

The Church

F. A. Hughes.

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MARCH 1963 The Church (1)

The words "church" and "churches" are mentioned some 120 times in the New Testament, and the same original word, meaning "a calling out" is used. The only exception is in Acts 19: 37 where the expression "Robbers of churches" is a compound word in the Greek. Quite obviously the subject is one of great interest to the Inditer of the New Testament — the Holy Spirit of God, as also to the men He has used to write that book.

Careful attention to the Scriptures should leave the honest searcher in no doubt at all as to the divine thought of the Church, (or, "assembly" as another translation speaks of it) and yet in the minds of men there exists all kinds of erroneous ideas as to this immensely important and precious matter. The following comments will be well known to and appreciated by many, but we do well to follow Peter's example in seeking to "stir up . . . pure minds by way of remembrance."

The first Scripture to which we would call attention is in Matthew 16: 18, where the Lord, speaking to Peter as to his confession regarding the Person of Christ, says "Upon this rock *will I build my church*; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Now it is important to notice the context in which this incident is set. The Lord had warned His disciples to "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," (verse 6). The Scriptures throughout speak of Christ, the pre-eminence of His Person and the value of His work. The Pharisees, whilst believing the Scriptures up to a point, refused to recognise the glory and greatness of the One of whom they speak; whereas the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection (Matthew 22: 29) had no knowledge of the "living God."

Before we can have a right conception of the Church we must be delivered from the conjecture and supposition referred to in the following verses (13, 14), and have a clear view of the greatness of the Person of Christ and that which God has established as the result of His death and rising again. Whilst at that moment the resurrection was future, and Peter and the other disciples were slow to understand what the Lord said to them regarding it, nevertheless the truth of it is implicit in Peter's reply to the Lord's question, "But whom say ye that I am?" "Thou art the *Christ, the Son of the living God*".

It is a most blessed and important matter to see that the first mention of the Church stands connected with the thought of what is *living*. This implies the fact of the resurrection, a sphere which is beyond the conception of the mind of men, and the appreciation of which is dependent upon the

revelation of divine Persons. The revelation by the Father to Peter as to the "Son of the living God" is that which the resurrection itself manifested "Declared . . . Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead" or, "By resurrection of the dead," (Romans 1: 4). It is in resurrection that the "gates of hell" (the kingdom of Satan) are robbed of their power, the enemy's stronghold stormed and left defeated. To quote another, "That, then, which God founds upon this rock of the unchangeable power of life in His Son shall not be overthrown by the kingdom of death," (J.N.D.).

We should notice two further points in the Lord's remarks to Peter. Verse 18 reads in the New Translation, "And *I* also, I say unto thee." This is a magnificent assertion of the deity of Christ! Who but a divine Person Himself could, in referring to what God the Father had said, add "*I* also say." Hence we see that the Church is not built by human hands, it is the work of One who in His Person is "over all, God blessed for ever," (Romans 9: 5).

Then we read "I will build *My* Church." There is something very precious about these oft-quoted words. The Church is not only that which Christ Himself builds, but it is *His*. We may see in a future article how exceedingly precious His Church is to His own heart. Let us revel in the blessed knowledge that we, through infinite mercy, are part of that wonderful living organism which Christ calls "*My* Church."

Notice that He says, "I will build." He does *not* say, "I *have* built," or, "I *am* building". Whilst during His pathway here in this world Christ drew to Him by the words of infinite compassion persons who would form part of His Church, yet He *did not* build the Church when here. The work which he so fully and blessedly completed at Calvary, and His glorious resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God were all in view of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It was then, and not until then, that the Church was established. It is of the utmost importance to see this. The Church is *not* found in the Old Testament. The reference in Acts 7: 38 is to God's earthly people, who as the seed of Abraham were in fact "called out" to be a peculiar people to Himself. Neither is the Church an addition to, or a continuation of Judaism, it is something *completely new*, the truth of which was "kept secret" (Romans 16: 25) and awaited the Spirit's day for its revelation, a ministry given particularly, but not exclusively, (Ephesians 3: 5) to Paul.

In a future word we hope to show the way in which Scripture distinguishes between that which is built by divine Persons in relation to the Church and that which men have built.

APRIL 1963 The Church (2)

In a previous article we considered the church as that which is built by Christ Himself, and which is His own peculiar possession. "I will build *My* church" (Matthew 16: 18). From the Lord's own words in the earlier verses of that chapter we see how necessary it is to be free from the thoughts of men, and to have a clear vision of the greatness of the Person of Christ if we are to arrive at a true conception of what the church really is. As presented in Matthew 16 the church, as a divine structure, is *impregnable*, "the gates of hell *shall not* prevail against it." We can rest on the unalterable blessedness of the word of Christ; the church is *His*, and will be throughout time and eternity.

The church has an immense value in the minds of divine Persons, a brief consideration of which truth should serve to give it a large place in our own affections. In Acts 20: 28, we read, "the assembly of God, which He has purchased with the blood of His Own," (New Trans.). The reference to "all the flock," and the instruction "to feed (or, shepherd) the church of God," would suggest that the personnel rather than the church as a vessel are in view. Other Scriptures, to which reference may be made later,

clearly refer to the church as a vessel. How blessed it is to realize that every member of this august company has been "purchased" at such a cost; what infinite value is thus placed upon each one by God Himself! The deep interest of the whole Godhead is apparent in that one verse of Scripture, and the transaction referred to is one which has glorified God in a most wonderful way. We understand that the verb (the "doing" word) "purchased" is one that causes the glory of what is done to reflect upon the doer, that is upon God Himself.

The glory of the whole transaction is His, but the consideration of this would give to us a greater understanding of the value of each individual saint to God.

O mind divine, so must it be
That glory *all* belongs to God;
O love divine, that did decree

We should be part, through Jesu's blood.

The church is infinitely precious to Christ. Whilst the parables spoken by the Lord as recorded in Matthew 13, have the "kingdom of heaven" in mind, the thought of the church as precious to Christ underlies verses 45 and 46. The New Translation gives verse 46 as "one pearl of great *value*". In the world around us price oft-times has but little reference to intrinsic value, but the Scriptures reveal the intimate link between the "great price" which the sufferings of Calvary involved, and the "great value" of the church to Christ. The truth of this is most blessedly seen in Ephesians 5, "Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered Himself up for it, in order that He might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present the assembly to Himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless." How much is involved in those verses! He gave Himself; He sanctifies; He will present her to Himself. Love, eternal love, is seen in every movement; love that surrendered all; love that has continued its unceasing, unaltered service of devotion; love that will be completely satisfied in having secured its object for its own delight, entirely suited to the presence of God, and in absolute accord with His eternal thoughts. "According as He (God) has chosen us in Him before the world's foundation, that we should be *holy and blameless* before Him in love." That is the thought of God from eternity, and the result of Christ's movements in devoted love is that the church is secured in complete correspondence to the mind of God, "*glorious . . . holy and blameless*". Thus the Lord Jesus secures an object for the joy of His own heart eternally, and that, too, which fully meets the thoughts and desires of the blessed God. How precious the church is to Christ!

With what delight the Holy Spirit indited those verses in Ephesians 5. The Scriptures had recorded the presentation of Eve to Adam in the beginning of man's history; a wonderful moment for Adam, and indeed for Eve too. Alas! the subsequent history is well known to us all. The securing of the church for the heart of Christ is something which will abide throughout time and eternity. Eve, as the result of divine workmanship, was peculiarly suitable to Adam in every way, and throughout eternity the church, in holy nearness to Christ, will be the joy and satisfaction of His own heart, and in Christ and His church will be displayed in a coming day the consummation of God's eternal purpose.

As we thus consider the value of the church to divine Persons, may the Holy Spirit of God impress upon our hearts the wonder and perfection of God's eternal thoughts, and cause us to abound in thanksgiving that, as the result of the precious, sacrificial love of Christ, we have an eternal part in that which divine love has secured for its own joy and glory.

MAY 1963 The Church (3)

Paul in writing to Timothy speaks of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground (or, base) of the truth," (1 Timothy 3: 15). Again, in the epistle to the Ephesians, we read of "the household of God" and of "an habitation of God through the Spirit," (Eph. 2: 19-22). In the first Scripture Paul was hoping to see Timothy "shortly," but if that was not possible he wrote instructing him how he should "behave . . . in the house of God, which is the church." It is therefore quite evident that God had found a dwelling place amongst His people *on the earth*.

A careful consideration of this stupendous fact must impress us with both its blessedness and its challenge. God is love, and the presence of One who in His nature is perfect love must indeed be most blessed; but God is also holy, and as dwelling among His people He does not surrender any feature of His holiness. "Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord for ever," (Psalm 93: 5).

Throughout Scripture we see that it was God's desire to enjoy the company of His people, and a reference to some of the chapters in which this desire is expressed will show how carefully the Holy Spirit has guarded the thought of God's holiness as dwelling amongst His own. In Exodus 25: 8, we read "And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." In the verses immediately preceding we have a collection of things which speak of priestly features, "Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense. Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate." In Exodus 29: 44, we read "I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to Me in the priest's office." Then the next verse adds, "And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God." Would it not suggest that God is looking for such features of holiness to mark those among whom He desired to dwell?

Then in 1 Kings 6: 13, He says, "And I will dwell among the children of Israel." The verse preceding indicates the moral condition which God looks for amongst His people, "If thou wilt walk in My statutes, and execute My judgments, and keep all My commandments to walk in them." God could not dwell in the midst of a lawless, disobedient people.

In the New Testament Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to judge and be separate from all that is inconsistent with the nature of God, reminding them that they "are the temple of the living God," adding the gracious promise of God Himself, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people," (2 Corinthians 6: 14-18). It is perhaps good to remember (although this is after the church has been taken to heaven) that when God tabernacles with man in the eternal state, *everything* contrary to the nature of God will have been removed for ever (see Revelation 21: 3-5).

Now the important question arises, how is it possible for such as we, ruined by the fall and sinners by nature and by practice, to be part of that company amongst whom God now dwells? The first reference to God's habitation is found in Exodus 15. God had appeared to men in earlier times; Enoch and Noah had, "walked with God;" Abraham and Isaac had walked before Him (Genesis 48: 15), but there had been no company of people with whom God dwelt. The simple, yet profoundly blessed truth, is that the people amongst whom God dwells are those whom He has *redeemed to Himself*. This is plainly seen in a later verse of Exodus 15, "Thou in Thy mercy has led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation," (verse 13). They are a people delivered by God from Egypt's power and bondage, standing before Him on the basis of blood that had been shed; brought safely through the Red Sea, God's "own people for ever," (1 Chronicles 17: 22).

If we turn to Ephesians 2 we find the same truth set forth in the most blessed way. The chapter commences with a reference to ourselves in our sinful, dead condition; a state in which we could in no wise be found enjoying the presence of God, nor could we in that condition be responsive to Him. Verse 4 introduces a completely new note — "But *God*". All depended upon God and upon what He would do to provide a dwelling place for Himself, His "rich . . . mercy," His "great love," the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness," have all been operative in this great matter. "We are *His workmanship*", and we have been "made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace." The partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down; we have been reconciled to God and we "have access by one Spirit to the Father." Thus we are brought into the "household of God . . . builded together (Jew and Gentile) for an habitation of God through the Spirit." What a triumph this is for God — and what value is placed on the work of Christ!

It has ever been the thought of God that His saints, in nearness to Himself, should be responsive to the desires of His own blessed heart. The Psalmist could say, "Thou are holy, Thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel." From Exodus 19: 6, we learn that God desired that *all* His people should be unto Him "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." It was not until breakdown came in that a special tribe was chosen for the priesthood. God has not given up His thoughts, and we read in Peter's first epistle (1 Peter 2) that those who "have tasted that the Lord is gracious" are "built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." We have already referred to the "house of God, which is the church of the *living God*", and those who serve Him in His house are themselves referred to as "living stones." Long ago Hezekiah the king said, "The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee; . . . The living, the living, he shall praise Thee." Through infinite mercy we are numbered amongst those who are "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," (Romans 6: 11) and thus form part of that living structure where the living God dwells in the praises of His saints.

This note of praise *is continuing*, as we see from Hebrews 2: 12, "In the midst of the church I will sing Thy praise." *It will continue*, for in Revelation 5 the twenty-four elders — "kings and priests" — break out into a note of praise which finds its echo in "every creature." The number twenty-four is interesting and would perhaps link in a moral sense with 1 Chronicles 24 where the priestly service of "the house of the Lord" is seen functioning in its twenty-four courses as under the ordering of David.

Finally, the church is referred to in Timothy as "the pillar and ground (or, base) of the truth." Immediately following we have that remarkable 16th verse which brings the precious details of the incarnation before us in so wonderful a way. This surely is the great feature of the truth which is enshrined in the hearts of those who form part of the church today. The revelation of God in Christ, the testimony rendered to Him, the faith which has responded to that testimony, and the knowledge of His present place of exaltation in the glory of God, are cardinal truths which are an integral part of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," (Jude 3). The church does not *teach* these truths; nowhere in Scripture is the church referred to as teaching. She is herself *taught* by the Holy Spirit of God, and these great truths have been held in faithfulness by loyal hearts throughout the whole of the church's history here. In days of bitter persecution and martyrdom, in the so-called "dark ages" too, men and women have refused to surrender their faith, many have sealed it with their blood.

We live in days of comparative ease, free from outward persecution, but the call for faithfulness to the principles of God's house is as urgent as ever. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," (2 Timothy 3: 13). From the very ranks of the profession men have arisen "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them," (Acts 20: 30). It is significant that the only other place in the New Testament besides Ephesians 2 in which the same

Greek word for "habitation" is used in Revelation 18: 2. "Babylon" the great system of corruption and of challenge to the glory of God "is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hateful bird."

May we, as helped of God, ever recognize the holiness of His house; having our part in the praises of the living God, and holding steadfastly to the truth as it has been revealed in the power of the Spirit of God.

JUNE 1963 The Church (4)

"The church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," (Ephesians 1: 22, 23).

"He is the head of the body, the church."

"For His body's sake, which is the church," (Colossians 1: 18-24).

The church is definitely stated in the Scriptures quoted above to be the "body of Christ." The truth of this is also seen in other portions of the Word, as 1 Corinthians 12; Acts 9: 4, etc..

It is largely in Paul's writings that this truth is taught, and the importance of it was conveyed to him in his first contact with the Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that the interview he then had with Jesus as risen characterized the whole of his subsequent service to the saints. The knowledge that the persons on earth whom he was persecuting were in fact the body of the living Head in heaven, revolutionized the whole outlook of Saul of Tarsus. He saw something which completely swept away from his thoughts the religious system in which he had lived and in which he had thought he was serving God. He learned that there was a *living organism* here on earth — the body of Christ. This living organism, which stands in sharp contrast to all organizations, religious or otherwise, was brought into being when the Holy Spirit of God came down on the assembled believers at Pentecost. The disciples had been "breathed on" by the Lord Jesus in John 20, and were thus to be characterized by the same living impulses and features which were seen in Christ Himself, but the body as such awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit for its formation.

As the formation of the body was the direct action of the Holy Spirit of God, so every member of that body from Pentecost to the present day has been the subject of the same Holy Spirit's action. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." In that Scripture the apostle goes on to show how far beyond the principles of Judaism the truth of the body is. He adds "whether we be Jew or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." This is one of the grand facts of the mystery of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 3, where in verse 6 he says, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body." We thus see, on the one hand, that our position in the body, which is the church, is dependent entirely upon the work of God by His Spirit, and on the other hand we see that the truth of the body is related to the choicest eternal thoughts of God Himself.

Whilst dwelling upon the important place the work of the Holy Spirit has in connection with the formation of the body, we must also remember with adoring hearts that the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross enters into the matter. In Ephesians 2: 16, we read "And that He might reconcile both (Jews and Gentiles) unto God in one body by the cross."

The outward condition of the church gives us anything but a true picture of the body. God's word is emphatic in saying, there is one body," or it might read simply "*one body*" (Ephesians 4: 4), as though God would impress upon our hearts the thought that is implicit in those two words. In that verse we again see the oneness of the body connected with the "one Spirit." As there is *one only Holy Spirit*,

so as the result of His activities, there is *one only body*.

In Ephesians 1, something of the dignity of the body is brought before us. It is spoken of as "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." The previous verses give us some indication of the glory of Christ in relation to the purpose of God. This glorious Person is "head over all things to the church which is His body." Now the church as the body is said to be the "fulness" of that glorious Man, that is to say she is capacitated to display the feelings, the mind, the affections and the desires of her glorious Head. In Romans 13: 10, love is said to be the "fulness of law;" that is the correct rendering of the word. It is in fact the same word as that used in the verse referred to in Ephesians, 1. Every thought of God in the law finds its expression and filling out in *love*. *By no other principle could God's mind in the law be expressed*. So the church *as the body is unique in the fact that no other company is adequate to express that which is to be found in her glorious Head*. What a place of dignity grace has set us in, and with what delight the blessed Lord takes account of His church!

Do we not see from such Scriptures as Ephesians 3: 6, and Acts 26: 18, that these great and glorious thoughts of the saints were in the mind of God in sending forth the precious gospel?

The value of the church as the body to Christ is shown in the gifts He has given. According to Ephesians 4: 12, these gifts (which we do not here enlarge upon) are, amongst other things, for the "edifying of the body of Christ." The "whole body" in "every part" (verse 16) is in mind, none are left out, the objective being the "increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Thus the body is to be filled out by that which is the very nature of God Himself.

Whilst appreciating and enjoying the place of dignity into which we are brought as forming part of the body of Christ, we must ever remember that in this sphere, as indeed in all others, *Christ must have the pre-eminence*. How blessedly this is insisted upon in Colossians 1: 18! and how gladly would we give Him this place. Is it not striking that the only other reference in the Scriptures to this word, "pre-eminence" is in 3 John 9? Diotrephes sought the place for himself, and would seek to cast his brethren "out of the church."

In Colossians 2: 19, we see the necessity of "holding *fast* the Head" (New Trans.). The conduct and self-exaltation of those who do not do so is portrayed in the previous verse, but the result of "holding fast" is blessedly seen in the nourishment and unity which "increaseth with the increase of God."

Finally as seeking to fulfil the exhortation of Colossians 3, we can know and enjoy the peace of Christ presiding in our hearts, and move here as He did in a spirit of thankfulness to God. "And let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly . . . singing with grace in your hearts to God, (vv. 15, 16).

Head of the church, Thy body,

O Christ, the great Salvation!

Sweet to the saints

It is to think

Of all Thine exaltation!

All power's to Thee committed,

All power on earth, in heaven;

To Thee a name

Of widest fame
Above all glory's given.

Continued

JULY 1963 The Church (5)

In previous papers we have considered the church of God in its general features. Built by Christ Himself it is an impregnable structure; it is of supreme delight and value to divine Persons; it is the house of God, "an habitation of God through the Spirit," and it is the body of Christ united to Him as its Head in glory, and thus capacitated to be an expression of Christ down here.

In the epistle to the Corinthians Paul writes to "the church of God which is at Corinth." It is evident that when Paul wrote, the church of God in that city could be identified; in fact Paul clearly divides the inhabitants of Corinth into three distinct classes, "the Jews . . . the Gentiles . . . the church of God," (1 Cor. 10: 32). Thus a very great responsibility rested upon those who formed the church of God at Corinth, upon each one in his or her individual pathway as also upon the company as gathered together. The majority of these believers were doubtless Gentiles who had been converted to God, and were now, through grace, among those who called "upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Gentiles, as steeped in pagan darkness and idolatry knew nothing of this Name, and the Jews as a nation hated that Name, and had rejected the One who bore it. What a privilege, and yet how great a responsibility, to bear testimony to that Name, a Name which is above every name, in such circumstances.

They had been taken up by God for that very purpose, and He had given to them all that was necessary in order that they might be witnesses in Corinth, which was noted for its corruptness. They were "sanctified (or, set apart) in Christ Jesus;" the grace of God was given to them in Jesus Christ; they were "enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; and they came "behind in no gift." Further, they formed part of a vast company of saints similarly blessed, those who "in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord." Their resources and all that they needed were in God Himself. In the first nine verses of the first chapter, which verses form a kind of preface to the epistle, God is mentioned no less than six times, the last reference calling their attention to the fact that He "is faithful." His will, His grace, His peace, His faithfulness were all at the disposal of these believers who formed the church of God in Corinth in order that they might rightly represent God in that city. Later in the epistle we find Paul suggesting the possibility of an unbeliever, or a simple person, coming into their gathering and falling down on his face worshipping God, and saying "God is *in you* of a truth."

Before we speak of the failures which marked these believers let us notice the wonder and blessedness of verse 8. From the divine side, and in the operation of divine love, features of faithfulness and devotion to Christ *will* be maintained in His church right on to the end of the dispensation, and there will be that in the sight of God which is "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Perhaps there is a link here with the fact that an *overcomer* is in mind right through the public history of the church from Ephesus to Laodicea, (Revelation 2 and 3).

Having spoken of the truth from God's side (and it is always well for us to approach divine things in that way), Paul in verse 10 refers to their practical condition. Alas! the simplicity and unity which would have marked them had they realized that their resources were in God, were completely absent. "My brethren . . . there are strifes among you" (verse 11, New Trans.). Men were before their eyes instead of Christ. How near this feature of strife is to us as believers; Midian, which means "strife" was a *son of Abraham*.

The history of the church at Corinth is alas! the history of the church in responsibility all through the centuries. Schools of opinions, human wisdom, all resulting in a "puffing up" of the flesh. Four times the apostle speaks of the Corinthian believers as being "puffed up." In 1 Cor. 4: 6, he speaks of them being "puffed up for one against another;" in verse 18 and 19 of the same chapter he refers to those who were puffed up in their speech, apparently against the apostle himself, and in 1 Cor. 5: 2, he has to reproach them for being puffed up when they should have mourned over the conditions prevailing amongst them. Is it not blessed to notice that, as moving in the "more excellent way" of love this feature will be absent? "Love . . . is *not* puffed up," (1 Cor. 13: 4).

We do not dwell further upon the failure of these saints of God except to notice that occupation with men, and resorting to their own opinions, seems to have seriously impaired their views of the Lord's supper itself (see 1 Cor. 11 20-22). Let us thank God that in spite of the introduction of men's thoughts and methods, this precious ordinance has been preserved to us in our own day in all its simplicity and yet profound meaning. May we value it more and more, and constantly face the challenge (and yet the encouragement) of verse 28 in chapter 11.

The apostle meets the conditions at Corinth by the "preaching of the cross" (verse 18). This verse could read "the word (logos) which speaks of the cross." The Lord Jesus in the first chapter of John's gospel is introduced as "the Word" (Logos). In Him was the full expression of the mind and thoughts of God, God has made Himself perfectly known in Christ. Thus the "word" of the cross is the full and complete thought of God in relation to man after the flesh. That man is removed from God's sight for ever, and can have no place at all in the things of God. How much, beloved brethren, we should have been preserved from in our local gatherings if the "word of the cross" had had its right place in each heart! We have valued, and rightly so, the wonderful blessings which have reached us through the cross (1 Peter 2: 24. etc. etc.), may we also be ready to hear the "word of the cross," and seek help not to bring the features of the man whom God there set aside into the gatherings of His people.

In the last verse of chapter 1 the apostle sets out in one verse the true position of the Christian. He has shown that no flesh should boast before God, and now he says, "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." As we understand in some measure the blessedness of such a position, and the resources which are available to us in that position, we would surely agree with what is written, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

There is a priestly touch in Paul's two letters to Corinth. He was skilful in the first letter in the use of the "snuff-dishes," (Exodus 25: 38). His letter would have the character of trimming the lamp, removing all that would hinder the light from shining clearly, and in his second letter he is, by the richness of his ministry, pouring in the oil. That his labours were effective is seen in his commendation of 2 Corinthians 3: 2, 3. These verses imply that their testimony was no private matter only, known just amongst themselves, but it was *well-known*, read of all. How blessed to know that this could be the testimony of every local gathering today.

In closing we might refer to Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. He speaks of them not as the church which is in Thessalonica, but as "the church which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." Actually they *were* in Thessalonica, but Paul is stressing their place in intimacy in relation to divine Persons. They were the babes of Christianity, and John tells us in his epistle that the portion of the babes was that they "know the Father." It is our portion and privilege to know nearness to divine Persons, and to enjoy in intimacy the blessedness and sweetness of divine love. Surely as we are in the good of this we shall be better fitted to fulfil our responsibilities in the localities in which God has set

us.

AUG 1963 The Church (6)

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21: 2)

"One of the seven angels . . . talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Revelation 21: 9)

We have already thought of the church as the body of Christ. As such, and as united to her Head in heaven, she is capacitated to be the expression in the present day of the graces and features of Christ. This is the normal function and testimony of the church as a body.

In the thought of the bride and of the wife, we have that which is for the joy and satisfaction of the affections of Christ Himself. The words of John Baptist in John's gospel, chapter 3, would indicate something of the peculiar joy which fills the heart of Christ as He looks thus upon His church — "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom" (verse 29). She is His own possession.

Whilst the "bride" and the "wife" are both mentioned in the same verse (Revelation 21: 9) a careful consideration of the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit would help us to distinguish between the two thoughts. As "wife" she stands related to Him as "the Lamb." This is seen in the title given to her of "the Lamb's wife," and also again in Revelation 19: 7-9, "The marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife hath made herself ready." The moment of display is not seen until chapter 21, and she, as His wife, will be seen as "ready" for that day. But in chapter 19 she is made "ready" for Himself. He, who as the Lamb has trodden a path of humility and suffering even to death, will, in His exaltation, have by His side in the administration of the kingdom, one who is in every way morally fitted to share His throne. The "*Lamb's wife*" would suggest that she has herself known the path of suffering in sympathy with the Object of her affections. It is a principle of Scripture that suffering precedes glory.

The church as "wife" is therefore mentioned in the portion of Revelation 21 which refers to the reign of Christ in the world-to-come. The whole of that section, from verse 9 to the end of the chapter, is worthy of the most careful attention. As reading it one cannot but be impressed with the beauty and dignity of the vessel secured for the glory of God through the movements of divine love. She is referred to as the "holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, having the glory of God," (New Trans.). The words "that great city" should not be there; the word "great" is properly applicable to the system of iniquity called the "great harlot," but would be completely inconsistent with she who is the "wife of the Lamb," for the word used for "Lamb" throughout the book of the Revelation indicates a "little Lamb."

John saw the glory of the church in this presentation as "in the Spirit" and "on a great and high mountain." Such thoughts are beyond the mind of the flesh and possess a glory and an elevation unknown to the world.

In the history of Joseph we have a wonderful allusion to the thought of "the wife." Joseph had trodden a pathway of suffering; hated and rejected by his brethren, falsely accused and imprisoned. As exalted, Pharaoh decreed that the whole scene should be regulated by him and placed under his absolute control. In that exalted position a wife, Asanath, is given to him, and we may be assured that the monarch was careful to choose one who would be in every way fitted to share the place of supremacy which was given to Joseph. So the church, as the gift of the Father to the Son, is in every

way suitable to be the "helpmeet" of the exalted Lamb, and to share with Him, as Head to the Church, in the administration of the day of display.

There is a challenging thought in verse 11. The "shining" which will mark the saints as the wife of the Lamb in the day of which we have spoken, is the "shining" that should mark us *now*. Paul in writing to the Philippians says in Phil 2, "That ye may . . . shine as lights in the world" (verse 15). These are the only places in which this word for shining is used. What a privilege indeed is ours "in the midst of a crooked and perverse" condition of things to display the characteristics which will illuminate the "day of Christ," when the whole universe will be lighted up with the purity of the light shining in the church as the Lamb's wife. It is the brightness of "a most precious stone," the words used in reference to Christ in 1 Peter 2: 4.

It is well known that the earlier verses of Revelation 21, refer to the eternal state. Peter refers to this as "the day of God," and Paul speaks of it as characterized by God being "all in all." It is not difficult for us to accept these verses as referring to the eternal state. The fact that God Himself is alone referred to is consistent with the expression, "God all in all" and "the day of God." Then the mention of "new" four times is significant. Further we read "there was no more sea." It is obvious that the sea did exist at the judgment of the great white throne — for we read, "the sea gave up the dead which were in it" (Rev. 20: 13). In connection with the world-to-come we read of "a river of life;" whereas here in the eternal state we reach the "*fountain* of the water of life." That is, we are led to the very source in *God Himself*.

It is in relation to this scene, filled with the glory and presence of God Himself, that the details of the "bride" are given to us. There is no mention now of the wife, nor of the Lamb. It is a "bride adorned for her *Husband*". She comes "down out of the heaven *from God*". As coming *from God* she must of necessity be suitable to the glory of God, and none but a vessel suitable to, and expressive of, the glory of God could be morally fitted to be the "bride adorned" for such a Husband. Thus the glorious end of God is reached. The church "all glorious" herself and completely suitable to her glorious Head, is seen as held in the embrace of His eternal love in a scene from which every element contrary to the holy nature of God has been banished for ever.

John saw these blessed things; we too are to be occupied with them, for they are the very essence of the "depths of God" which are searched by the Spirit who reveals them to *us* (1 Corinthians 2: 10).

Finally let us ever remember that whilst the enemy of God has succeeded in producing a great counterfeit system filled with the glory of man, we are *not* called to view it except as we see it judged of God. John was invited to look *directly* upon "the bride, the Lamb's wife," but he was invited to see not the "harlot," but the "*sentence* of the great harlot" (Revelation 17: 1).

May the glory of that which God has secured for the joy of His own heart and for the glory of Christ fill our hearts to the exclusion of all that man and his world are occupied with.