

"The church which is His body."

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My present purpose is to consider briefly the work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the Church of God — the body of Christ. "By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12: 13). The Baptism of the Spirit is but feebly understood by the many. Some imagine it to be a kind of "second blessing" entered into by a favoured few at some time subsequent to salvation; others suppose it to be a repeated thing to be called down by saints individually and collectively by earnest prayer.

Scripture speaks otherwise. The baptism of the Spirit (Christ being the baptiser, John 1: 33) is with a view to the body of Christ. By reason of it the saints of God, however numerous, are united to the living Head in heaven and to each other. Such a thing was unknown until Christ was glorified. There were godly men before, of course; individual faith has been since the days of Abel, if not of Adam. But there was no union, nor could there be until redemption was accomplished and Christ ascended to the right hand of God. Then was brought out a purpose, which was formed before the world was, but kept hidden in the heart of God until the suited moment arrived. That purpose was to have a company of persons in heavenly glory with the Second Man to share with Him all the results of His glorious work, in closest association with Him as members of His body. The members are being gathered while the counsels of God concerning the earth are in abeyance. When the Messiah was presented to Israel, He was refused. This has delayed the Kingdom, with all its connected blessing for the whole earth. All will be made good by-and-bye, and all that the prophets have spoken will be accomplished: but for the present Christ sits at the right hand of God, and the Holy Spirit is here, gathering out His members and joint-heirs. When the number is complete, the Lord will descend into the air, and receive them to Himself. It is a wonderful thing to have part in such a counsel. It was an immense privilege of old to be a Jew, and to be in possession of the word of God and the divine sanctuary. But the new wine is surpassingly better for faith. In the new company all fleshly distinctions between Jew and Gentile disappear, the middle wall of partition having been broken down, all have access by One Spirit unto the Father, and all the blessings of the risen Head are ours who are one with Him (Eph. 2) Thus to know our place truly, we must learn Christ's place to grasp our heavenly portion. Christ's portion must be comprehended; for in this all the members share, through the infinite grace of God. All spiritual blessings in the heavenlies are ours in Him; and all the Father's love rests on us in Him.

This lifts the soul right out of the world, and gives it a heavenly character. If our portion is altogether heavenly, and if we are really one with the exalted Man there, it makes us want to know what is there and to become familiar with it all. Impossible that a saint could really grasp by faith his union with Christ in glory and love a hostile and evil world. Intellectual understanding is worthless and vain.

The apprehension of such a place of blessing and privilege carries with it its corresponding responsibilities for our walk on earth. These the apostle presses in 1 Cor. 12. The difference between Eph. and 1 Cor. as regards the truth of the one body is, that the one gives us the heavenly side, and the other the earthly. The members have all received something from the Head for the general edification and blessing, and there is to be no discontent with the place and functions divinely assigned to each (1 Cor. 12: 14-18), on the other hand there is to be no contempt on the part of the more eminently gifted

for those who are but slightly endowed. All are necessary and none are to be despised (v. 19-21). The feeble and the uncomely members, far from being useless in the body, are to have our special affection and care. There is to be a community of interest among Christ's members (v 22-26).

We see these divine principles understood and acted upon in faith by the early saints. The picture presented by the Spirit of God, in the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles is charming in its loveliness and simplicity. From all this, the Church of God has grievously departed. The honoured vessel who was used as the administrator of the truth of Christ and the Church — the apostle Paul — beheld with sorrow the vast majority declining ere he was called to his rest. How rapid the decline after his departure! How soon was the truth completely lost! It is only of late that God has recovered this for His own. Much truth concerning the individual blessing of believers was won back in the sixteenth century, but little or nothing was then entered into as to the Church of God. But the Spirit of God has brought the truth to the front once again before the Lord comes. He would have the saints enter into their true relationship to Christ, that there may be a becoming walk, individually and collectively, and a right attitude towards Him.

It may be argued that it is practically impossible to act upon such principles after all that has come into the professing Church. With the vast mass of Confessors of Christ spending their energies in building up humanly formed bodies, what is to be done? Let us not forget that the Church of God is made up of individuals and each individual saint has his own responsibility to the Lord. To attempt to get the public body right is futile, each must tread the Lord's path for himself. The Holy Spirit is still on earth, and the body of Christ is still here, as we read, "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4: 4). If but few seek to carry this out in faith, they may count on the presence of the Lord with them and the power of the Spirit of God. What more can heart desire? (Matt. 18: 20).