christ in heaven was fully brought out, and that is the special testimony for this moment in which we share in the rejection of Christ. The third thing is that we are to watch for the return of the coming One, knowing neither the day nor the hour when God may shake everything, and close up the history of the world as it now is. This age is not closed up as some imagine by the universal reception of the gospel, though it is to be published among all nations, but by the shaking of everything that can be shaken. The powers of the heaven as it affects the earth will be shaken, but we know One who is above the heavens, and we wait for Him. Meanwhile we get the intimation that we belong to His house. The Master of the

house has given authority to His servants, to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

It was an immense thing for God's centre on the earth to be overthrown. I have no doubt the Jews, and even the disciples themselves, could not think it possible that the temple would be overthrown. The Lord had owned it as the temple of God, but now He says that not one stone should be left on another that should not be thrown down. He went out of it, and foretold its overthrow; and now that God's centre on earth has been thrown down, there is no other place owned of God. If you are looking for anything stable upon earth, and yet that which God Himself established has been overthrown, is there anything else going to be stable upon earth? I say it is impossible to look for stability upon earth, *God's* foundation remains sure, but that is His purpose in Christ, and Christ is rejected from the earth. In the end of chapter xii. the Lord asks the scribes to give the explanation of what the Holy Ghost had written, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool." Christ being rejected here, and sitting at God's right hand, God's centre is transferred from earth to heaven. Everything now centres in Christ at God's right hand, our life is there, and we are to

seek the things that are there. The epistle to the Hebrews gives us the present character of heaven, it is looked at as a tabernacle, the true tabernacle which God has pitched for His own Son to minister in. Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands which are a figure of the true, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us. The saints now, as builded together for a habitation of God by the Spirit, get their heavenly character from Christ in heaven. The assembly is a "heavenly thing." How are you going to put different nationalities together—Boer and Englishmen? (I speak of what is going on now; then it was Jew and Gentile.) To get them together they must both be lifted on to heavenly ground; that which is so opposed can only be together thus. God's centre being in heaven, where the Lord Jesus has entered, He is the minister of heavenly things, and saints of whatever nationality take their character as heavenly from Him. The One who ministers to them and for them is in heaven.

The moment people seek to connect the church with the earth, that moment they have lost the true character of the church. It arises from this, that they assume that Christ is still connected with the earth, whereas He has been rejected there. A heavenly Christ is not in

honour on the earth. The moment He left the only place on earth that God owned, and went and sat on the Mount of Olives opposite, He foretold the judgment of the place where He had been rejected. They at Jerusalem crucified Him, and now all is transferred from earth to heaven, and the church is here to set forth morally what is in heaven.

By many people the Lord Jesus is looked at to-day merely as a good Man (it is a Unitarian idea), and by incarnation linked with and Head of Adam's race. They think that the present order of man is to be exalted and set up through connection with Christ. This is the spirit of Antichrist, and it is falsehood as to Christ. It began in the apostles' days, and has worked out in two ways, one is that christian profession has gone out into the world, with the result that you have a christianised world, a world with the name of Christ put upon it. If you speak to unconverted people of the world to-day, they say we are all Christians: we are not Mahomedans or heathens. The apostle John speaks of many antichrists who "went out from *us*," that is, they went out into the world from the bosom of apostolic Christianity. Jude, in his epistle, speaks of ungodly men who crept in among Christians, and therefore you get in the second place a worldly Christianity. That is the effect of the

working of the spirit of Antichrist and of the mystery of iniquity.

My heart often aches for young people, for I see the tendency to gloss over things of this world. Beloved young Christians, if you love Christ you have to take home the fact that the Christ you love has been rejected here ; glossing over the world with the name of Christ does not alter it. It is the world, though it is not characterised by the horrors of heathenism, but by the fair garment of nominal Christianity. We have not any yet so hardy as to say, "I am Christ," but the spirit of Antichrist is at work to falsify the truth of the Christ. When I speak of *the* Christ, it means *the anointed Man*. If I think of Him as Lord, that is the divine side ; but when I look at Him as the Christ, I think of Him as God's anointed Man, and as exalted God has made Him Lord and Christ. Having been rejected here, He is in heaven exalted to the right hand of God. His body is actually here, but His body must have His own heavenly character. The saints who compose it are necessarily heavenly, united to a heavenly Christ.

The second thing is that we are in the moment of disquiet upon earth. When the Lord was born into the world, the angels said, "Peace on earth." He did bring peace here, hence when

sending out His disciples He said, "When ye enter into a house say, Peace be to this house, and if the son of peace be there your peace shall rest upon it ; if not, it shall turn to you again." The son of peace was not here, and therefore you find in Luke xii. the Lord says, "Think you that I am come to send peace on earth ? I tell you, nay." The name of Christ became the watchword, not for peace, but for division between those most closely allied. Instead of a state of peace upon earth, all is disquiet. We find it to-day, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. I do not want to occupy your minds with passing events, but with the conduct of Christ's disciples in the midst of the disquietude of this second period.

I believe that in a way it is of the goodness of God that now Christ is rejected, there should be this period more or less characterised by disquiet. Man cannot settle down here in peace ; we need not be distressed at the overturning of things here, the great thing for us is to be a testimony for the blessed Man at God's right hand. When He comes there will be the convulsion and shaking of everything in this world, and then He will establish peace as the effect of righteousness, but it has no resting place in the world now, it is only found in Him. I would ask you to look outside the scene of this world

in the consciousness that everything here is going to be shaken, but we are set for the testimony of the kingdom that cannot be shaken, and that in the power of the Holy Ghost. God's foundation is stable, and His purpose is secure. "The counsel of the Lord, that shall stand," but I do not believe there is anything stable at the present time in this world. The testimony to Christ may have to be maintained in feebleness, it was so in Zechariah's day. The returned remnant were a feeble company, and Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel were not in honour, but Zechariah was privileged to look behind the whole range of events taking place on earth, and see Israel as in the mind of God connected with the coming Priest and King. It is an immense thing for saints in this day, feeble though we may be, to be set for the testimony of a heavenly Christ in the power of the Holy Ghost. (See 2 Tim. i. 7, 8.) When our eyes are lifted up to heaven to see the glory of Christ, then we bear testimony not merely by word, but we become descriptive of Him here, through being transformed into His image.

I do not want to trace the course of events on earth, the point for me is that the Holy Ghost is here to sustain the church witnessing for Christ—a Christ who is rejected here, accepted in heaven and coming again—so that the testi-

mony to Christ's exaltation should be maintained here in the power of the Holy Ghost. The way in which we shall be able, however feeble we may be, to be witnesses for Him is by being responsive to His own love. We shall be separate from the world as we are drawn to Him. The true separating power is love. We are in the period of disquiet on earth because the son of peace is not here, but it is our privilege to live in the region of peace, because there is peace in heaven. We need not defile our spirits with what is going on in the world. Not that we should be indifferent to it, but we need not *feed* upon the events taking place, whatever they are. Big schemes are being advanced by man's pride, and great wars take place, but God has written that all that can be shaken will be shaken. Our occupation is with Christ in heaven and His interests upon earth, these now centre in the church.

In 1 Corinthians i. we read of the church at Corinth, that "the testimony of the Christ" was confirmed among them, it embraced what is set forth in the exalted Man at God's right hand. Then in Ephesians ii. we read that Jew and Gentile are builded together for a habitation of God by the Spirit, all the enmity is gone; and in chapter iii. we get the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ consists in Jew and Gentile

being a joint body, and that Christ's body, in which the unsearchable riches of the Christ are set forth. The habitation of God is, so to speak, the place where the mystery of Christ is housed, the unsearchable riches of the Christ which Paul preached to the Gentiles are known there. As of old the tabernacle had the ark of testimony in it, so the testimony of the Christ is in the church; as the house of God it contains the mystery of Christ. Christ is set forth in His body, the church. In chapter iv. we have the truth in Jesus, the having put off the old man and the having put on the new; Jesus died in order that it might be effected, so that in the one new man created in Christ out of Jew and Gentile, there might be a truthful testimony for God as to Christ.

We may be feeble, but the great point for us is not outward power, but inward affection. I would like Christ's challenge to Peter to come home to every heart, "Lovest thou me?" and surely our response would be "Thou knowest that I love thee." The Holy Ghost is here to maintain the testimony but He operates in the divine nature, that is, by love. It is in a very incipient way that it comes out in this chapter that the disciples were to be here in testimony, and that the Holy Ghost would speak in them; still it indicates that this period is a time of

testimony in the midst of all that goes on, and that the Holy Ghost is the power for it.

The third thing is the period of universal convulsion; the actual shaking is yet to come, but we have prophetic light as to the fact that everything will be shaken. "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken." We are also in the light of God's testimony that everything set up here by man shall be overthrown. (Isaiah xxiv.) Christ having been rejected we are in the second and indefinite period, but we are to watch not for events but for Him who is about to shake not only earth but heaven. We need not forecast events, God brings all about in His own way. We know that the Latin empire will be revived, but apparently it was never more weak than at the present time. There are many Christians who shew extraordinary interest in the going back at this moment of many Jews to Palestine, but if I see God's hand in casting down Jerusalem and scattering the Jews because of the rejection of His Son, how can I think that He has any hand in gathering them back while they are unrepentant, and still reject Jesus as Christ. Well meaning people take it up, because they do not recognise Christ's rejection here. All will

be shaken, and the effect of being in the light of Christ at the right hand of God, is that we wait for *Him*. He is to us the Morning Star. The Morning Star is not prophetic light, but Christ *Himself*, the harbinger of the day of which prophecy speaks.

In connection with our position of watching for Him, the Lord gives His servants their occupation. They are not to be occupied with events, but with His house, "to every man his work." I have already referred to God's house, it is the place where the testimony of Christ is treasured; Israel had the testimony of Jehovah committed to them, and there were two ways in which they had to care for it. They had to keep the charge of His tabernacle when it rested, and to march with it through the wilderness; thus they carried the testimony of Jehovah onward to the land. All that is figurative. The church now has the testimony of the Christ, the Son of God. The Lord is now within the veil, but the day of manifestation will come. The heavens will open for the revelation of the glory of the Son of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. The unsearchable riches of the Christ are displayed in it, and the church now has the testimony of that which is to be displayed, and is set here to be descriptive of Christ. Consequently He is the measure of everything for

us, "As he is so are we in this world." Is it sanctification? He is our sanctification—the only measure of our separation from the world to God. Is it righteousness? He is our righteousness in the presence of God, and we could have no other measure down here. Is it love? The Lord prayed that "the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." The Son dwelling in the Father's love, and the Father's love resting on the Son, that is the love we are given to know. God's work in the saints is to this end, that we should grow up into Christ in all things. The Spirit is the link with Christ, and as to the individual saint, he is formed in Christ by the Spirit; the labour of the apostle was to present every man perfect in Christ. But the assembly is that in which Christ is formed; and so is built up in the divine nature. It is in loving one another that the divine nature is in activity.

All this makes the house of God a great thing for our souls to enter into, we are brought to a company that is morally outside the world, a company who are heavenly in character. It would have a great effect upon us if we all had the sense of belonging to the heavenly Man. "As is the heavenly [one] such also are they that are heavenly." In the death of Christ we realise circumcision, that we are cut off from the

man that is here, that we might belong to the Man who is there. It is wonderful grace, that God should give us service in His house. We have our daily occupation, and perhaps with many the greatest portion of our available time is spent in the daily routine of secular employment, but where is our chief interest? When Israel were redeemed and brought out of Egypt their chief interest was the tabernacle, though each Israelite had his own tent and family to care for. But they pitched around God's habitation, and compassed it before and behind as they accompanied it to Canaan. Our great interest is the house of God as we move on to heaven. It is there in heaven that peace is. The word Jerusalem signifies "the vision of peace." Jerusalem on earth was overthrown, and all here is disquiet and unrest, and the vision of peace is in Jerusalem above.

There is a double aspect of the house of God given us in Hebrews iii. It is looked at as a habitation "built by some one," and it is looked at as a household, "whose house are we." In material things we speak of a house as an enclosed building, and we speak also of the people who inhabit it as forming the house, and that is by far the most important. So we get the idea in scripture of a sacred enclosure (not now a material one), but it is realised in the

gathering together of the saints. When the Lord was going away "He gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." I would recall one of Mr. Stoney's last words to me—to press upon all, even the youngest believer, that they should seek to know their place in the body of Christ—what their function is as members of His body. There is a niche for each one to fill in the house of God. Do not seek for place in this world where Christ is rejected; you have in daily life to fill a niche of work in some way, but what niche do you fill in the house of God? Some may think that the interests of the house of God belong only to the older saints, but do you not sit among them in the meeting, and if it were only that you can take a message of love to a sick saint, do not say there is no place of service for you in the house of God. We have the place of children, and so belong to the house. I constantly exhort the young to cleave to the company of the saints, to keep to the meeting. The assembly is the place of the testimony of Christ while we wait for His coming.



II.

THE OUTWARD ASPECT OF THE HOUSE OF GOD.

(1 TIM. i. 1-20.)

WHAT is before me is to speak a little upon the House of God. I think there are two aspects of it given us in scripture, the outer and the inner. Perhaps some may wonder that I do not take the inner aspect first, but I desire to follow on that which was before us last week ; the outer aspect of the house of God would follow that more directly.

We may look at ourselves as the worshipping company, and that is what I may call the *inside* of the house of God ; or we may regard ourselves as those who are set to shew forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. In other words, the outside aspect of the house of God is connected with the conduct of those who are of it. This first epistle to Timothy takes up the conduct befitting

the house of God, not the inward privileges of the worshipping company—what we are as sons before the Father—but what we are set for down here, that is, to exhibit the character of God in this world, God was perfectly presented to man in Christ, and the conduct of the household of God, called godliness or piety, is to take its character from Christ.

Last week I sought to conduct you along the line which the Lord indicated that events would take between the time of His rejection, and the consequent overthrow of all that was connected with the name of God upon earth—and His coming again. There were three points which I brought before you and now recall. One, that we have to maintain the doctrine of Christ. Immediately Christ was severed by death from this earth, and took a heavenly position, the effort of Satan was anti-Christian, that is, he sought to falsify the heavenly position of Christ, and to connect the Lord with the existing state of things on earth. We find in John's epistle that one character of what is anti-Christian is, that it went out into the world from the bosom of apostolic Christianity—"They went out from us," says the apostle, "because they were not all of us." In the Epistle of Jude we find on the contrary that ungodly men crept in among the saints, and we saw that on the one

hand there is a world Christianised in name, and on the other, a worldly Christianity. The heavenly character of Christ now that He has been separated from this world by death is denied, and the attempt is made to improve the world by attaching to it the name of Christ. We are set here for testimony to the fact that Christ has been rejected here, and that we know Him in glory.

The second thing I spoke of was, that during the time of the Lord's absence, and while we were set here in testimony for Him, the Holy Ghost is the power from Christ to maintain down here what is true of Him. We are not here for the schemes and plans of this world, its upheavals and wars we are apart from, they are under the overruling hand of God ; we are to bear testimony for a rejected Christ in the power of the Holy Ghost.

The third thing I sought to bring before you was, that we are set here to watch for the Lord's return, as those having the consciousness that He is not of this world. We are regarded as a household, and the Master of the house has given to each his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

In 1 Timothy we get the activities of the house of God, and a large place is given to the conduct and behaviour of Christians. Every

one ought to feel what an important subject that is, because it is by our conduct that the character of God is set forth. The conduct of the household of God is formed after Christ. He perfectly set forth God in this world, and we are to be imitators of God as beloved children, but Christ is the measure of everything for us in our conduct.

I would lay stress upon the great fact that has been before us, that the Lord has died out of this scene and is in heaven, and therefore the present dispensation must of necessity be in faith. Let me say that the words rendered "godly edifying" (ver. 4) should read, "God's dispensation," and then it is added, "which is in faith." When the Lord was here, no doubt there was faith in Him, but it was faith in a person present, so that the apostles could speak of what they had heard and seen and contemplated of the word of life. They had been in His company, but when He was going away He said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." When the Lord was here they believed on Him as the Sent One of the Father, but now that He has gone to heaven Christians believe on One whom they do not see; the dispensation of God is in faith.

We can never have again what took place when the Lord was here. We have the record

of the Lord's ministry and history, but that can never be gone over again though its effect abides. Take for instance John v. 24 : " He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come in condemnation, but is passed from death unto life ;" the point of the verse is believing through Christ's own word that the Father sent the Son. That moment cannot recur again. They actually heard the Lord speaking ; they heard the words of the Sent One of the Father. We have the record of this by the apostles, as also in 1 John i. of what they saw in the Lord here, but we believe on Him received up in glory.

So the Lord coming into the midst of His own, as in John xx. on the evening of the resurrection day. That can never be literally known to us. We have all that was involved in that action. It was the fulfilment of what He had said. " I will come to you." (John xiv. 18.) He did come to them and breathed into them, and spiritually His people have never lost His presence as having so come to them. We realise it when gathered together, not literally as they did, but as having the Spirit *we* are enabled to enjoy what the Lord said *to them*, " I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." We are all witnesses to-day that the presence

of the Lord given to His disciples on the resurrection day has never been taken from His people. The joy He gave them remains to us, and we enter into it by the Spirit. The presence of the Spirit is characteristic of the dispensation of God which is in faith; it must of necessity be in faith, therefore we have to do with unseen things, and the Lord Jesus Christ is known in glory.

Now the dispensation being in faith makes a great difficulty for many souls, because we are so apt to sink down into the seen things of this world. There is not the consciousness of what the Lord said to His disciples, "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." We are defective in apprehending the desire of the Lord to bring us into association with Himself on resurrection ground. However much we may hold that the Lord is in the midst of two or three gathered to His name, no one realises it without being in faith on resurrection ground in association with Christ. Faith enters into the truth of Christ's resurrection; but we have more in chapter iii. He has been received up in glory. The light of God shone in Christ here, "God was manifested in flesh:" now it shines in Him glorified. He has taken a place in glory entirely outside the course and order of this world, a heavenly place,

and our conduct has to be governed by the light of Christ in glory. People no doubt believe that Christ is in heaven, but how far is that light in our souls. We see how the light of Christ in heaven waned in the parable of the ten virgins. All slumbered and slept unconscious that there was an absent Bridegroom, and they sank down into sleep among the things of this world. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the Lord has no place in this world, every link with it is broken for Him by death. All His links with His people are in resurrection. I could not understand *the fellowship* of the Lord's supper, except as consequent on His rejection. It was on the *night of His betrayal* that He took bread and wine and gave to His disciples, thus associating them together in the fellowship of His death. Then He spoke to them of His resurrection, and that now forms the basis of faith in our souls.

The Lord is in heaven, and the dispensation of God down here is in faith. This puts our souls in the light of heaven, and the glory of Christ there. Even the gospel is the gospel of the glory. The glory is going to be displayed, but by faith we perceive the heavenly system of things established consequent on Christ being at the right hand of God. The moment that was lost sight of, people turned back to law

to regulate conduct down here, there were already those who desired to be law-teachers. To regulate conduct by law instead of by Christ is a snare to many, though people do not see the insidiousness of it.

Now in view of this the apostle Paul besought Timothy to abide in Ephesus, that he might charge some to teach no other doctrine, and he adds, "Now the end of the commandment [or charge] is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned." What I see in that is, first, that there must be a new bottle for the new wine. A pure heart is a new bottle. What God promised to Israel in contrast to their condition under law was, that He would sprinkle clean water upon them; and not only cleanse them from their iniquities, but give them a new heart and put a right spirit within them. Then further, that He would put His laws into their hearts, and in their minds would He write them. What we have there is not the law in its letter given them to keep, but what lay in principle underneath the law, love in their hearts, the divine nature; so we have here the principle, not of law-keeping, but love out of a pure heart. We cannot set forth the character of God in this world, except as our hearts become the vessels of God's love, shed abroad by the Holy Ghost; but this necessitates new birth and the renewing

of the Holy Ghost. People think that conduct is that which merely affects themselves, whereas our conduct is that in which the character of the blessed God is to be set forth. The household of God is the place where divine affections flow, and our conduct should bear the impress of them.

Sometimes the question is raised of the right or wrong of such a thing, and whether there is harm in this or that. The question comes from a wish in self to do this or that, and it is pleaded for; it is not love out of a pure heart. When God begins in a soul it is newborn—then the Spirit sheds abroad God's love in the heart, and there is a new bottle for the new wine of divine love. For our conduct to be properly regulated, it is necessary for our hearts to be in association with Christ in the knowledge of divine love. There are two more things spoken of in verse 5, "a good conscience" and "faith unfeigned." A good conscience is, that you have been brought to God in the sense that according to His righteousness there is nothing between yourself and Him. The blessed God Himself has taken up the question of your sins and guilt, and by the blood of Christ He has brought you to Himself with a good conscience. Faith unfeigned is not merely the belief of certain doctrines as truth, while the history of the

soul is not in accordance, but it is that the light of God shines in the soul, so that we should be true to what we believe. This is all according to the dispensation of God which is in faith.

The apostle then for a moment speaks of the law. It was useful to convict a man, it was made for the unholy and profane and the like; and then he adds as to conduct: "And if there be any other thing which is contrary to sound doctrine according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." In connection with that I would refer to Romans iii. 23: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "All have sinned," declares that all have transgressed God's will; with the Jew it was positive transgression of a command, with the Gentile, his conscience bore witness to the work of the law written in his heart, and he violated conscience, so that all are brought in guilty before God. But there was another thing, that Christ having died and risen again God has been fully revealed. The veil has been rent, and God's glory has been fully manifested, that is, morally. The Lord Jesus Christ came in humiliation, and the divine glory was veiled in Him here; but the moment He died, God rent the veil, and every attribute of the divine glory shone forth, because every attribute had been morally glorified. This

necessarily raised the question as to whether man could stand in the light of glory—he could not, he is short of it, so that the point is not merely of right and wrong, but of meeting the divine glory. Now this comes home very close to us. Every one believing in the work of Christ is clear for heaven as to their sins, and if called on to die you would have no question about your acceptance; but in meeting the question of death there is often reserve, and why? The fact is that with many there is the allowance of things which are unsuited to our heavenly calling and the glory of God. There is an instinctive feeling that many things should be dropped, while we may have no question about our title to go to heaven.

Now that raises another question as to our capability to set forth the character of God's household, if we allow what is contrary to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. With the principle of law-keeping there is only the attempt to approve self. It is not the heart associated with Christ in divine affections. The light of God's glory has shone for us, for God has been glorified in Him, and we need to run up the shining way in spirit to Christ. We can lift up our hearts in righteousness to Him where He is, and then be for Him here. The words, "any other thing that is contrary to

sound doctrine, according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God," are of great importance for us.

The household of God is the witness of *a present salvation*. Many people understand by a present salvation, present assurance of final salvation in the future. It may be perfectly true that you may be as sure of heaven as if you were there, but the effect of a present salvation is to bring you to the house of God. You will seek the company of those that belong to Christ, as bound up in life with that company, and saved out of the whole course of this world, and in association with Christ as Son over God's house. In John x. it is not the figure of a household but of a flock. In putting forth His sheep the Lord led them out from their former associations, then He said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Enter into where? Into the company of Christ. This runs along with the truth of the house of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is Son over God's house, and He is our Saviour. When He was glorified, the Holy Ghost came down and formed the house, and dwells in it. The Spirit of God is the witness of a present salvation, that we are severed from the world and attached to Christ. You could not go on with the course

of things in this world, if you were in the truth of the house of God.

Now the apostle himself was the pattern of the salvation of the chief of sinners. He was converted by the glory of Christ shining upon him when he was a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious. In the light of the glory he said, "I am the chief of sinners." But the glory not only converted him, it appropriated him; when he received his sight, he saw things down here in the light of the glorified Man who had laid hold of him. He was the witness of salvation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He belonged to Christ. The Jews to whom Christ came with the promises rejected Him; Paul was a pattern for them in the last days, they refused Christ in the flesh, but He has been exalted in glory. Stephen saw Him there, and afterward Paul. The generation of the Jews of that day refused the testimony of Christ's glory, but for any who believed, the church associated with Christ in glory became the place of safety, the city of refuge, for those who had killed their Messiah. In the last day they will look upon Christ coming in glory, and be converted. Paul is the pattern man of the gospel. And the house of God now is not the place of the testimony of law, but of the gospel

of the glory of God according to the pattern of Paul. The household of God are witnesses of a Saviour God to all men. "Who will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth."

In chapter ii. the apostle shews another character of the house of God, not only is there present salvation, but they have the privilege of prayer for all men. Men are to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. They are to pray for kings, and for all that are in authority, as well as for all men. In John's epistle the apostle carries the saints on from point to point up to the consciousness of having eternal life in the Son of God, and then shews the place of intelligent prayer. They are brought, so to speak, over Jordan, into the sense of having life beyond death, and then into the place of prayer and intercession. To pray for all men is another aspect of the grace of God as characterising His household.

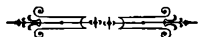
The thought of "all men" leads to the apostle saying, there is one God. There had been the idea that every nation had its own god, but the testimony of the house of God is that the Saviour God is one God for all men, and that the Mediator between God and *men*, not between God and the Jews, is One also, the Man Christ

Jesus, who gave Himself for all, the testimony for its own peculiar time, that is, now. Mark, it is not between men and God, but between God and men. If God was to *approach* men, it must be by a Mediator; the Lord Jesus Christ became Man for this.

In the end of chapter iii. it comes out very clearly that the apostle's subject is the conduct in the house of God. "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in the house of God, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth." (New Trans.) This leads him to speak of the mystery of godliness, or piety. I rather like the word godliness because it connects piety with the name of God. The assembly of the *living* God is an important point, it is easy to have an idea of God without being in the faith of the *living* God. You will find men in Christendom to-day, men of education and intellect, who do not admit the *living* God. They would not admit His intervention in the things of the world He made. They admit natural laws or providence, but not the living God; now the house of God is the assembly of the living God, where the activity of God's Spirit is. Furthermore, it is the pillar and support of the truth. The church is the pillar on which is plainly inscribed (that is its normal character) the truth of God.

Nothing can be a greater witness of the living God than that He raised Christ from the dead, and in chapter vi. 13 He is spoken of as holding all things in life, but the church is the vessel of the activity of the living God. It is the place of the Spirit's power, and the place where the testimony of the living God is seen. It is not as with Israel of old the testimony put into an ark, but the testimony is seen in the conduct and walk of the saints. It is in the saints that the testimony is living. What ought to be seen in us is that we are separated from this world, and attached to Christ in heaven. Now the secret of piety, of godly walk and ways in the house of God is, first, that God has been manifested in the flesh. If you had asked a Jew as to the secret of piety, he would have said—the law; but for us it is Christ. He was down here in all the circumstances in which we are, and in all of them God was manifested. In every miracle, and in every word He spoke there was divine fulness, for God was there manifested in a very man, and God is love. He was manifested in *flesh*, but justified in *spirit*, His flesh was a veil behind which was hidden His true glory as a divine Person, hence it was only apprehended in a spiritual way, and He was vindicated fully as a divine Person according to the spirit of holiness in which He lived and acted and moved as a Man

here and rose again. "Seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles." Before, the Jews alone had the deposit of the testimony of God, and Christ Himself did not come to the Gentiles, but now all that is connected with the manifestation of God in Christ is proclaimed to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world, not merely in the limited sphere of Judaism. The final thing in the mystery of godliness is, that He who was manifest in flesh has been received up into glory. There is a glorified Man in heaven who was here in flesh setting God forth. Now Man is before God in glory in His Person. The knowledge of the truth connected with Christ is the secret of our conduct in the house of God. Christ is the measure of everything for us. We see Him in humiliation down here, and we see His place in glory according to the counsels of God. What a wide range of testimony belongs to the house of God—the pillar and support of the truth. May the Lord give us to walk in the secret power of the truth for His name's sake, but the culminating point for us is that He has been received up into glory.



III.

THE HOUSE OF GOD : ITS INWARD ASPECT.

(PSA. XCII. ; EPH. III. 1-21.)

WHAT I sought to shew you last week was the way in which the character of God is to be known in the conduct of His household ; that God's house in this world is that from which the light of His grace goes forth. If you consider it, it was wonderful grace that in the midst of the world where His Son had been rejected by the Jew, and where there was gross darkness as to God and idolatry among the Gentiles, God should have built a house in which there should be the light of God, and that the light should come out in the saints who compose His household. The Lord, when here, said, " As long as I am in the world, I am in the light of the world," but only those who followed Him had the light, and the light itself set in the darkness of His rejection and death, so far as the world was concerned ; it had rejected the light, hence it was wonderful

grace in the ways of God that the light of Christ should be continued in His household, and among the Gentiles it shone in a peculiar manner. The light of the glory of Christ was deposited in the house of God—the testimony of the exalted and glorified Man. In Paul we saw that the light of glory had shone into the heart of the chiefest of sinners, so that he became the pattern of the gospel of the glory of God, which shone forth for sinners when Christ had been rejected on earth. But the real power of the testimony lies in the saints being transformed by the light which shines in Christ, so that the light should shine forth from them.

I now turn to the two scriptures before us. I read the passage in Psalm xcii. to bring before you the idea of being *planted* in the house of God. It is not merely that you belong to it, but the point of the passage is being *planted* there. A great many Christians are satisfied in knowing that they belong to the house of God, they are part of His assembly. In Israel there were three classes—priests, Levites and the people. Without question, the priestly family had their portion and place in the house of God; each priest might have his own family, and tent, but their service and occupation was in the tabernacle. The people were represented there by the high priest, but they could only come to the door—

they were not planted in the house of the Lord. Aaron and his sons ministered for them. Then if you remember, every Israelite had his memorial in the tabernacle, the silver sockets being made of the atonement money taken from them when they were numbered as among the people of God. Each owed his position as one of the Lord's people to redemption. Now many a Christian goes no further than this, he is content with being numbered as among the people of God, he has, so to speak, his memorial in the house of God. Many a Christian does not accept the privilege of his priestly position in association with Christ. All here will admit that on the Lord's day morning we are in the assembly as priests, but are we to drop down to the level of the common people in Israel? I believe it is true—once a priest always a priest. We may have ordinary duties to do, so had a priest in Israel; but I should greatly deprecate the idea of being merely content with being numbered among the people of God, and having a memorial in His house. The people went up to the door of the tabernacle occasionally, but a priest was planted there. Many a Christian attends the meeting who does not realise what it is to be planted in the house of God. There cannot be real growth in the things of the Lord, unless we have the sense of being *planted* in the house of

the Lord. It is there the saints grow in the knowledge of God and in divine affections. You have come under another Headship, when you really see that God has transferred you from Adam to Christ, as the priestly family were under the headship of Aaron. I may have to attend to my occupation or my family, but my privilege is to be planted in the house of God.

It is of immense importance to see this. The apostle sought to impress the saints at Corinth with their privileges. They were the assembly of God—called to the fellowship of His Son—the temple of God—Christ's body. Such were the characteristics of God's assembly, but they were not up to it, and consequently their conduct was not at all suited to the temple of God, nor did they act as being one body, and that Christ's body. Now we may be shocked at the disgraceful conduct of the Corinthians, they took too much wine, and feasted when they came together to break bread. We cannot fall into that, because the Lord's supper has been separated from any other meal; but when we come to the Lord's supper, do we never bring what is of ourselves there. Is there no intrusion of the flesh? No inconsistency with the fellowship of the death of Christ? That death must judge all that is of the flesh, and hence in his first epistle the apostle seeks to affect the Corinthians by

the cross and death of Christ, shewing them that the fellowship of His death excluded the flesh. Then in the second epistle he seeks to recover them by the grace of God, and to bring them to the contemplation of the glory of the Lord. It was a point which they had not reached. Let me here say a word as to this. I do not for a moment doubt but that we do reach certain stages in the history of our christian experience. There would be no growth if we did not, but it is not by legal effort that we make any progress, but by the *grace of God* working with us, so as to *bring us* to each point, though in our experience we do reach that point. I say this for the young that you may not be disheartened. We have all to learn, and the same grace which has provided everything in Christ for us, also works with us to give us the apprehension of grace. It was by the grace of God that the apostle sought first to bring before the Corinthians how God had established everything in Christ. There is no possibility of breakdown there, all is yea and amen. Then he says, "Now he that stablisheth us with you in Christ and hath anointed us is God." Now that was very wonderful, "*us with you.*" Some one might think, Ah, the apostle, he was faithful, and he was far before the Corinthians in his christian experience. Yes, but God in grace

established, or firmly attached both the apostle and the failing Corinthians to Christ. The apostle had long learnt his own nothingness, and the Corinthians had to learn it, and we have each to learn it, but God in grace firmly attaches us to Christ, the yea and amen of all His promises. If you see that nothingness is attached to Christ, then it is that you are connected with all the fulness in Him, and it is wonderful company, "us with you." Further, he says, "hath anointed us," to bring us under divine teaching. "Who also hath sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." It was in that way the apostle sought to plant them, to establish them in grace.

They might have a feeble apprehension of the house of God, but when a soul is planted—firmly attached to Christ, it can go on to apprehend what is in Him. A tree is planted before it can grow, and it must be planted in suitable soil in order that it may flourish. "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." It is not enough for any soul to know that it is numbered among the people of God, I want to press on you what it is to be planted in the house of the Lord. It is what follows on being transferred from Adam to Christ—you are firmly attached to Christ. Peter was according to nature "Simon the son of

Jonas," but his name "Peter" was given him by Christ; he was to belong to another order, and be part of another building than that of the house of Israel. Jacob had his name Israel confirmed to him in connection with Bethel—the house of God. Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, but all that he counted loss for Christ. Whatever we belonged to in nature, now we have been transferred from Adam to Christ, in order that we might be planted in the house of God. The moment we reach that point in our souls, that we have been transferred by God's grace from Adam to Christ, we come under another Head, and we are to grow up into Christ—rooted and grounded in Him. That for us answers to Psalm xcii. "Planted in the house of the Lord." Then really we begin to grow and flourish in the things of Christ. We have our place in the sphere of the Spirit's operations. Many are more at home in another sphere of things. Hence it has been said, that the energy of the Spirit is more taken up with correcting us, and rebuking that which is wrong in us, than in conducting us into the enjoyment and apprehension of what is given us in Christ. The energy of the Spirit according to the divine mind is to strengthen us in the inner man that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we might grow up in the atmosphere of divine love

and purpose. The lusting of the Spirit against the flesh, which so many of us need because the flesh lusts against the Spirit, is not the exercise of the normal energy of the Spirit. The anointing of the Spirit is given to teach us the things that are freely given to us of God. This lifts us above the present scene as those that have their place in the house of God. A very little thing will shew where our thoughts are, whether we are following the course of events in this world, or entering into the purposes of God. As the anointing teaches us we are subdued to Christ, and pass through this world "meek and lowly in heart," having through grace our place in the house of God.

I now come to Ephesians iii. as giving us the inside of God's house, and I do not think we can be true to the character of the household of God as seen outwardly, apart from knowing something of the inside. In chapter ii. the apostle speaks of Jew and Gentile having been quickened together with Christ. All were under death and subject to judgment, but the grace of God had made them to live in that which Christ lives in, as quickened together with Him. He is our life. That is an important point as shewing us the sphere of our life. Then lower down in the chapter, the apostle shews how the Gentiles through the death of Christ had been brought to

have part in the household of God down here, both Jew and Gentile being builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit, and in verse 18 you get what I think corresponds with priestly approach, "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The house of God is not only a spiritual house, but it consists of a priestly company who have access by one Spirit to the Father. That is connected with the sanctuary, the inside of the house of God. The subject of the end of chapter ii. is resumed in the beginning of chapter iv., but the apostle pauses for a moment to shew us what was deposited in the house of God. The third chapter is a parenthesis which treats of this deposit, the truth of the mystery, as made known to the saints by the apostle's ministry.

I would illustrate this by referring to the tabernacle of old. The great deposit there was the ark of the testimony. The ark, no doubt, was a type of Christ, it contained the tables of the covenant on which was written the law, that is, the will of God for the people. In Christ we see One who came to do God's will, God's law was in His heart. Then on the top of the ark was the mercy seat. From thence God's thoughts and purposes were communicated to the Mediator, and on the mercy seat was the blood of propitiation which laid the foundation

for the accomplishment of all that God's will purposed. It was also the place where God's glory rested, as now Christ sustains His glory, it all shines in His face.

But the wonderful thing which constitutes the mystery is that the church is the body of Christ, it is that in which Christ, now that He is hidden in the heavens, is set forth. The church of God is that in which the testimony of the Christ is confirmed or established, this testimony is the great deposit of the house of God. (1 Cor. i. 6.) The apostle also shews in 2 Corinthians iii. that instead of the law written on tables of stone, there is the writing of Christ on the fleshy table of the hearts of the saints by the Spirit. The testimony of the Christ is not only what we hold but what we are, so that in the saints should be set forth the mystery of Christ. Now there could be no setting forth of Christ if He were not Head of the body, the church, the church deriving everything from the Head.

The way in which the apostle introduces this parenthetical chapter is remarkable. He speaks of himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." That involved the great fact that the Lord had been disallowed of men; so Peter speaks of Him in his first epistle, but also as "chosen of God and precious," and living stones are being built up on the stone

disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious. Paul was a prisoner in the hands of the Gentiles through the enmity of the Jews. He had to experience, after Christ had won his heart, what had come out so remarkably in himself—the hatred of the man after the flesh, the religious man, to Christ. As to the flesh Paul could boast, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of a pure genealogy, a keeper of the law, but a thorough rejecter of Christ. He was made a prisoner by the Gentiles when he went to do good to his own nation. It was what had taken place with regard to Christ, He went about doing good in Israel, yet the leaders of the nation condemned Him and delivered Him to the Gentiles to be crucified. Joseph, too, a type of Christ in rejection, when sent by his father to inquire as to the welfare of his brethren, was taken by them and sold into the hands of the Gentiles. In his own person Paul experienced what the hatred is of the man after the flesh to Christ. Then it was given to him to know the Christ who was rejected of man in the most wonderful way. He had seen Him in glory, he knew Him as exalted above every principality and power at God's right hand, and it was given to him to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of the Christ. That which had been hidden in other ages had been made

known to Paul, the mystery of Christ. This mystery was not that the Gentiles should come into the kingdom of God, but that they should be a *joint body* with believing Jews, and that to them should be made known the unsearchable riches of Christ. It is sometimes thought that these unsearchable riches are preached to us in order to meet our need; but it is not here a question of our need but of God's grace. The unsearchable riches of Christ delight the heart of the blessed God. This is spoken of in Proverbs viii. Before man was created Christ the wisdom of God was His delight. Every ray of glory that shines forth from God, all His "many coloured" wisdom (ver. 10) in which He displays Himself, His counsel, His purpose, the thoughts of love divine that flow from His heart, are all expressed in the Christ glorified at His right hand. In the heavenly city we see the reflection of Christ in its many coloured stones, its wall, and its foundations, while the glory of God fills it. When the new Jerusalem descends out of heaven the unsearchable riches of Christ will be in full display, now is the time of the mystery of Christ, and the unsearchable riches are preached to us who are Gentiles, because the church is that joint body of Jews and Gentiles in which all the unsearchable riches of Christ are to come out. Each stone does not shine

with the same colour, but the lustre of each is a reflection of Christ. I might use another figure, that of a beautiful garden, where there is a wealth of colour, and every shade and tint is blended together, but the sun has painted every colour. In looking at it, you are merely looking at the wealth of colour which exists in the sun. So the church receives from Christ that He may be set forth in the saints who compose it.

You can easily imagine what Paul thought of the grace given to him, that he who had been such an opposer of Christ, the chief of sinners, should be the witness of His glory, and preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and that it should be given to him to make all men see what is the fellowship (or rather the administration) of the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God. It was always in His mind to manifest Himself, but in His wisdom He allowed man to fully shew his hatred and opposition to Christ, and when all was morally reduced to nothingness, and the weakness of death in the cross, then God raised Christ from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand, and the light of God's glory shines in Him, and the unsearchable riches of Christ are proclaimed.

Now the house of God is the place where this testimony of the Christ is, and the Spirit

of God who dwells there brings us into the sense of what Christ is, and the love made known to us in Him. His death is our introduction to this happiness. We come into the presence of His love shewn in death for us on the Lord's day morning, and that puts us consciously in touch with Him as raised from the dead, and the unsearchable riches of Christ made known to us in testimony are the portion of our hearts, and thus the house of God becomes known to us as the place of the mystery of Christ.

Now I think you can understand why the apostle prays that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that the Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. The testimony of old, that is the law with its requirements of God from man, was put into an ark, a box overlaid with gold ; but with Christians the Christ is to dwell in our hearts by faith. The ark was the depository of the will of God for Israel, but the church is not a mere depository where the truth is held. Man has tried to make it so, and hence there are articles of faith and systems of doctrine, and the attempt to reduce Christianity to a religious system. But what we have here is Christ dwelling in the heart. It is not any longer a box overlaid with gold, but the hearts of the saints which become a *dwelling place* for Christ. A dwelling place is

for that which is living, Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, not for a system of doctrine. Faith is that which perceives His glory, and gives Him a place in the heart. That gives us a great idea as to the inside of the house of God, and our conduct outside depends much upon our acquaintance with the inside. "*The Christ*" does not give us exactly the idea of Christ personally, but of all the glory that is set forth in Him as the exalted Man. He is the centre of all God's counsel and purposes, the riches of His glory centre also in Him. It was a great favour to Israel that God should pitch a tabernacle, and His glory dwell there, and afterwards that Solomon should build a house for His name, and again God's glory filled it; but we get another thing when the Babe was born in Bethlehem, One who tabernacled in flesh but in whom all the divine fulness was pleased to dwell. All was living there. Every word He spoke, every act He did, had divine fulness in it; everything in Christ was immeasurable, and now He is exalted that he might fill all things; but what grace it is that the unsearchable riches of the Christ should be ministered to us, that the Christ should dwell in our hearts by faith, as those in whom all the traits of Christ are to come out for ever.

The apostle adds, "being rooted and grounded

in love." The object is that we might be filled into all the fulness of God. Love is the divine nature, the fulness of God, but revealed in Christ. It is like an ocean, and we but tiny specks in it; but the One in whom it is all revealed is the Christ, and it is very blessed that this boundless love is made known to us in a Man, though it passes knowledge. In the presence of this love we realise our own nothingness, but Christ is everything, and as we understand that the house of God is the place of the mystery of Christ, not now as of old a mere deposit of testimony but dwelling in the hearts of the saints, we shall desire to be planted in the house of the Lord, that we may grow up and flourish there. The chapter concludes with glory to God in the church for ever. In John xvii. we have two points very distinctly brought out. One, the glory which Christ had brought to the Father on earth, and that He was about to glorify the Father on high; secondly, there is most touching grace in His speaking to the Father of His own and saying, "I am glorified in them," and He desires their sanctification in order that it might be so.

May the Lord grant that each may know what it is to be planted in the house of the Lord, and grow up into Christ in all things.



IV.

GROWING UP INTO CHRIST.

(ROM. VI. 3-5 ; COL. II. 10-19 ; EPH. IV. 15-24, 30.)

THE question has been often put, when considering some of the realities of scripture, how are we to get into these things ? Then there is on the other side the use of certain phrases which express what is very true, but which often seem to have but little meaning for the soul. Hence I desire to bring before you to-night the way in which everything for our souls centres in Christ. I was saying last time that we do reach certain points in the experience of our souls, but that it is not by effort of our own, but that we are brought to each point by the ministry of the grace of God, and then it becomes true in us. It is a great thing for the youngest, as for the oldest, to have the present sense of God's grace to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now there is a great principle on which God

deals with us in His grace, the principle of death and resurrection. We have to own *this* ; first, that *death has come to us* ; but grace makes us know that this sentence of death as the judgment of God upon all flesh has been carried out for us in Christ. There is the setting aside by God in His death of all flesh, and we have to accept the truth of this. This opens to us the great fact that our blessing is secured for us through God's grace in resurrection. His grace deals with us on the principle of death and resurrection. Now let me point out the way in which God brings us to accept this lesson of death. It is not by our own death, but by the death of Christ, that God takes us morally out of this world ; buried with Him (figuratively in baptism) we retire from this scene to have part in another through Christ's resurrection. Whatever advantages or privileges in the flesh may be ours in this world, whether of intellect or of riches, they may help us in making our way in the world, but when we come to the things of God, there is not a single thing which is in honour in this world but we have to retire from, it is a disgrace in the light of the cross of Christ. Man has failed in everything which has been put into his hand, he uses riches to gratify himself, and intellect to advance his own glory. God uses death to free us from the disgrace that

attaches to us because of the flesh. Now to accept death and give up things here may seem hard, but God does not call upon you to do anything as of yourself, but what He does do in grace is to identify you with the death of Christ. The fact that Christ has been into death makes the bitter water sweet for us.

I read the passage in Romans vi. to bring this identification with *Christ's* death before you. Many souls look for a state in themselves, and there is nothing more mischievous. God does give us a state I fully admit, and He deals with us in grace as to our state, but to be looking for a state of soul instead of to Christ is mischievous. Suppose any one were looking to see whether they were dead in themselves, they would only find out that in themselves they were not at all dead. They would say if really honest, it is all very well to talk about being dead but I am deeply conscious that much of my life is in the things down here (I do not mean one's occupation), but in the things of the flesh and the world, and there is a constant battle going on. Now all that is good exercise for the conscience, but it is not being dead, but a struggle. Where the Spirit has shed abroad God's love in the heart, the way in which the flesh lusts against the Spirit is greatly felt by an exercised conscience, and if such an one is

looking for a state in itself, that is, being dead, it does not find it. What we read in Romans vi. is that we have been baptised, not to our own death, but to Christ's death. I have heard of the question being put to those baptised, Have you buried your dead out of your sight? but I do not baptise myself, I do not bury myself, nor am I committed in baptism to my own death but to Christ's death. It is in the death of Christ that I learn death through grace. Baptism is your identification with the death of Christ, and with the fact of His having gone out of the world; He was buried. To realise this is a great relief.

Our beloved brother, Mr. Darby, used to insist upon it that baptism was grace—grace identifying you with the death of Christ, and not a legal ordinance. A man may see what his condition is as living in this world, and everything here under death and judgment, but then he cannot die out of it in himself, and in one sense he has no right to die out of it; or he may try to live in it as apart from it, and find how powerless he is. But this is what God's grace has done, Christ has died, and been buried, and has gone out of the scene, and now lives to God, and grace has come in to identify me in baptism with Christ's death. Grace ministers death to us in that way, that it may be freedom

to us while actually alive in this world. People often baptise children when they are going to die, that is just when they do not need it. We do not need a figure of death when death is actually taking any one out of the world. We want to be separated from the world while living in it, and grace has provided the outward token of the administration of Christ's death to us. We are buried *with Christ* in the baptism unto death, it is administered to us by another in the Lord's name, and looking at ourselves as living actually in the world we have to learn to be true to our baptism. The death of Christ becomes a shelter to us from the world, and so a present salvation, as the ark was to Noah. I think it is a great point to seek to exercise the children of Christians as to the force of their baptism. Their baptism should have a great hold on them. You can say to them, "You have been baptised to the death of Christ, and you cannot do this or that, or go here or there, because of the privilege you are committed to. Figuratively the water of baptism is between you and the world, as the waters of the Red Sea rolled between Egypt and Israel, after they had been baptised to Moses in it."

Turning now to the Epistle to the Colossians, we find that in it the Christian is not looked at as though living in this world, but one whose life is

hid with Christ in God. The reason is this, that he is looked at in this epistle as belonging to the christian *company*, and is not regarded as in his *individual* relationships in this world. Now, it may be said that the christian company is down here in this world, but nobody would gainsay the fact that the christian company is in its nature the very opposite of the world. The religion of the world may have falsified the character of the christian company, and degraded it to Judaism, which was a religion for man in the flesh; instead of that, it is a fellowship outside of the world. When a person comes to the christian company, that person necessarily leaves the world, he may not be true to it, but that is what has been done. The bearing of baptism in Colossians takes us further than in Romans; there it brought us to the point of being identified with the death of Christ. Here that is looked at as having taken place, "Having been buried with him in baptism" is the better translation. Thus it becomes the door through which we pass into association with Him in resurrection, "wherein also ye are risen with him through faith of the operation of God who raised him from the dead." Romans speaks of *actual* resurrection in the future, but here in Colossians we are looked at as risen *with Him* now, through faith of the operation of God who

raised Him from the dead—not risen in ourselves, but faith enters into the truth and bearing of His resurrection. This is how we belong really to the christian company. It has often been said that the truth in the Epistle to the Colossians corresponds to the forty days, during which Christ was with His disciples as a risen Man before He went to heaven. Before His departure He had gathered them together apart from the world in the fellowship of His death; it really separated them from the old Jewish covenant when He gave them the bread and wine, His death to feed upon, and thus He laid the foundation for a new company, who should be in the fellowship of His death. The Lord's supper is the ground of this fellowship for us. Then for the moment He was parted from them, they indeed would be scattered, but when risen they were re-gathered, and He was with them for forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. How they must have felt that they were associated with a risen Man in what has been called an out-of-the-world condition of things; it was not heaven, nor earth properly, but resurrection life realised by them in the risen Man. This was the beginning of the christian company, which afterwards formed the church by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, for it was to that company the Holy Ghost

came. We do not actually see the Lord as they did, but we are risen with Him through faith. Faith enters into the place of Christ risen. The Lord said to his disciples when about to depart, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." He was to be the object of their faith when gone, they would only see Him by the power of the Holy Ghost. "The world seeth me no more, but ye see me, because I live ye shall live also." How everything for us centres in Christ. He is risen, and we cannot say we are risen as any state attained in ourselves, but we are risen *with Christ*. The sphere of Christ's life is in resurrection, and that is the sphere of our life, for Christ is our life. Hence the apostle says, "Why as though living in the world."

It was an immense moment when the Holy Ghost came to the company who were associated with the risen Lord. How we can see the expediency, as the Lord says, of His going away, so that the Comforter might come. There was a necessity for Him to go away. He took His place according to the counsels of God in glory, and then the Spirit of God came as the witness of the glorified Man. He reveals the coming scene of glory of which Christ is the centre. It was a great point for the disciples to know that the Lord had

entered into glory, that the One they knew in resurrection was now in glory, it carried their hearts to another scene.

The christian company began with those who had been for forty days with the Lord when He was risen and before He left the earth. Their great testimony was to His resurrection. With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of Christ. To-day we follow on, and belong through grace to that company. Neither Paul nor we ever companied with the Lord when He was risen, but we belong to the company who are in the faith of His resurrection, and so outside the world—"not as though living in the world." It would be a relief to many a soul by faith to take the place of risen *with Christ*. You cannot say that you have died apart from this, that you have died *with Christ*; and you may hesitate to speak of being risen, but Christ is risen, and therefore you can take the place of risen with Him. That is the place of the christian company, and they are complete in Him, that is, that they have everything in Him, and do not go outside Him for anything. Filled full in Him excludes all else. Philosophy, or tradition of men, or the elements of the world add nothing, but only rob the saints of their portion. "Christ is everything, and in every one." (Chap. iii. 11.)

We have an individual pathway through the world, but as associated with Christ God has given us to be of a company whose privilege it is to be in the faith of His resurrection, and so to enter into an entirely new range of things where Christ is everything. The true bearing both of baptism and circumcision lay in realising the truth of what had been effected in Christ. The circumcision of Christ made without hands was His cutting off upon the cross. He was severed from the life of flesh in dying there. We can only put off the body of the flesh, and have no confidence in it, as we realise circumcision in Christ's circumcision. If any one set about to have no confidence in the flesh, would he reach it in himself? Abraham was brought to the sense of the utter weakness of the flesh—"He considered not his own body, now dead"—and circumcision was given him as a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had in God who quickens the dead. Christ's death severs us from the life of flesh, from Jew or Greek, to find ourselves in association with those who are risen with Christ. The great point in Colossians is that Christ is our life. As an individual I am here in the life of the flesh, but the only life of the church is the life of Christ. Hence we have here "quickened with Christ." God never sees the

Christian apart from Christ. Ye, says the apostle, are complete in Him. There is no sufficiency in ourselves, but Christ is the fulness with which the christian company is filled. You do not get the Spirit mentioned in Colossians save once, "your love in the Spirit," because the subject is "*Christ* in you," but that could not be apart from the Spirit, and the Spirit is the link with Christ. Many look for the Spirit of God to help *them* to be this or that; but that is all self, not Christ. *I* am this and *I* am that, can only lead to disappointment. The Spirit leads us to what we have in Christ. So in Ephesians, where there is much spoken of the Spirit, we get in chapter iv.: that ye "may grow up into him in all things which is the head"—Christ. It is growing up into Christ, and not into some state in ourselves. Our christian state is dependent upon the Spirit of God giving us to apprehend what we have in Christ. The apostle laboured to present *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. The growth of the soul is in the apprehension of Him. This is individual work, "every man," and it is the Spirit's work to form every man in Christ, that is full growth; but it speaks in Galatians of Christ being formed in you, and that I think is a collective thought, because no one Christian is sufficient to set forth Christ, it takes the whole

church for that, this is fully seen in the new Jerusalem. As to the individual, we do not get the words, "formed in Christ," but they express the idea of full growth in Christ, and the result of that is, that we enter into the truth of the assembly. The Spirit never forms the soul apart from Christ, but always according to Christ. It has been said that our measure as Christians is according as we grow in the divine nature, that is, in love; but where is the love of God known? It is in Christ. Could it be in our souls apart from Christ? It is impossible, it has been manifested in Christ; it is "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Again, in John xvii. the Lord Himself says, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." You have the divine nature in you, or you could not love, but not apart from Christ, not apart from the Spirit linking your soul with Christ. Each one does reach certain points in the history of their souls, but every point reached is a growth in the apprehension of Christ, and of that into which He has entered by resurrection. "Quickened together with him" means that He is your life, as He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also;" otherwise it would be life independent of Him.

I have read from these three epistles because

they give us three distinct points. In Romans we have "justified," and the Spirit given to us in consequence, shedding God's love abroad in the heart. Entering into God's justification by faith, we are clear before God of all that was under His judgment, in order that we may in the power of the Spirit enter into what is new in Christ. It only brings you to the threshold of the new, but does not unfold it. Even in chapter viii. it is not more than bringing out the privileges connected with the gift of the Spirit, but it does not enlarge on them. In Colossians the leading word is "complete." The christian company has everything in Christ. The assembly is rooted and built up in Him, and filled full in Him, in short Christ *is* everything, as He is *the source* of everything to the assembly. We have an example of this when the disciples were gathered together on the evening of the Lord's resurrection. They were in fear of the Jews, but the moment He came into their midst, He alone filled the vision of their souls. He spoke peace to them so that there should be no disturbing element, and when He breathed His Spirit into them they were filled full from Him. There is no room for anything else when Christ fills the scene. There was a danger of the Colossians being spoiled through philosophy and ordinances, but the

apostle insists that they were complete in Christ. The sense of what the company of Christ's own possess in Him would have a great effect upon us, because it would attract us from our own things. The Lord Jesus Christ is not here on earth or we would like to be with Him, but there is the company of His own for us to seek and enjoy, and they are complete in Him; that is the teaching of this epistle, how far we realise it is another matter, but as we do we are in touch with Christ living in the saints. All the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him, and the company of saints is filled full in Him. Now Christ is not personally here, the saints knit together in love, live by Him and form the place where His fulness is known, and where we grow up to Him in all things. Some were in danger of not holding the Head from whom the whole body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together increases (or grows) with the increase of God. The increase of God is love, the divine nature, and growth is promoted in the christian company by love.

The word which I think characterises Ephesians is "accepted in the beloved." This is more than the idea of favour being extended to you, but that you are taken into favour in Christ where Christ is. That shews us *the place*

of the assembly. In speaking to His disciples before going away the Lord said, "I go to prepare *a place* for you." There He spoke of the Father's house, here of sonship and the heavenly places. But the point I wanted to reach in this epistle is in chapter iv., "Speaking the truth [or rather being truthful] in love, that ye may grow up unto him in all things who is the Head, Christ." We have looked at the company of the saints being in association with Christ on resurrection ground, but in the assembly there is also the knowledge of Christ where He is. He is the exalted Man, and Head over all things to the assembly, which is His body. Hence the saints are to grow up into Him, and it is from Him, the Head, that there is the effectual working, so that the body should build itself up in love. What I want each one, even the youngest, to see is that there is no looking for a state *in self*, but *a being joined with all other saints*, so that the supply from the Head may promote the growth of the body in love.

One word more as to the Spirit. We are here told not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. In John we have first the Spirit individually known, in chapters iv. and vii., and then collectively in chapters xiv., xv. and xvi. In chapter iv. Christ gives the Spirit to be in the believer as a well of

water springing up into eternal life. The shedding abroad of God's love in the heart has this result, that there is a corresponding answer in our affections, and it is as the Spirit of Christ that He produces this answer to God's love. It is the love of Christ springing up in the heart to the Father, and this leads to worship. In worship I do not think you can separate between the Son and the Father, it is all so intimately bound up. Worship of the Son rises up to the Father. In the case of the tenth leper who returned to the feet of Jesus, we read that he glorified *God* while falling at *Jesus' feet*, giving *Him* thanks. So the Lord says, "there have not returned to give *glory to God* save this stranger," and yet he was giving thanks to the Lord. In John vii. the Spirit is the revealer of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are actually down here in the wilderness, but "rivers break forth in high places" and "the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose" for us. The light of Christ shines down upon us, and we drink of the joy of another sphere. Earth does not afford to us anything but barrenness, but as we drink there is a flow out from us in this weary world.

In chapter xiv. the Comforter is promised to the disciples whom Jesus had gathered into the intimacy of His own company. He was to make

known to them (ver. 26) all that the Lord was while with them upon earth. Secondly (chap. xv. 26), He would bear witness of Christ when He was gone from them into glory ; and, thirdly, He would bring the report to them of the glories into which Christ had entered. (Chap. xvi. 14, 15.) They were in a scene of contrariety, and we are, but the Spirit abides with the saints, so that they may know what Christ was upon earth for the comfort of their hearts, and that they may walk here as He walked, representing Him here. Then not only is the Spirit the witness of the One whom the world rejected, but He reports to us the coming glories of Christ. All is established in Him now, and will come out fully in the new Jerusalem, but meanwhile the Spirit brings us the light of it. Now all this belongs to the company of disciples given to Christ when rejected by the world, and those who have believed through their word come into the blessing. How necessary to us is the Spirit to acquaint us with Christ, in order that we may grow up into Him in all things. The Spirit demonstrates for us the character of the whole system of this world and its judgment, but fills our hearts with living affections to Christ, and puts us in touch with the sphere of His glory that it might be light for us while here. He has given us a place there, and He will come

again and receive us to Himself that where He is there we may be also.

May the Lord give each one of us to be occupied with Himself, not with our state but with His perfection. Perfection is in Christ :

Oh, Man! God's Man; Thou peerless Man!

Jesus, my Lord! God's Son;
Perfection's perfect in its height,
But found in Thee alone.

O matchless, peerless Man! shall we
Begrudge to Thee this praise?

by looking in at ourselves, instead of seeking to grow up into Him. Oh, do not deny Christ His glory. Perfection for us is to be conformed to Him, and they are the perfect, or full grown, who like Paul press forward to Him.

