

The Pattern of the House

Ezek. 43: 10-12: Acts 2.

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While we have been together reference has been made to that wonderful scripture, Ephesians 5 which tells us that "Christ 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." From this scripture we rightly judge that to the heart of Christ the Church is the most precious thing on earth today.

Now I propose to speak on one aspect of the Church of God. We know, do we not? that the Church is presented in two great aspects in the New Testament. First, as the body of Christ, then, under another figure, as the House of God. When we speak of the Church as the body of Christ we think of all the Christians on earth formed into one body by the Holy Spirit and united to Christ as the Head in heaven; but when we speak of the Church as the House of God, we think of all believers united together by the Holy Spirit to form the dwelling place of God upon earth.

In other words, if we think of the Church as the body of Christ, we think more especially of the Church in *its heavenly aspect*, because it is obvious that if we are united to the Head in heaven, we belong to the place where the Head is. But when we speak of the Church as the House of God, we think of the Church in its *earthly aspect* as the dwelling place of God on earth, and therefore as a witness of God to the world. It is this latter aspect of the Church that I want to refer to this evening, namely, the House of God.

As the truth of the House of God may be new to some here, I will first refer to two scriptures which definitely show that God has His House on earth to-day. Let me read one verse; Ephesians 2: 22, "In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." Then read 1 Timothy 3: 14, 15: "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*." Then the Apostle distinctly says that the House of God "is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." I simply refer to these two scriptures to prove the great fact that God has His House upon earth today.

Now, brethren, I would just remind you of a historical fact which is somewhat remarkable. Most here will remember, how that in the last century, about 1825, God in His grace revived the great truth of the Church, and at that time the truth that was first apprehended was the Church in the aspect of the body of Christ. It is striking that it was not until some years later that the truth of the Church as the House of God was generally apprehended or taught. It was only in the year 1860 that Mr. Darby published his tract, "The House of God; the Body of Christ," and in 1867 his second tract, "The Church — The House and the Body," appeared. The importance of this lies in the fact that the Church as the House of God is the last great truth that has been revived by God. And mark you, dear friends, the truth that is last revived is the truth that we first let go in a day of departure, and hence I think we shall agree that this truth of the Church as the House of God is of the first importance, and therefore I venture to bring it before you in a simple and practical way.

Now before I go further, I will ask you to turn to Ezekiel 43: 10-12: "Thou son of man, show the House to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the House, and the

fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. This is the law of the House."

Now we all know that Ezekiel was the prophet of the Captivity; he was speaking to the people of Israel when they were held in captivity because of their iniquities, and God gave Ezekiel a magnificent vision of the House of God, and He says as it were, to Ezekiel, "You show the people this vision of the House so that they may see how far they have departed from My thought." There are two things the prophet was told to do; first he was to show them "*the pattern of the House*" then he goes on to say in substance a second thing "If," and you will please mark that *If* — "if these people are ashamed of the way they have departed from the pattern, you may go on and show them *the law of the House*." There are then two things there is (1) the pattern of the House, and (2) there is the law of the House.

I may point to a magnificent building, and you may admire its design and you may say to me, "Yes, I see the pattern, but tell me on what principle is the house governed?" Now, God has His House, and He has His principles for the administration of His House, and mark this, we cannot apply the law of God's House to a house that man has designed; you can only apply God's law to God's pattern; you cannot have a pattern of your own, and then try to work that pattern on God's principles. Hence, unless the people repented, the prophet had nothing more to tell them; but if they did repent, if they owned that they had departed from the pattern, he could tell them the law of the House.

Coming now to New Testament times we find that God has still His House upon earth. From the verses I read you, the one in Ephesians and the other in Timothy, it is very evident that God's House today is not formed of material stones it is a House formed of living stones, of believers and moreover God has given us the pattern of His House, as well as the law — the principle — on which His House is administered. Now in order to bring before you the immense importance of this great truth, let me briefly show you what a large place the House of God has in the New Testament.

For instance, in the Acts we see the pattern exemplified in a practical way. In 1st Timothy we find the pattern of the House in a doctrinal way. Then in 1 and 2 Corinthians we have the law of the House, or, the divine principles for the administration of the House, such as association, fellowship, holiness, liberty, love, edification, and separation. Then again, in the Epistles to the seven Churches in Rev. 2 and 3, we get the prophetic history of the Church as the House of God in the responsibility of men, with the result it has been ruined. Then coming back to 2 Timothy, we get instruction how to walk in a day of ruin, and finally, in Rev. 21, in the vision of that magnificent city, we have presented to us symbolically, the House of God in millennial display. From these scriptures you will see that a very large part of the New Testament is taken up with instructions as to the Assembly, the Church of God, viewed as the House of God.

Having made these preliminary remarks, I will ask you to turn to Acts 2, in order to present a few definite facts that will bring before us the pattern of God's House in a practical way. As we look abroad today, we see Christendom broken up into innumerable sects, each having a special form of Church government, holding distinguishing creeds and conducting their services according to special forms and ceremonies. We see, too, vast numbers of societies and organisations for sending out missionaries, and generally conducting religious work, and in them all we see devoted men for whom we can truly thank God.

But, beloved brethren, as we look abroad at Christendom, as we see all this vast machinery for carrying on the service of God, we may well ask ourselves, Is this what God intended? Is all this

religious machinery God's way of carrying on His work? *Is it according to the pattern?* This surely, is a proper question to ask, and in order to answer this question we must go back to the Book, for the simple reason that it is not possible in a day of ruin and departure from the truth, to look abroad on this earth and see any concrete illustration of the House of God.

Therefore in order to get a true conception of the House of God — and here we are faced with a difficulty — we must get it in an abstract way. Abstracting our minds from all that we see around, we must seek to get before us the pattern of the house of God as presented in Scripture, going back to Pentecostal days. I think we shall get some true thought of the pattern of the House in a practical way, and, as I have said, we must have the pattern before we can talk of the law of the House.

In the opening chapter of the Acts we are faced with three great facts. First of all, redemption is accomplished. In Acts 1: 3, we read, "To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion." His sufferings then were over — redemption was accomplished. That was one great fact. Two other facts follow — the Lord Jesus Christ is received up into glory the Holy Spirit is received upon earth. The Church could have no existence apart from the accomplishment of these three stupendous facts. Redemption must be accomplished to remove everything that would hinder God having His Church; then the Lord Jesus Christ must take His place in glory, and the Holy Spirit must come down to earth.

Now, dear friends, I want for just one brief moment to press those two latter stupendous facts, because every essential truth of Christianity hangs upon them. To-day there is a Man, a real Man, in the glory, and there is a Divine Person on earth. When I say there is a Man in the glory you must not for a moment think that I am for, getting that the Man, the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory, is "over all God blessed for ever;" He is that, but still the way Scripture presents the truth is, that He has gone back to the glory as a Man.

Stephen looked up and saw the Son of Man at the right hand of God.

Then, on the other hand, there is a Divine Person on the earth, and mark you, the One that has come down from the glory has come to represent Christ in you and me. That is to say the Lord Jesus Christ has taken a place in the glory as Lord, and the Holy Spirit has come down to make the Lord known in our hearts, and the Person that has come down is as great as the Person that has gone up — hence He is perfectly adequate, and perfectly competent, to take of His things and show them to you and me.

Well, the Holy Spirit comes down, and in Acts 2, He descends upon the hundred and twenty disciples gathered together. He doesn't come upon the twelve simply, but He comes upon the hundred and twenty. Before that day, you will remember according to that word in John 11: 52 the children of God had been scattered abroad, but now, at this moment when the Holy Spirit came, they were gathered together in one, and not only that, but the Holy Spirit *indwelt them* — they were sealed by the Spirit — and He was *with them*, and the result was that the House of God came into existence in a new way. The people of God formed the dwelling place of God on earth.

Now I want to present to you in a simple way seven facts in this chapter that I think will give us an idea of the pattern of God's House. If we get the pattern of God's House into our souls, we shall be able to see whether or not we have departed from it. Now the first great mark of God's House must of necessity be that it is the place where God dwells. Hence the first great thing that comes before us in this chapter is *the presence, power, and control of the Holy Spirit*. Now you will note how the instant the Holy Spirit comes, everything that these disciples do is in the power, and under the control, of the Holy Spirit. They proclaim the glad tidings, but it was, "As the Spirit gave them utterance." In Acts 4: 8, we read, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers," etc., that is to say, when

opposition arose, it was met in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then if we pass on we find in Acts 6 a question arises as to the temporal needs of the saints, and immediately men are chosen to meet this difficulty who are "full of the Holy Ghost." Then in the end of that chapter Stephen meets opposition, in the power of the Spirit. In the end of Acts 7, Stephen endures persecution, but he does it in the power of the Spirit — as we read, "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." In the mighty power of the Holy Spirit he was able to face martyrdom. Passing on to Acts 8: 29, we find Philip, the evangelist, receives his instructions from the Spirit, and so we find, if we follow on chapter after chapter, that the Holy Spirit is present in the House of God to take entire control.

Now, beloved brethren, I think we may well pause for one moment to ask ourselves this question, Have we not in great measure lost the sense of the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit? What was the origin of the ruin of Christendom? Was it not the loss of all sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit? The outstanding sin of Christendom is that it has so largely set aside and ignored the Holy Spirit. By its religious organisations and religious machinery it has, to a large extent, shut out the Holy Spirit.

The presence and control of the Spirit is then the first great mark of the House of God, and apprehending this, we shall be able to measure how great has been the departure from its pattern.

Before passing on, let me say that if the presence of the Holy Spirit is the first great outstanding feature in the House of God, it must involve that where the Holy Spirit is there can be no room for the flesh. Hence you will see in these early chapters of the Acts, that though the flesh seeks to intrude, yet, again and again, the flesh is dealt with. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira religious reputation is sought by lying, and is dealt with by the Holy Spirit; then in Acts 6, the flesh murmurs and is dealt with by the Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, the flesh must be excluded. Oh! brethren, looking around, we see, together with the loss of all sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit there is the allowance of the flesh in almost every form. We have practically said that the Holy Spirit is not able, that He is incompetent to move souls, and we have resorted to all kinds of fleshly methods to try to reach and to touch people. By music, and choirs, and pathetic solos, and other fleshly methods the Holy Spirit has been ignored, forgetting that only by the Holy Spirit can souls be reached, and that He is adequate to meet every possible emergency that can arise in the House of God.

Let me then repeat that the first great mark of the House of God is the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. May God give us to see how far we have departed from the pattern, and may He bring us back to it.

The second great fact that comes out in this chapter is that the House of God is the place where the disposition of God towards men is made known. This is one great leading thought in the House of God. Hence, immediately the House of God is formed, men begin to hear, in all their different languages, the wonderful works of God. We get some of these wonderful works brought out in verses 22-36, how that God was with the Lord Jesus Christ; how He delivered Him up, how He was crucified, how He was raised from the dead, how He was received up into glory; and then mark what Peter says in verse 38: "Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." I do not think we always stop to think what a remarkable verse that is. Peter is speaking to the people who had spat in the face of their Messiah, they had nailed Him to the cross; they had crowned Him with a crown of thorns; they said, "Away with Him, not this Man, but Barabbas." But the marvellous thing is that immediately the House of God is formed there goes out from the House of God this wonderful message which tells to the world the

disposition of God to those very people who had cast out His Son. This is what Peter tells them — in spite of what they had done; in spite of the fact that they had rejected the Messiah and spat in His face and crowned Him with a crown of thorns, such was the heart of God, that He can say, "Repent, and be baptised *everyone of you*" — not a single exception — "in the name of Jesus Christ," and you will receive the remission of your sins, and the greatest possible gift — "the gift of the Holy Ghost." Now that was the magnificent message that went out from the House of God.

Hence you will see another great feature of the House of God is that it is not only the place where God dwells, but it is the place where God is made known. Brethren, if we give up the gospel, we shall depart from the pattern of the House. And so you will find in chapter after chapter of this wonderful book that the gospel is told out, and the fact of the gospel being given up so much today in Christendom only shows how great the departure has been from the pattern.

Let me add in connection with making known the gospel, that not only is the House of God the place where God is witnessed to, but it is the place where God is witnessed to *by God's witnesses*. That is to say in the House of God, God chooses to take up whom He likes to do His work; and, as a matter of fact, He takes up very often very simple people, as we read, in 1 Cor. 1: 26, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." That is to say that God will have a wonderful witness going forth from His House, but He will have that witness carried out by His own witnesses, and His witnesses are for the most part the poor and feeble of this world. So in Acts 2 we read, "Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?" Galileans, of course, were the simple country folk — the peasantry — and Peter "an unlearned and ignorant man" was their leader, and for the most part the witnesses of God have been all through the ages the simple and poor of this world. God on occasions may take up a rich man, or a noble man, for some special work, but generally, as of old, so to-day, God's witnesses are chosen from the despised of this world.

Passing on, we have in verse 41 a third fact. The House of God was formed by a people who were *separate from this world*. It says, "Then they that gladly received his word, were *baptised*: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." They were a separate company. Baptism, as we all know, presents the idea of separation. There was in that day, and there is in this day, the great world system, dominated by the power of evil and the will of men, but on the other hand there was a new circle formed by God, and in that circle the Holy Spirit dwelt. Dominated by the Holy Spirit, and the flesh excluded, there was a circle of life and light and blessing. The converts were separated from this world's circle, and were brought into the Christian circle by baptism — the figure of death. They said in substance, "We are dead to that world in which we once lived, we have left it in order that we might come into that new circle of life and love where God dwells." Now, dear friends, look around at Christendom, and what a sight we see! We see the world and Christians so mixed up that you cannot tell the difference. Does this not show how great has been the departure from the pattern of the house of God?

A fourth fact is in verse 42: "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine," or the Apostles' teaching. The House of God is not a place where we are left in ignorance to follow our own way, and do the best we can; no, it is the place of divine teaching. For us today we have the Apostles' doctrine enshrined in the epistles. In Acts 2, it was limited to what was then known; to-day, we have the whole revealed mind of God in the Scriptures, and Paul's doctrine, which has come out since the

day of Pentecost, is most important. The fact that the Apostles' doctrine is so lightly set aside today only marks a further stage in the downward course of departure from the pattern. Brethren we want to get back to the Word, and have our thoughts formed by the Apostles' teaching.

The fifth fact is, they continued in "*fellowship*." Fellowship, we know from 1 Cor. 1: 9, is the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord — not fellowship with His Son, but fellowship *of* His Son. Fellowship is a very simple thought; it means that we participate in common, and that involves a bond which binds us together. We participate in common in the dominion and administration of the Lord Jesus Christ, we own one Lord, He is the bond of our fellowship, and, beloved brethren, we are responsible to be true to that fellowship.

The sixth fact is "they continued . . . in the *breaking of bread*." In the breaking of bread we formally commit ourselves to fellowship in the death of Christ. "The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" It is something we do ourselves. Baptism is the act of another. We could not baptise ourselves. But when we take the Lord's Supper, it is something we do. We formally commit ourselves to the death of Christ, and that means, beloved brethren, a very great deal. It surely means that now we are responsible to allow nothing that is contrary to Christ's death, that we are not to go on with that for which, and to which, Christ has died. Alas! in this respect, how great has been the departure from the pattern.

The seventh fact is, "They continued . . . in *prayers*." Here then is the last great mark of the House of God. It is marked by being a place of prayer. As we read in the Old Testament the House of God should be the place of prayer for all nations, so, too, when you come to the doctrine in the Epistle to Timothy we see a very, great deal is made of prayer. "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands." It is the place where we can get in touch with God on behalf of men in a perishing world around us. And being the place of prayer, it is the place where we express our dependence upon God.

Here then we have seven marks of the House of God — IT IS THE PLACE WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLS and WHERE HIS PRESENCE IS KNOWN.

IT IS THE PLACE FROM WHICH THE GOSPEL GOES OUT. It is *the House of God* that sets forth the disposition of God to this poor world. It is then not only the place where the Holy Spirit dwells, where the Gospel is told out, but it tells of SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD. It is the place too, where we have DIVINE LIGHT, CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP EXPRESSED IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD and in PRAYERS.

Now I am not proposing anything that is not possible today. We are in the midst of ruin; everything is broken up, but still we have the pattern of God's House, and if I once see the pattern, there are two things before my soul; first, I must refuse everything that is not according to the pattern, and, secondly, I am responsible to walk according to the pattern.

One more remark before I close. In taking you back to Pentecost it is needful to sound a warning note, because we hear a very great deal today of going back to Pentecost, but what people mean, alas! is this, they want to make something of themselves by getting back to the *outward* power of Pentecost; they would like to get back to tongues and healing and miracles. I have no such thought. But what I do say is this — that while I have no thought of trying to go back to the outward power of Pentecost, yet I would seek to get back to the divine principles of Pentecost, and you will see that all I have brought before you this evening is quite possible today. The Holy Spirit is still here; the gospel can still be preached; it is still possible to be separate from this world; we still have the Apostles' teaching; it is still possible to walk in fellowship, to break bread, and to pray. There is not a single mark of the House of

God, that I have brought before you, that is not possible to be walking in the power and blessing of. Hence we can go back to Pentecost for divine principles, but I do not go back for outward power.

Do not let us presume to reconstruct anything, or set up to be a pattern of the house. We shall break down if we do. All we have to do is in all simplicity to seek to walk in accordance with the principles of that House, and, brethren, I say again, I don't go back to Pentecost simply for outward power.

If I want power — and I do want power — I say do not go back to Pentecost, but on to glory, and, beloved brethren, I delight to look on and see the power is coming. A day of display is coming. There will be power and there will be display, but you must look on for that. I know there is a tendency to look back and say that the days that are gone were the best days. Sometimes it is said the times of the early brethren were the best days; and I have no doubt they were saying what wonderful days they had in the days of Wesley and Whitefield; and I am sure they again would talk of the days of Samuel Rutherford and the Covenanters; and if you had lived in Aberdeen and got in touch with Samuel Rutherford, he might have said, "Ah! if you had only lived a hundred years ago in the days of Luther;" and Luther was looking back to the days of St. Augustine; and he again was looking back to the days of the Apostles; and so they were all looking back, and all looking the wrong way.

It may be we live in a day of great failure, we are a feeble folk, but *the best days are coming*; they are not behind; they are on before. Look on. The glory of the latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former. In spite of all the breakdown, and all the ruin and all the weakness, the best times are coming, and in that great city — the holy City, New Jerusalem — I see the glory and power and display, and the weakness and the failure will have gone for ever, for the former things are passed away, and I see the purposes of God fulfilled in spite of the failure of man, so that I repeat, if we want power and glory, we must look on, and if we want divine principles to guide us in the present moment we must look back.

May the Lord give us a deeper sense of the pattern of the House according to His own mind, and may that pattern be transferred from Scripture to our hearts and minds so that we may seek to walk and live according to the principles and pattern of God's House!