

Lecture 3 — The House of God.

Eph. 2: 18-22; 1 Tim. 3: 14-16.

from 'The Church: What is it?'

Ten lectures on the church of the New Testament seen to be established, endowed, united and free.

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In the New Testament the Assembly of God is presented under four figures — a House, a Body, a Candlestick, and a Bride. Each figure suggests a different idea. The House of God is where He dwells — the relationship of the Assembly to God; the Body of Christ is its relationship to Christ, that by which His life, taken from the earth, is now to be expressed here; the Candlestick is to carry the light the Spirit gives — the responsible vessel of testimony for Christ on earth during His absence; while the Bride is more connected with what is heavenly and eternal, when the Assembly, the object of the affection of Christ, will be for ever with Him who is the Bridegroom. This latter truth presents the final destiny of the Assembly, for "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5: 25-27). And in the day when the last component part of the Assembly shall have been brought in, by the blessed activity of the Spirit of God, the Bride will be taken home by the Lord to be with Himself for ever; a very bright hope to the heart of the Christian. But there it will never cease to be "the fulness of him that filleth all in all," as the Body (Eph. 1: 23), or the dwelling-place of God, as the House.

Now I will take up the subject of the House of God. Although presented in an entirely new way in the New Testament, we have the thought and truth of the house in Old Testament days. From the moment of Israel's redemption out of Egypt, the thought of God dwelling in the midst of His people appears. He did not dwell with Adam; He paid him a visit, and retired. He might, and did, in His grace, visit certain of His saints, as recorded in the book of Genesis; but when you come to Exodus, the book of redemption, immediately the people are out of Egypt (the world typically), and upon redemption ground before God, the thought of the Lord having a habitation upon earth, where He could dwell, is presented to us.

The first intimation of this is in Exodus 15, when the Song of redemption is rolling in majestic volume from the lips of God's delivered people, on the shores of the Red Sea, where they were typically, by the death and resurrection of Christ, in the joy of having been brought to God. They say, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation" (ver. 2). In the bosom of the people somehow the idea sprang up that God meant to dwell with them. Passing on in Exodus you find that God answered

this by saying to Moses, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25: 8). Then giving Moses instructions as to the Tabernacle and all its furniture, God was careful to say, "According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Ex. 25: 9) — instructions which the many church-makers in Christendom would do well to heed today.

The pattern of the Tabernacle was kept on high, in heavenly glory. When Moses went up into the mount, and spent those forty days with God, the people thought he was going to get the law. Not that alone. He had gone to get God's mind and to see lovely pictures of Christ. He received the tables of stone, but far better than that he saw many shadows of Christ. He walked through God's picture gallery, and saw all that is summarised in Exodus 31: 7- 11. The Tabernacle and all its furniture spoke of Christ in some aspect or other. I do not say that Moses apprehended the full meaning of all that passed before his eye, but ere he came down from the mount God said, "And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount" (Ex. 25: 40). That is surely a lesson for us. If we are going to learn anything about God's habitation (and we are now inquiring about the Church, for men are wonderful church-makers), let us see that we get our eyes on the heavenly pattern. The importance of this is manifest, for these Old Testament details of the Tabernacle building and furniture, were, says Paul, "the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8: 5). Moses implicitly obeyed his instructions, for in Exodus 39 and 40 we read no less than sixteen times that all was done "as the Lord commanded Moses." Happy and wise servant!

God's object in having the Tabernacle reared is very distinctly stated: "I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office" Ex. 29: 44). Aaron and his sons were a type of Christ and the Church, brought into beautiful nearness to God, for every Christian, besides being a living stone, is a priest. We see that in 1 Peter 2: 5, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." These two thoughts go together in Scripture; and here in Exodus you get the first suggestion of them, a dwelling-place for Himself, where God could have those near Him who would minister to Him, and meet His heart and mind. Hence the blessed statement which follows: "And I will *dwell* among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God" (Ex. 29: 45, 46). God says, Let them clearly understand why I have brought them out of Egypt — it is that I might dwell among them. Separation from the world is a prime necessity to secure God's presence.

But why did God separate them? Why would He not dwell with them in Egypt? How could He, in a scene of idolatry? He must bring them out, and separate them; and when Moses was going to bring them out, Pharaoh — type of Satan's energy, as prince of the world, then as now — contested every inch of the road, and proposed, when hard pressed, a series of compromises. Moses said to him, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me *in the wilderness*" (Ex. 5: 1). Pharaoh said, "Go ye, sacrifice to your God *in the land*" (Ex. 8: 25), *i.e.*, Set up worldly worship. Moses replies, "We will go *three days' journey*

into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, as he shall command us" (ver. 27). Then said Pharaoh, "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go *very far away*" (ver. 28), *i.e.*, don't be very separate. The next question was, "Go, serve the Lord your God: but who are they that shall go?" Moses replies, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord" (Ex. 10: 8, 9). Pharaoh rejoins, "Not so; go now ye that are men" (ver. 11). This means the parents may be for the Lord, but the children must be kept in the world. Moses carries this point, however, and Pharaoh reluctantly says, "Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your *little ones* also go with you" (ver. 24). This meant, take the children but leave your goods — or run your business on worldly lines. Moses' answer was grand: "Our cattle shall also go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind" (ver. 26). And in Exodus 12: 32 Pharaoh cedes the flocks and herds also. The devil knows that out-and-out separation from the world is what must mark God's people, if they are to be fit for God's company, and He to bless them with His presence. Hence Satan's persistent effort to hinder their escape from the world.

The moment they were out, God says, I am going to dwell among you. Then the Tabernacle was reared; and by-and-by the Temple was built. It was called God's House, His glory filled it, and any one in that day who sought God must go to that Temple — that was where He was to be found. And that is why the Ethiopian eunuch went up to Jerusalem, because he thought God was there. He went to the spot where he thought God could be found, but he came away disappointed. Why? God was not there then. Failure, sin, and idolatry had come in, and God had disowned His earthly people, and forsaken His House, the Temple. Ezekiel tells us (Ezek. 9 and 10) how His glory, which had so blessedly filled the House of the Lord in Solomon's day (see 1 Kings 8: 10, 11), began to depart. It was very reluctant to go, and moved from the cherubim to the threshold, thence to the east side of the city, upon the Mount of Olives, then it took its upward departure, and God's House was empty. Was it not refilled? Never; it was burned by Nebuchadnezzar.

The remnant of the Jews who came back, with Ezra and Nehemiah, rebuilt the Temple, but we have no account of the glory filling it. Ezekiel tells us (Ezek. 44) that it will come back by-and-by to an earthly house yet to be built in Palestine; but we have no account of the glory or presence of the Lord revisiting the earth, until one starry night to a number of shepherds, who were keeping their sheep in the fields of Bethlehem, the angel of the Lord appears, the glory of the Lord shines round about them, and they hear the wonderful tidings, that in Bethlehem, the city of David, that day there had been born to them "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." When the Son of God became incarnate, the glory of the Lord revisited the earth in connection with His birth and life.

And what was the Temple then? Was the glory in Herod's Temple? No, it was hid beneath "the veil, that is to say, his flesh," but there it was, in that Man. You remember what He Himself said in John 2. Man is naturally a religious creature, and will go on with form, ceremony, and ordinances, when all life has departed out of them. The Jewish ritual was maintained, but God had departed, He was not there. Then it was that "Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the

oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2: 13-16). That shows what God's professed House could come to — a place of merchandise and money — and is it not so today in Christendom? History repeats itself.

"And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy *this temple*, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of *the temple of his body*" (John 2: 17-21).

Where then was the Temple of God? In His Person, a Man on earth, sealed with the Holy Ghost. It was not only that He was God's Son — that He was Emmanuel, God with us; but more than that — He was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10: 38). In Jesus' blessed body God was moving here along the earth for three and a half years of public ministry, and if any one sought then to know God, he must go to Jesus. God still dwells on earth today, only now it is not Jesus that is upon earth, but collectively His people, who by the Spirit are His temple — as we shall see — and further He Himself is in their midst.

You do not get the knowledge of God now except in connection with what He calls His Assembly, in some way or other. It might be in a desert place (see Acts 8: 26-40), through the ministry of some servant, who is an integral part of the Assembly; or it might be in the bosom of the gathered Assembly, as Paul says, "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. 14: 24, 25). He recognises the presence of God in the midst of His people.

In Matthew 21, where the Lord cleanses the Temple, similar to the action which John gives, at the beginning of His ministry, He said to those whom He drove out a second time, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21: 13). Quoting an Old Testament scripture (Isa. 56: 7), He calls it "*my house*" there, only to show how utterly had man in responsibility failed, touching divine things; what God designed as a place of prayer, man had made to be a den of thieves. It only shows what divine things can become in the hands of man, so corrupt is he in the moral springs of his being. Two days afterwards He said "Behold, *your house* is left unto you desolate" not "*my house*" now, but "*your house*" — "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23: 38, 39). As to the house where God was supposed to be, He has to say, It is "desolate" — He is not there.

The next thing is the Lord is slain, the Messiah is refused, He is put to death by His own people — the house is empty, and the grave is filled. Then He is raised from the dead, ascends on high, the Holy Ghost comes down, and the first effect is that He filled the house where the disciples were, and sat upon each one. That filling of the house carries with it the deeper thought of the House in which God dwells, *i.e.*, the Assembly looked at corporately. The body of the

individual believer is equally said to be the temple of the Holy Ghost. There is no doubt as to the corporate thing, because we read, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3: 16). The Assembly of God in Corinth Paul here distinctly calls "the temple of God." In the same epistle, he says, of individual Christians: "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? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20). Thus we get the collective side of the truth, and find all believers on earth at this moment united in one spiritual building as the Temple of God that man does not see.

You may put up a building that man can see, and call it a church; but that is not the thought of Scripture. There is upon earth what God calls His Assembly, His House, His Temple. It is there where He now dwells; and none compose that but God's own children, who have been born of the Spirit, led to believe on the Son of God, are washed in the blood of Christ and sealed by the Spirit also. Looked at collectively they are God's Temple, where He dwells, and there is immense privilege connected with that.

When the individual believer is looked at as the Temple of the Holy Ghost — which is true as to his body, because he is sealed by the Spirit — he must walk carefully for that very reason. If he go into associations unsuitable to the Lord, he takes the Holy Spirit with him; for this blessed Spirit does not *leave* him, as He is the earnest of our inheritance until redemption is put forth in power unto the purchased possession (Eph. 1: 13, 14). The indwelling of the Spirit of God in the body of each believer is indeed a wonderful truth, and the Christian must be careful not to grieve Him. He will not *leave us*, therefore we must take care not to *grieve* Him, which is the purport of the exhortation, "*Grieve* not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4: 30).

We must be careful not to confuse the truth of the House of God — with which responsibility is connected — with the truth of the Body of Christ, which develops our privileges as members thereof according to the counsel of God, for Christ is the Head of a body, every member of which is in vital union with Him by the Holy Ghost. This could not be said of every one now who is of the House of God in its responsible aspect. All baptized professors of Christ are professedly there; but the Body is composed of real believers, united by the Holy Ghost to the living, ascended Man in glory the Head, who has His Body on the earth.

Any one who is a member of the Body of Christ is an integral part of Christ. If you belong to Him, you are part of Him. That is why it says, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is *Christ*" (1 Cor. 12: 12). If I had written that chapter I should probably have said, "So also is the Church." God there calls the Church Christ. In Genesis 5, where God speaks about Adam and Eve, it says, "Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called *their* name Adam" (ver. 2). It is the same thought, that the Bride and Bridegroom are one — Christ and the Church are one. In the Body of Christ everything is real, because no one can be a member of the Body of Christ without being a true Christian, born and sealed of the Spirit. But there might be in that which has its responsibility as the House of God today, those who have nothing to do with Christ save by profession. (See 2 Tim. 2, 3)

On the day of Pentecost the House of God and the Body of Christ were co-extensive. All was real. The stones in the House were the members of the Body, for they all had the Holy Ghost; and this is still true of the divine work, Christ's building. But the House as committed to man's responsibility has widened out so as to include an immense mass of lifeless profession in Christendom. We have already seen how the Assembly grew, as believers in Samaria, in Caesarea and then among the Gentiles, came in. The introduction of a new labourer, a wise master builder in God's building, Paul, marked a notable day in the Assembly's history. He brought out what had been hidden till then — "the mystery" — which was that Jew and Gentile, wrought in by grace, born of God, and sealed by the Spirit, are made one in Christ, and united to Him who is the Head, at God's right hand. It may help you to get hold of the truth of the Assembly being the Body of Christ if you see this — that the Head of the Church was never dead. He who is Head of the Church. was dead — He died as Messiah and Man; but He never was Head of the Church till He was alive from the dead.

When did Adam become the head of a race? As a fallen sinner, out of Eden, then he begat his family. When does Christ become Head of the Church? Not till He goes to God's right hand, and the Holy Ghost comes down; then this wonderful new structure is formed, which is to enjoy God, and display Christ. All this was the result of the Spirit being here personally, founded on Christ being glorified. If you read the Acts you will be struck with the thought that there is not only a mighty influence, but a divine Person dwelling here upon earth. Ananias had "lied to the Holy Ghost" — "not to men but to God" (Acts 5). The Spirit could say to Philip, "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot" (Acts 8: 29). To the prophets of the Assembly at Antioch "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13: 2), and then sent them out on that wonderful missionary tour amongst the Gentiles. Again, Paul was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (Acts 16: 6), because He wanted to send him into Europe with the gospel. All this shows that there was a divine Presence dwelling in this new structure, here upon earth. God's Assembly was God's House, which He built, and in which He dwelt.

If a man build a house he can do one of three things — he can sell it, let it, or live in it. God neither sold, nor let His House — He came to live in it; and that is a wonderful truth for a Christian to see. It puts a new character on the Assembly, and makes me ask myself if I have ever really taken in the words, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom *ye* also are *buildd together* for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 21, 22). The habitation of God through the Spirit is what the Assembly is now, while God's work is going on, and the final thought is, "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," as seen in Revelation 21 — that is the completed building — what it is growing to now, when all will be perfectly according to His mind in the new heavens and earth. In Acts 19, Paul found a company of twelve, who had been baptized with John's baptism, and had not heard about the Holy Ghost having come. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied," and the Assembly of God was locally formed in Ephesus. A wonderful work went on, and eventually there came to them the beautiful epistle, bearing their name, which is occupied with unfolding the truth of God as to "the mystery." The Ephesian believers are there told that they "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner

stone" (Eph. 2: 20). No builder is here named. Are not the apostles the builders? Not according to this scripture — they are themselves stones: "The foundation of the apostles and prophets" — the truth which they, the apostles and prophets of the *New Testament* brought out, appears to me to be that on which our faith reposes, Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

Now see what an important thing the House of God is. People think it is some place where they go, so they take off their hats, and I have no objection to that. It is done out of reverence, and if there be one thing that should mark God's Assembly it is reverence, and I am sure we are not so marked by that as we might be. It is impossible to over-estimate the magnificence of the truth that the Assembly is the habitation of God through the Spirit. If we were summoned to the palace and presence of King Edward VII., there would be a kind of behaviour suited to the occasion; and if we remember that God's people are His habitation through the Spirit, it will produce a gravity in my mind and yours, that perhaps has not always been present there. Get hold of what it is to be the habitation of God through the Spirit. Where is it to be seen today? Alas, it is not in evidence. It is composed of all God's people today, though they are scattered in the divers so-called "churches" of Christendom, not walking together, to our sorrow and shame, be it said. The Assembly of God today in any place, is *all* the people of God in that place, and none others — not *any few*, however they may assume to be the Assembly. All mere professors are outside the divine work of the House of God, however they may have the solemn responsibility of their place in it as committed to human builders.

If you, my hearer, have not been truly converted, born of God, washed from your sins by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and sealed by the Spirit of God, having experienced what Christ speaks of as the baptism of the Holy Ghost, by which all are baptized into one body, and cemented into one spiritual building — you are outside, and your name of Christian is absolutely valueless, save that you cannot free yourself from the responsibility that attaches to it. I beg all unconverted professors of Christ to ponder the path of their feet, because there is coming a day when the Lord must reject what is unreal. Even in Peter's day the time had come when judgment must begin at the House of God. That of which I have been speaking is real, what God builds, what the Spirit forms, and what the world does not see. Happy is he or she who is a living stone in that building.

While we are passing on through this scene, where Christ was rejected, there is a spot where He can come and dwell — the Assembly, which is divinely constructed. Do you think an unconverted person is there, an unregenerate man? No; though it is quite possible for such to intermingle with those who constitute that Assembly. The Assembly of the living God is that which is the fruit of His own blessed grace. To men once dead in sins, by His Spirit's activity He has communicated life. Through the knowledge of Christ dead and risen, they have received the Spirit of God as the witness of the forgiveness of their sins, and all such have become an integral part of the Assembly of the living God.

We are brought there into the region of life, freshness, brightness, joy, perennial gladness, peace with God, enjoyment of God, and apprehension of His love. It is indeed a wonderful thing to be an integral part of the Assembly of the living God. You ask me who form it. All the saints of God on earth today. Every saint may not know it, but such is the fact, and what I desire is, to wake up in every believer's heart an increased sense of the blessedness of being part of God's

Assembly. If I get the sense of what that is, I shall have then the thought, I must get clear of the world, I must be separate if I am going to answer at all to God's thought for His people.

Now let us turn to 1 Timothy 3, where Paul gives us remarkable instruction in regard to God's House. It was possible for Timothy or others to behave very badly in it. It is the aspect of the House to which I have referred where man has his responsibility. In writing to Timothy he says, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3: 14, 15).

The first thought is the House; the second, the Church; the third, the pillar and ground of the truth. The House of God is where He dwells here on earth.

The Assembly is then "the pillar and ground of the truth "what is that? A pillar is what supports and holds up a thing. And how is the Church to be the pillar — does the Church teach? Never in Scripture.

The Church is taught. Who teaches then? The Spirit teaches through gifts, through servants of the Lord whom He uses as the gifts of Christ to His Body, the Church; but you never find that the Church teaches. The Assembly, as "the pillar and ground of the truth," is to maintain and uphold the truth by its confession and testimony, to contend for it against all gainsayers, because she has it. When Christ was on earth He was the truth, and now, though hidden in God, He is still the truth; but the Assembly knows Christ, and is the maintainer of the truth on earth where Christ is not. The Assembly is not the truth, the Spirit of God is that. She maintains the truth on earth. She is God's witness to present the truth to men. When she is removed by-and-by, at the Lord's coming, the truth will have disappeared from the earth, and men will believe a lie (see 2 Thess. 2: 11, 12). The Assembly, as set up by God on the earth, is the pillar and ground of the truth, and what does not present and maintain the truth is not God's Assembly. Everything connected with Christ and His glory is of vital interest and deepest importance to the Assembly. What she maintains before the world is essentially connected with the Person of Christ, the living centre of all truth. Hence she will give up nothing of the truth.

You see men today give up this, that, and the other part of Scripture. Is this being true to the responsibility of the Assembly as the pillar and ground of the truth? It is the worst unfaithfulness. The Assembly of God was set in this place to hold tenaciously to the truth, for it centres and finds its fulness in Christ and His Person, and what touches the truth in any part of it touches Him. That is the meaning of the next verse: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3: 16). That was Christ. God, the object of their worship, was never seen of angels till His Son became incarnate. What happened when people believed on Him in the world? They came out of it — the discovery of Christ brought them out of the world, as a moral system that God is going to judge. He who was the Temple of God when here is gone from this scene, and what has God been pleased to leave here in His stead? He has sent down the Holy Ghost, and He has formed a new Temple. Sinners saved by grace, out of Jew and Gentile, are, by the reception of the Holy Ghost, formed into a holy and beautiful House where God dwells. Those who form that House are

attached to Christ, love His name, and maintain His truth in the day of His rejection. That is what the House of God in its normal character should be.

How far the Church has departed from this, you know very well. It has failed; man has failed everywhere in responsibility. And now we shall briefly look at how what God formed as His own habitation has become that great outward thing called Christendom, which as such is hastening on to the judgment of God, while all the time there is the real work of God being carried on in it, which is growing to and will result in an holy Temple in the Lord as we have seen. Turn to 1 Corinthians 3: 9, "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." The Corinthian Assembly, formed by Paul's ministry, was God's building; and looked at broadly and largely Christendom is the House of God; only we must not in our minds connect with the House all the privileges which belong to the Body of Christ. In the Body all is real; in the House, in this aspect of it, much is mere profession. It is because people were taught that any one baptized was made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," that there has come in all the unreality and confusion that is in Christendom today. Members of Christ's Body are those who have been the subjects of the work of Christ. Baptism of the Holy Ghost brings you into the Body. Water baptism only brings you into the House by profession, but that carries with it responsibility, for God is going shortly to judge it. That is why the apostle Peter wrote: "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 Peter 4: 17). You must not shut your eyes to that. The House of God, as Peter sees it in this chapter, will come in for judgment. God acted similarly in Israel's day (see Jer. 25: 29; Ezek. 9: 6). The Christian profession has not remained faithful to God, and Paul says it will be cut off (see Rom. 11: 21, 22).

Speaking of man as a builder, Paul says: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon" (1 Cor. 3: 10). Nobody could lay a foundation in Corinth — Paul had laid it; the foundation was Christ. He had come and told them of Christ dead and risen — and thus laid the foundation. Others might follow, and preach or teach in the Lord's name. Then the apostle describes what might be built by men in responsibility, and points out three classes of builders. "Now, if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; *every man's work shall be made manifest*: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (vers. 12, 13). The teaching might be solid or worthless, but souls are formed by it. Doctrine influences men's souls. What is really of God will stand, and the reverse be destroyed.

Fire will not destroy the gold, silver, or precious stones; but what about the wood, hay, and stubble? The fire must of necessity destroy them. What is thus built refers to the doctrines, good or bad, by which souls were introduced to the Assembly, some good and really the work of God, others lifeless and dead, induced by vain doctrine to take the ground of the profession of Christ. Every man that takes the name of the Lord on his lips will be tested, and — solemn reflection for all Church builders and Christian workers — every one taking the place of being Christ's servant will be tried, and his work also.

Now see the three classes of builders in the result: — First, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall *receive a reward*" (ver. 14). What is that? The man is saved, and his work stands. His work is according to God, and he is rewarded. Second, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall *suffer loss*: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (ver. 15). The man is saved, but his work is all lost; there is no reward. Now if I have been busy building up a state of things, and find out in the day of the Lord it has all been a mistake, what loss I shall suffer. That is a serious consideration for every Christian. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (ver. 16) is the solemn preface to the third class of builders here spoken of. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (ver. 17). The man is lost, and his work is lost.

The point of the passage is ministerial labour expressed by various doctrines, and seen by their fruits to be either good, worthless, and vain, or utterly subversive of the truth of God as the case might be; and three cases are given. The first man is saved, and his work stands — all is good. The second man is saved, for the workman was a child of God, but his work was unintelligent and vain, hence his work is lost. The third man is lost, and his work burned up. He was a corrupter of God's Temple which is holy. This scripture should surely cause every serious man to ask himself, "Have I God's mind in what I am building?" To miss this is to ensure nothing but absolute ruin, failure, and destruction in the day of the Lord, so far as the work is concerned, though the workman be saved. The third case given here contemplates manifestly an unconverted servant, an imitator of "Noah's Carpenters" — people who may have helped to build the ark, and yet were not inside it when the judgment fell. Friend, are you one of this kind? Are you busy in Christ's things and have not yet been born again? You should ponder this passage carefully, for clearly its teaching makes Christian service a very serious thing.

Many other scriptures present the House of God as being built by man in responsibility. We see this particularly in Paul's Epistles to Timothy, the first of which we have already glanced at. The first epistle presents *the truth*, and shows us things *in order* in God's House. In the second epistle *error* had come in, the truth been given up, and things had got into great *disorder*, and the man of God gets instruction how to behave when all is in disorder. There we read: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2: 19).

What God builds will abide, and although all the Lord's people in any locality today do not know each other, yet the Lord knows them all. They ought to know each other, and, if they are set to really follow the Lord, they will soon find each other out. Dear old Anna knew all the Lord's people in Jerusalem and "*spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*" (Luke 2: 36-38). She was over a hundred years of age, but was as energetic as she was devoted, being a real child of her father. She was an Asherite, and of him it was written: "Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33: 24, 25). Her foot was dipped in oil — Holy Ghost energy — truly. The children of God ought to know each other — they are all of one family, one Father, one House, one Body, and they will all be together by-and-by.

God's house has now outwardly become as "a great house," with much in it that is not of God, as it is written, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (ver. 20).

The professing Church in this passage is looked at as a great house, it is all that which calls itself Christian, and every Christian, spite of himself, is of and cannot get out of it. He can, however, cleanse himself from that which dishonours the Lord, and is bound to do so if he will walk in faithfulness, and seeks to be a vessel unto honour and fit for the Lord to use.

"Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity," is the divine injunction in a day of evil, and the way to show real love to God's saints, in an evil day, is to maintain the truth at all costs, at its full level. This is the rule of Christian faithfulness. What dishonours Christ the true heart departs from. We are not called to put other people right, each individual must put himself right. The responsibility of the individual never ceases, and if the nominal Church has departed from the truth so much the more need for me to know what it is and act upon it. If I know a thing is wrong, I am done with it, by the grace of God. I am not going to associate myself with what is iniquity.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour and some to dishonour" (ver. 20) describes most graphically what God's house would become. It has come to be a great house — having many rooms, many compartments. When such is the case we are told what to do.

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (ver. 21). To "purge himself" is the first duty of the faithful follower of the Lord. People say, "Why do you not try to put things right?" I have only to put myself right, because I am not competent to put others right. You put yourself right, and then you will help other people, and that is what I am trying to do. I do thank God for any little bit of light He has given me on His Word, and I am trying to share it. If I purge myself from what is not according to God, and does not suit Christ, I shall be a "vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use," and so also will you. But there is a moral state needed for Christ to take either you or me up and use us.

We have now seen that the truth of the house of God is very important and blessed, and it all turns on the presence of the Holy Ghost here. The people of God are put and held together, and in its normal state there is not an unconverted one inside — they are all outside. The inmates of God's house are in a wonderful place of privilege. No one knows me that does not live in my house. It is only those who really get into God's house that know Him. There is nothing more blessed than that.

You know the Lord, and by separation from all that is unsuited to His name you can be in the enjoyment of the Lord in the midst of His temple. What has the unconverted man to do with that? Nothing. He is outside. Shall we leave him there? No, by all means try and reach him. Go out and preach the gospel to him. Get him converted. Then show him the way in, to know God, and enjoy Him, and wake up to find himself "a living stone" in Christ's building. Regarding

every such case I say, thank God, another stone is added, and it is beautiful to see how God's building is growing.

On the other hand, men have built up an immense mass of profession that must all come down. Christendom is a mass of confusion. What men call the church is no guide. Yet there is a path and a guide. You and I must learn to pick our way in a day like this by hearkening to what God says in His Word. Well said the apostle Paul: "I commend you to God, and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20: 32).