



# The Church in Many Aspects

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**I**T is regrettable that persons should belong to anything of which they know practically nothing beyond the bare name; yet this is the position in which the majority of Christians are found in relation to the Church of God. We frequently hear believers say that they have "joined the Church." By this they mean that they have attached themselves to some outward and visible ecclesiastical organization. *I have not joined the Church.* As a Christian, I necessarily belong to it; indeed, I am an integral part of it; it would lack completeness without me. Having received by faith first the Christ of God, and then the Holy Spirit (as the fruit of accomplished redemption), I share in that wondrous baptism of the Spirit which formed the Church at the beginning, and which, from Pentecost onward, has sustained it in power and blessing upon the earth (1 Cor. xii. 13).

The Church is presented to us in various aspects in Holy Scripture. So full and wonderful is its blessing, through grace, that a great many human figures and relationships are divinely employed to set it forth. Speaking generally, the Church is spoken of as a Body, a Building, and a Bride.

## **The Body of Christ.**

First, it is the body of Christ (Eph. i. 22). It was the eternal purpose of God that the exalted Man in heaven should have a body associated with Him in all His glory and blessedness. When the day comes to put all things

under His feet, His body will share with Him His dominion and power. Whatever the dignity and bliss of angels, it is altogether transcended by that which God has done for sinners saved by grace, and united by Him to His Son in glory. This is clearly expressed in Eph. i. 20-22. God has "raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come : and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." The body, according to this passage, embraces the whole company of believers from the day of Pentecost until the Lord's coming again. (See also Col. i. 18).

But the body is regarded from a different standpoint in 1 Cor. xii. There we get, not divine counsels, but human responsibility. Christ's body is not only formed with a view to participation in His future glory ; it is a vessel divinely established to represent Christ and display Him during His absence. This is the point and purpose of the testimony of the Church on earth. All the graces and perfections of the heavenly Christ should be displayed in its many members, not only towards one another, but towards all men.

All the members are inter-dependent, and it is the privilege and duty of all to share both the joys and sorrows of others. Christ's body is thus shown to us as a working organism upon the earth, and as such it is regarded as always complete. In this aspect, it includes all the saints on earth at any given time. It could not be said of saints at rest (those departed to be with Christ) that, if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. xii. 26) ; neither could the warning to the foot and the ear, concerning discontent with their respective functions, have

any meaning for them. But all the instructions of 1 Cor. xii. have the fullest meaning for us who are still in responsibility upon the earth.

A few of the details of 1 Cor. xii. may well detain us briefly. Discontent is forbidden. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?" The great point for us to understand is, that "God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him." Perfect wisdom and infinite love have set us in our respective positions; it is ours to learn what they are in each individual case, and, having discovered them, to be content. There may be an allusion to particular gifts in the cases supposed above. Thus "the foot" may represent the evangelist, upon whom devolves, in a very special way, the duty of traversing the earth in search of souls for Christ. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. x. 15). Let none such ever discount the value of their service. Arduous and trying it may be, but it is of the first importance for the well-being of the body of Christ. How can His members be gathered, if not by the proclamation of the gospel of peace? "The hand" may suggest the pastor and teacher, whose duty is to form and fashion for Christ those whom the evangelist has gathered. "The ear" and "the eye" remind us respectively of "the word of knowledge" and "the word of wisdom" in verse 8 of the same chapter.

Contempt is as evil as discontent. The less gifted are in danger of the one, and the more gifted of the other. Accordingly, the Apostle adds, "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Even an Apostle, however richly endowed, was not independent of the most

insignificant fellow-member of Christ's body. The feeble members of verse 22 would refer to those who are "weak in the faith," as in Rom. xiv. Those who are nearer the divine standard than others, and who comprehend more fully than the majority where the grace of Christ has set His own, must, with tender consideration, bear with the slowness and dulness of their brethren. It is the divine intention that such loving interest should be shown all round that there be "no schism in the body."

When once the immense fact of Christ's body dawns upon the soul, all behaviour becomes viewed in the light of it. If it be Christian love, we think not merely of the saints known to us, but we cultivate "*love unto all the saints*" (Eph. i 15). If it be the understanding of divine counsels, we seek to "*comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height*" (Eph. iii. 18). If it be even peace in the daily life, as we enjoy it, we remember that we "are called thereto in one body" and we are thankful (Col. iii. 15). And at the Lord's Table we eat and drink, not for individual enjoyment only, but in the realization that "we being many, are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. x. 17). Neither individual nor corporate independency can ever be allowed in the heart which has entered into the mighty truth of Christ's body, "*the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*"

In its character of a building, the Church is variously presented to us as Christ's assembly, God's habitation, God's temple, and God's house. It is exceedingly important that we should understand the significance of each term the divine Spirit has been pleased to use. How else can we enjoy the grace that is expressed in them, and how can we respond practically to the will of God in connection with them?

## Christ's Assembly.

In Matt. xvi. 18 we hear Israel's rejected Messiah saying to Simon Bar-Jona, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it." This is the first intimation of the Church that we find in the Word of God, and it is the only place in which it is said to be Christ's, its usual title being "the Church of God."\* The circumstances under which the Lord spoke of it to Peter accounts for this. He had just drawn forth from the disciples what men were saying concerning Himself. They were everywhere discussing His person and mission, but only in the way of idle speculation. Their *hearts* were not interested in Him. To some He was John the Baptist risen again, to others He was Elias, and so on; but all this showed how Israel stood in relation to Him. Nobody really cared who He was. How, then, could He establish the predicted kingdom? But in the midst of the unbelieving mass there were those who appreciated Him, and who entered, at least in measure, into the Father's thoughts concerning Him, and of these Peter was the spokesman when he said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Human learning had not communicated this blessed knowledge to Peter. Thus "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." Then He added, "And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The Father had told Peter something about His Son. The Lord would now tell Peter something about himself, and the new thing that was shortly to be set up

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\*It is true that in Rom. xvi. 16 we read of "the churches of Christ," but there local companies are in view, and not the whole assembly as such. The local companies are Christ's witnesses in the earth.

in the world, of which Peter should form a part. Ecclesiasticism, which encourages superstition in man and makes him blind, and is a man-exalting system withal, has perverted our Lord's words in Matt. xvi. 18 and has sought to make Peter the foundation upon which the Church is built. Our Lord neither said, nor meant, anything of the kind. The truth is, Peter was a stone (his name means this); the rock is the Lord Himself, in the particular character in which Peter had just confessed Him. The Church is built upon Christ, as the Son of the living God. This implies resurrection. "The *living* God" has the power of life in His hands, and could not leave His Son in the grasp of death. Nor will He permit death to triumph over the Church. The gates of Hades (the invisible world of spirits) will never close upon the Church as such. The Church that was established at Pentecost will still be found upon the earth when the Lord returns, however long His return may be delayed, and at His coming the whole company will be translated to the Father's house. The personnel is changing daily, but *the Church* remains.

He calls it "My assembly." It is His sanctified company, described in John xiii. 1 as "His own" which are "in the world." It is all He has in the world for the time being. While Israel continues in estrangement from Him, and while the nations continue in revolt against Jehovah and His Anointed, the Church is the centre of Christ's earthly interest. There His heart finds its joy, and into its midst He delights to come as the chief Musician for God, that He may lead its song of praise (Heb. ii. 12). Had the Church but realized its true relationship to Christ, it would, from the beginning, have held itself aloof from everything below, and reserved all its affection for Him. But corporate failure only emphasizes the more deeply the need for individual faithfulness. Shall not both reader and writer aspire to be absolutely and unreservedly for Christ according to the grace expressed in those wonderful words, "My assembly?"



## God's Habitation.

Speaking generally, it may be said that the Church as the habitation of God, is where He dwells ; as His house it is where He rules ; and as His temple it is where He is known and worshipped.

It is a wonderful thing that God should have a dwelling-place amongst men. This is one of the choicest fruits of redemption. The first mention of the divine desire in this respect is in Exo. xxv. 8, after Israel's redemption from the land of Egypt, which is a type of the greater deliverance that we have experienced through the work of the Lord Jesus. The heart of Jehovah and the hearts of His people were at one with regard to this. He said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" ; Israel sang, "He is my God, and I will prepare Him a habitation" (Exo xxv. 8 ; xv. 2).

In earlier ages God visited the earth, but He had no habitation here. He visited the man in Eden, He visited Abraham in Mamre, but He did not go beyond this in the times recorded in the book of Genesis. When the tabernacle was completed, Jehovah deigned to inhabit it, the outward and visible sign of His presence therein being the Shekinah cloud—"the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle" (Exo. xl. 35). During their march through the desert, Israel could point to the tabernacle in their midst as the earthly dwelling-place of the Maker of heaven and earth. Marvellous privilege for that most favoured of all nations !

When the people became established in the land of their possession (and this was not really until the days of David), Jehovah desired a more settled habitation. While His people were in pilgrimage, He graciously adapted Himself to their circumstances, and He became a pilgrim

God; but when all their enemies had been subdued, and the land was really theirs, and David desired to build Him a house, He consented. Stephen described the circumstances thus: "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He had appointed, speaking to Moses that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen: which also our fathers that came after brought in with Joshua into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favour with God, and desired to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house" (Acts vii. 44-47).

The temple of Solomon was probably the most magnificent structure the world has ever seen. The amount expended upon it is almost beyond comprehension. Yet Solomon felt that nothing but exceeding grace in God could lead Him to accept this offering from His people. "I have surely built Thee a house to dwell in, a settled place for Thee to abide in for ever . . . . But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house than I have builded!" (1 Kings viii. 13-27). Again, the outward and visible sign of Jehovah's presence was the Shekinah cloud. "The cloud filled the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of Jehovah" (1 Kings viii. 10-11).

That order of things has passed away. Israel's rejection of the promised Messiah has brought about a total revolution in the ways of God with men. During His last week in Jerusalem, the Saviour said, "*Your house* (not Jehovah's house any longer) is left unto you desolate" (Matt. xxiii. 38), and forthwith He informed His disciples of the impending destruction of the city and sanctuary.

But God has not given up His heart's desire to dwell with men upon the earth. Its final realization awaits the new heavens and the new earth. Then the holy city (New Jerusalem) will come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And a great voice out of heaven will say, "*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God*" (Rev. xxi. 1-3).

The present habitation of God is a spiritual structure. Thus we read in Eph. ii. 22, "In whom (*i.e.* in the Lord) ye are builded together for an habitation of God through (or in) the Spirit." This obviously could have no beginning until the Spirit of God came down from heaven. Many stones were in readiness before He came; it was the work of the Spirit to build them together. Of "living stones" He has built up "a spiritual house" (1 Pet. ii. 5). The believers whom He found here on the day of Pentecost became forthwith members of Christ's body, and stones in the new habitation of God, though for a season (while divine patience lingered over Israel) these new relationships were not explicitly made known to them.

The blessedness of having God with us upon the earth is almost beyond our power of understanding. No mere glory-cloud have we; a divine Being is personally present amongst us. The Son (Emmanuel—"God with us") has gone away, but the Holy Spirit has come from heaven to take His place. The history of the Church has been a long dark chapter of unbelief as to this. Like Israel at Sinai, who lost faith in the invisible Moses, and much more so in the invisible God, the Church has lost faith in its invisible Head in heaven, and in its invisible Indweller and Guide upon the earth. Hence the ecclesiasticism and officialism of which Christendom is full.

But the divine fact abides that God the Holy Spirit is personally present upon the earth. If the Church at large woke up to a due sense of this, a mighty transformation would ensue. Man's intrusive ways would be instinctively resented, and all the cumbrous human machinery would fall to pieces. But if two or three are willing to come together in any place in the faith of what God has wrought, richest blessing from God will result. The Spirit is as truly with the merest handful gathered simply to the Lord's name as He would be with the whole Church, could it be assembled in one place. The instructions of 1 Cor. xii.-xiv., are based upon two great facts:—first, that Christ has a body upon earth, and second, that the Spirit of God dwells therein as power from on high. Every member has his own endowments according to chap. xii.; divine love is the atmosphere in which everything thrives for God according to chap. xiii.; while in chap. xiv., we have counsel and instructions as to how to behave when assembled together. An invisible presence and power is assumed in 1 Cor. xiv., restraining flesh, and drawing forth from the saints that which will please God, and also edify and comfort themselves. Such evident power should be in operation, that when a stranger enters, and takes notice of what is passing, he should be constrained to fall down upon his face in worship, and report that God is in us of a truth (1 Cor. xiv. 24-25).

“Let all things be done decently and in order,” says the Apostle in concluding these instructions. What is order? Letting the Holy Spirit of God have His own way in the assemblies of God's saints. That, and that only, is order according to God.

## **The Temple of God.**

We must distinguish between the temple as spoken of in Eph. ii. 21 and in 1 Cor. iii. 16-17. In the one passage

we have a work that is wholly divine, and in the other we have something in which human instruments play a part. At the close of Eph. ii. we are introduced to a new spiritual structure in which all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, have their place. The foundation of this has been laid in the teaching of the New Testament apostles and prophets, all of which was imparted by revelation, and transmitted by divine inspiration. New revelations of the mind of God were required for the new thing; divine counsels, hitherto kept secret, must now be made known. The temple in this aspect is continually increasing, as we read: "In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." This obviously embraces all the saints of this entire period. When the Holy Spirit came down from heaven at Pentecost, the framing of the temple began; during the centuries which have followed, the work has been proceeding, and the work will continue until the last stone has been gathered in by means of the Gospel, and then the temple will be completed, to God's eternal praise. All this speaks of a true work in souls, wrought by God Himself, in which no failure can ever be.

It is far otherwise in 1 Cor. iii. 16-17. There in his address to the local assembly in Corinth, the Apostle hints at the possibility of the temple being corrupted by human hands, which corruption God, in His infinite holiness, will not fail to avenge when His patience is exhausted, and the hour of His judgment has come.

But we must also distinguish between the temple of God in 1 Cor. iii. 16-17, and the temple of the Holy Ghost in 1 Cor. vi. 19. The latter is individual, while the former is collective. The Apostle was seeking to make the Corinthians ashamed of the licentiousness which prevailed amongst them, and, in the course of his appeals, he says: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are

not your own ? ” The same words could be addressed to every Christian on earth to-day. What an incentive to holiness is here ! The realization of the fact that the mortal body is tenanted by the Holy Spirit of God would surely cause us to view it in a very sacred light, and would lead us to devote all its members to God, “ Yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness ” (Rom. vi. 19).

To the assembly at Corinth the Apostle said : “ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy ; for the temple of God is holy, which ye are ” (*i.e.* ye are holy ones). We have already pointed out that as the habitation of God the Church is where God dwells ; as His house it is where He rules ; and as His temple it is where He is known and worshipped. It is certainly true that outside the Church (whatever its unfaithfulness) God is unknown, and consequently not worshipped. Both Jews and Mohammedans profess to know and serve Him, for both refuse the many false deities of the heathen. But the Jews absolutely reject the Son, and the followers of Mohammed would put Him amongst the prophets merely, as no more glorious than they. God cannot tolerate either the one or the other. “ He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him ” (John v. 23). Apart from the Son, none can have to do with God, except in wrath at the last day. “ I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life ; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me ” (John xiv. 6). So spake the Son, and the Father can do no other than spurn the advances of all who would draw near to Him apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The temple of God in Corinth had been built by human hands. Paul went there at first with the Gospel, and, as a wise master-builder, he laid a foundation. Others followed in his steps, and they built thereupon. Something similar has happened in every place where

Christianity has been established. Human hands have wrought in responsibility to God. Labourers in the spiritual sphere were called "builders" in our Lord's time (Matt. xxi. 42; Acts iv. 11); they are called builders still. "Let every man take heed how he buildeth." Three classes of labourers are indicated. First, we have those who build upon the foundation gold, silver, and precious stones. Here we have true men who set forth only that which is of spiritual worth, and who gather thereby genuine souls for God. Their work will stand, and they will receive a reward. Second, we have those who build with wood, hay, and stubble. Men's opinions and worldly methods are thus designated. These may produce great results to the outward eye, but genuine souls are not gathered thus. The day of Christ will shortly be revealed in fire, *i.e.*, the holiness of God will characterize that day, and in the light thereof all labour will be tested. Much that to-day passes muster in the religious realm will then be utterly disowned. But in every case where the faulty workman is himself a born-again soul, he himself shall be saved, "Yet so as through fire." - The solemn possibility is here suggested of a man's whole life-work being rejected and destroyed. But what follows is more serious still. The third class of spiritual labourers are themselves destroyed as well as their work. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." These men are not Christ's at all. New-birth by the Spirit and cleansing by the precious blood are blessed realities to them altogether unknown. Other considerations have operated to put them into the sacred office. As the responsible servants of Him whose name they bear, they stand forth, but from such persons nothing but evil can proceed. Their unholy hands defile everything they touch, to the dishonour of the Lord Jesus, and to the hurt of immortal souls. Such characters were in the Lord's mind in Matt. xxiv. 48-51 and similar Scriptures. Woe to them when in His holiness He adjudicates upon all that has been wrought in His Name! No graver sin is conceivable than to corrupt the most sacred thing on earth.

## The House of God.

Some twenty-five centuries ago the Persian Sovereign published his decree "that every man should bear rule in his own house" (Esth. i. 22); and it is undeniably the will of God that every man should so do. In the spiritual sphere, he who cannot "rule *well* his own house" is not qualified to take care of the assembly of God (1 Tim. iii. 4-5). We thus learn the divine thought in connection with "the house"—it is the place of rule and order.

He who owns a house expects his word to have sway there. It would be regarded as an unwarrantable intrusion if a stranger sought to regulate its affairs. No plea whatever would be accepted as an excuse, if this were attempted in the social sphere.

Let us apply this principle to the Church of God. The world at large is in revolt against its Creator. His will is universally flouted, and the will of man (urged on by Satan) prevails instead. Not until the Kingdom is established in power will this condition of things be changed. Meanwhile we pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. vi. 10). But in the midst of the rebellious mass, yet altogether distinct from it, there stands the house of God, where, in contrast to all that obtains elsewhere, God expects His will to be carried out down to the smallest detail. He who legislated for Israel's sanctuary of old, speaking even of pins, cords, spoons, dishes, etc., is no less particular in this age to have everything in this sacred enclosure done as He would have it. Thus the first epistle to Timothy was written "that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15—Darby's Translation). This passage, read as we have given it, shows that the instructions were not merely personal to Timothy, and therefore of no application to us to-day, but they are general in character, and thus binding upon every believer while the dispensation continues.



In some quarters the notion prevails that in matters connected with divine worship and service much is left to the discretion of the people of God. Indeed, it has been said that just as a man is entitled to choose his own banker or lawyer, so he is entitled to choose his own minister, and the particular way in which he will have to do with God. No thought could be more evil. However little it may be intended, it is lawlessness of the worst type. Moreover, it is a denial of the completeness and all-sufficiency of Holy Scripture. He who would do the will of God need not long be in ignorance of what that will is. Patient examination of the New Testament Scriptures will make plain to the inquiring soul how the Church was carried on when apostolic power and influence were there to maintain divine order. The mode of gathering, the method of ministry, the arrangements whereby saints were cared for in their various localities, are all shown with clearness and precision. God has not changed since apostolic times. If we are anxious to be found in the pathway of His will, our plain duty is, "cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Isa. i. 16-17). In other words, our true course is to abandon all human innovations, ancient and modern, and then seek to discover from the Word of God the pattern of the house as God established it at the beginning.

In the house of God we are all *servants*. Responsibility is everywhere connected with the Church viewed in this aspect. Thus in Heb iii. 6, where the Apostle says that Christ is Son over God's house, it is added, "whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." This means that our conduct proves whether or not we genuinely belong to the house of God. Peter tells us that "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (1 Pet. iv. 17). It is a universal principle with God to deal first with that which is nearest to Himself. Thus in the latter days of

Israel's kingdom Jehovah said to the executors of His judgments, "Begin at My sanctuary" (Ezek. ix. 6). Also in Amos iii. 2, Israel is addressed thus: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities."

It is a blessed thing to be near to God, to be in intimate relationship with Him, but it is also deeply solemn. Holiness becomes the house of God for ever, and He will be held in reverence by all those who are round about Him (Psa. xciii. 5; lxxxix. 7). Accordingly, while His patience still waits as far as the world is concerned, His hand comes down to-day upon His own. Thus there were many sick ones in Corinth, and many others had been put to sleep (1 Cor. xi. 30). If we would take account of ourselves with reference to what is due to God in His house, we should not be chastened thus. May God in His mercy arouse our consciences as to His holy claims.

## **The Bride of the Lamb.**

It is a question with some whether the Church can rightly be regarded as the bride of Christ, seeing that in the Pauline epistles it is described as His body. "If the Church be Christ's body," it is asked, "how can it possibly be His bride? Surely Israel must be the bride."

It does not seem to occur to objectors that the difficulty is quite as great whether we regard Israel or the Church as the bride. In Exodus iv. 22 we read, "Thus saith Jehovah, Israel is My son, even My first born;" and it might fairly be asked, if Israel is Jehovah's son, how can Israel possibly be Jehovah's bride? Yet Isaiah liv. 5-6; lxii. 5, and other Old Testament passages, indisputably indicate this wonderful relationship for the earthly people of God; while Psalm xlv. shows the queen standing at the King's right hand in gold of Ophir amidst all the glories of the kingdom here below.

The truth is that divine grace is so marvellous in its working, both as regards Israel and the Church, that a great many figures and human relationships have to be employed in order to adequately set it forth, and it is to our own hurt and loss if we confound them, or set one relationship over against another.

The same believing ones are acknowledged by Christ as His brethren in Heb. ii. 11, and as His body in Ephesians and elsewhere. They are also spoken of as living stones in God's spiritual house, and as priests within His house (1 Peter ii. 5). It is impossible logically to reconcile these various positions and relationships with one another, yet we reverently accept them, and seek to take into our souls the blessedness connected with them.

If we act upon this principle concerning the Church being both body and bride, all difficulties will quickly disappear.

A few further remarks may help some. The bride of the Apocalypse most certainly belongs to heaven, for the marriage supper takes place there, and from thence she comes forth in all her glory to be displayed by her Bridegroom to the world. How can this possibly be Israel, seeing that Israel's portion is not in heaven, but in Canaan? The earthly people of God will never be found on high.

Moreover Israel is shown to us in the Revelation as the mother of Christ (chap. xii. 2-5). It would be incongruous indeed to present the same nation in the same book as His bride.

Yet another consideration. The bride of the Apocalypse is possessed of the Spirit before the Lord returns, for Spirit and bride cry with one voice, "Come" (chap. xxii. 17). How can this by any just reasoning be applied to Israel? That Israel will be granted the gift of the Spirit

ultimately is certain, but this will not (and cannot) be until the nation has first accepted the long-rejected Messiah. But it is true beyond all controversy that the Church is possessed of the Spirit while her Lord sits on high. Indeed, this is her richest endowment. These are some of the considerations which satisfy us that the Church (and no other) is the bride of the Lamb.

There are earthly things, and there are heavenly things, as the Lord told Nicodemus in John iii. 12. Israel is yet to be the bride of Jehovah, taken back in grace into this intimate relationship after long ages of unfaithfulness, and will again be blessed in the land of her Husband's choice; but the Church is the bride of the Lamb, and is to be blessed on high with Him whose rejection she has shared below.

We turn now to Eph. v. In this part of his epistle the writer is dealing with the earthly relationships of the saints, and he lays down the divine principles which should govern us in them. Thus wives are told to be subject to their husbands, even as the Church is subject to Christ (verses 22-24). Then to husbands the Apostle says: "Love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it." (verse 25). Such words can have no meaning if the Church will never stand in a relationship to Christ analogous to the marriage bond. On the contrary, the quotation from Gen. ii. 24 in verse 81 shows that God had Christ and the Church before His mind when He provided a companion for the first man, and presented her to him.

While God loved the world with a feeling of compassion towards the perishing, Christ loved the Church with the purpose of having her with Himself in the tenderest relationship possible. To depths to us unfathomable He went in order to secure for Himself the object of

His desire. This love our hearts recall week by week as we gather together in His name to break the bread, and drink the wine according to His behest.

He who died now lives again, and His present ministry of grace to His own is designed to fit the Church morally for the wonderful place she will fill eternally. Solomon felt the incongruity of bringing his Egyptian bride into the house of David, "because," said he, "the places are holy, whereunto the ark of Jehovah hath come." Accordingly he prepared for her a dwelling-place elsewhere (2 Chron. viii. 11). No such incongruity will be found in the bride of Christ in the day when He introduces her into a holier scene than Solomon ever knew. By means of the Word He seeks to draw our hearts away from everything here, and to fill us with bright anticipations of glories on high. When this labour of love is completed, He will come according to His promise, and He will present the Church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. Spots are suggestive of wilderness unfaithfulness, and wrinkles of decay. Nothing of the kind will be seen in the Church when glory dawns. God presented Eve to Adam; Christ presents the Church to Himself. Why? The answer is very simple—*Christ is God.*

Eph. v. 31-32 show us the link of connection between the body and the bride, which seems to perplex some so deeply. Eve was formed out of Adam's body and she became his bride. Even so is it in the antitype. The body and the bride are one. Oh, that God may produce in us affections suitable for such blissful relationships to our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## **The Heavenly Jerusalem.**

The Book of God closes with two visions of the bride of the Lamb in her future glory. This is the consummation of the most wonderful purpose that ever entered the

great mind of God; it is the triumph of grace, matchless, unspeakable, and divine. Scripture commences with a man set in authority over the works of God, a bride sharing his dominion and bliss; it finishes with another Man possessed of a wider authority than Adam ever knew, He also having a bride to share it all with Him.

There are two distinct visions. The first eight verses of Rev. xxi. must be read apart from the verses which follow. The first eight verses give us a glimpse into eternity, and there we see "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." In verse 9 we are carried back into time (vials and plagues being again mentioned), and there we are shown the bride in her Millennial glory. She is called the *New Jerusalem* in verse 2, for she is in relationship with a new heaven and a new earth ("Behold, I make all things new"—verse 5); she is called "the *holy city Jerusalem*," in verse 10, the intention there being to present the contrast between man's *great* thing, as seen in the harlot of Rev. xvii.; and God's *holy* thing.\*

The city is symbolic. Material symbols are freely used in the description for the setting forth of moral excellencies. The nations and their kings will behold all the perfections of the divine character displayed in the Lamb's wife, and they will pay their respectful homage to her. The wall speaks of separation and security. Though high (more than 200 feet), it is not intended to hide anything, for the city itself is 1,500 miles high. Nothing will ever obscure the glories of Christ displayed in His redeemed. *Gates are there, for the good things of God are not intended to be confined.* The bride is His appointed dispenser of the grace that she herself enjoys. Upon the gates are inscribed the names of Israel's twelve tribes, for it is through them as a medium that the glorified Church

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\*The word "great" in the Authorized Version of Rev. xxi. 10 should be eliminated.

reaches the nations. . *Angels* stand respectfully at the gates, thus acknowledging the place of superior blessing to which we are called. The *river* of God is there, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. It is the gracious influence of the Spirit flowing forth, conveying life and blessing wherever it goes. The "lightnings and thunderings and voices" of chap. iv. 5 having spent themselves, the majesty of God having thus been vindicated, the throne becomes the source of blessing to all the earth.

But no *temple* is there (Rev. xxi. 22), for there will be no degrees of nearness to the Eternal. "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The divine presence pervades the city in its every part. In the earthly city it will be otherwise. When Jerusalem is re-established as the city of the great King, the temple will once more rear its head (Ezek. xl; Psa. lxxviii. 29). The blessings and privileges of the glorified Church are of a character with which none others can ever compare. Well might the Apostle say: "To Him be glory in the Assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. Amen." (Eph. iii. 21. J.N.D.).

If we would know what the Church ought to be for God to-day, we must cast our eyes both behind and before us. Behind us we see what the Church was when originally set up. The historical account of this is found in the Acts, and the interpretation is found in the Pauline epistles. Before us we see what the Church is destined to be in the day of glory, when all the failures and shortcomings of the wilderness are ended, and the grace and power of God have made the Church what His eternal purposes of grace intended. Under the influence of these divine thoughts let us seek to walk during the little while that yet remains.