

"There is one body and one Spirit."

Ephesians 4: 4.

(B.T. Vol. 5, p. 14-16.)

The Lord Jesus, both before His death and after His resurrection, had told His disciples of the promise of the Father — that other Comforter who should come, given of the Father and sent of the Son. (John 14, 15, 16.) "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." For Jesus they had forsaken all; and more, far more than all had Jesus been to them. He was now about to go. What could turn a loss so grievous into positive gain? The presence thereon of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. It is clearly impossible to understand these and kindred Scriptures, of anything short of His personal presence. Effects and manifestations are enlarged on elsewhere; but such is not the theme here; nor could any conceivable spiritual power outweigh the comfort of having Jesus with them. But the Spirit was promised personally; not comfort only, but the Comforter Himself, One who could be described as a teacher, remembrancer, testifier, and convicter; One thenceforth and for ever acting in and with the disciples, who left heaven after the Saviour ascended, and who takes His place, on the ground of accomplished redemption, in the midst of those who confess the name of Jesus and wait for His return. When here below, Jesus alone could speak of His body as the temple of God. (John 2.) But now, having borne the wrath of God, and annulled by death the power of Satan, He could righteously send down from the right hand of God the promised Holy Ghost to dwell in the faithful on earth. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3: 16.)

In *principle*, then, the coming of the promised Spirit was contingent on the departure of Jesus, and, in *fact*, it was when He took His seat, as the glorified man in heaven, that the Spirit was sent down. Assembled together with the disciples, previous to His ascension, He "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me; for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." (Acts 1: 4, 5.) The next chapter records the accomplishment of the promise on the day of Pentecost. The Comforter was given; the third person of the Trinity was now, permanently, present in them as truly as the second person had been with them, before He ascended to heaven. The Holy Ghost was the grand witness, as His presence in the disciples was the new and wondrous fruit — of the glorification of Jesus in heaven.

Are the operations of the Spirit of God from the beginning denied? In nowise. Creation, providence, and redemption all speak of Him. His energy declares itself in, and pervades every sphere of, God's dealings. Who moved upon the face of the waters? Who strove with man before the deluge? Who filled Bezaleel with understanding, and all manner of workmanship? Who enabled Moses to bear the burden of Israel, or others to share it? By whom wrought Samson? By whom prophesied Saul? It was by the Spirit of the Lord. And, as in their early national history, His good Spirit instructed the people, even so could the prophet assure the poor returned remnant, "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you." Were any regenerate? They were born of the Spirit; and the blessed and holy actings of faith in the elders who obtained a good report, were, beyond controversy, the results of His operation. So far, the way of God is still, and necessarily, the same. Jesus set not aside in the least the need of the Spirit's intervention. He proclaimed its necessity as a fixed, irreversible truth — "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." But life, peace, and sonship (while all are communicated

and known by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost,) are in no sense the presence of' the Comforter. The disciples possessed these privileges before, the Lord Jesus ascended. They are, therefore, entirely distinct from the promise of the Father, which the disciples did not possess, and which none ever did or could possess till Jesus was glorified. (John 7: 39.) The presence of the Comforter is clearly the distinctive blessing since Pentecost. It was never enjoyed before, though the Spirit had wrought, and wrought savingly, as regards believers at all times.

But when Jesus took His seat in heaven as the exalted Head, the Holy Ghost was sent down, not merely for the blessing of individual believers, but for the purpose of gathering them into one body here below. This and this only is called in Scripture "the Church of God;" and its unity, hanging upon the baptism of the Holy Ghost, is "the unity of the Spirit." Matt. 16: 19, is the first occurrence of the word "Church" (*i.e.* assembly) in the New Testament. It is there spoken of as a thing not merely unmanifested find unordered, but as not yet existing. It was not built, nor being built yet.* "Upon this rock I will build my Church;" which Church, be it observed, is mentioned as altogether distinct from the kingdom of heaven, the keys of which (not of His Church) the Lord promised to give to Peter.

* The learned Bishop Pearson, in his well-known "Exposition of the Creed," (Vol. I., pp. 506, ed. Oxford, 1797,) had the intelligence to see, and the candour to own, that our Saviour, first speaking of the Church, "mentioneth it is that which then was not, but afterwards was to be; as when he spake, unto the great Apostle, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church;' but when he ascended into heaven, and the Holy Ghost came down, when Peter had converted three thousand souls which were added to the hundred and twenty disciples, then was there a Church for after that we read, The Lord added to the Church daily such as should he saved? A Church, then, our Saviour promised should be built, and by a promise made before his death; after his ascension, and upon the preaching of St. Peter, we find a Church built or constituted, and that of a nature capable of a daily increase." What is more, in p. 508, he cites in his margin, Acts 7: 38, and Heb. 2: 12, as instances of its occasional usage, much as the Septuagint, for the assembly of the people of God under the law, (*i.e.* of Israel,) and therefore most fitly translated the 'Congregation,' here, as in the Old Testament. The attempt, from such a text as that in Acts 7, to show that the 'Church of God,' in its full, proper meaning existed, under the Old Testament, before our Saviour even promised it, is a singular proof of the blinding effects of prejudice.

But, although the unity of the Church, as Christ's body, will only be displayed perfectly in the dispensation of the fulness of times, when God will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, (Eph. 1: 10,) yet it was intended that there should be a testimony to it, produced and manifested by the power of the Holy Ghost in the one body on earth. When the apostle spoke of the saints being "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," this was not an ideal or future thing only to be achieved in heaven. It was an actual, present fact, made good here below by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Hence we read, "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, *by the Church*, the manifold wisdom of God." (Eph. 3: 10.) And the "unity of the Spirit," which the saints should endeavour to keep, where was it if not on earth? The saints were there, and there too the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers given of Christ Himself ascended up far above all heavens. There go on the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ. It is on earth that we meet with "sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4: 11) ; and it is there that we "grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom *the whole body*, fitly joined together, and, compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body

unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4: 16.) It is in this world, and in this world alone, that "all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment administered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God," (Col. 2: 19,) as it is assuredly here that the Spirit would have the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, "to the which also we are called in one body." (Col. 3: 15.)

So, in Rom. 12: 4, 5, the apostle writes to saints, who, like the Colossians, had never been visited by him, and therefore, as man might judge, were in no peculiar way connected with him: "As we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Evidently, it is not a tie which was going to be established, but a relationship already existing. Membership is not with a local church, but with *the* Church, the body of Christ, (Acts 2: 47) ; though, on the other hand, if one be not in fellowship with the assembly of the members of Christ where one resides, there can be for him no fellowship with them anywhere else

Nor can language be more explicit than that of 1 Cor. 12. "But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will. 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; for by *one Spirit* are we all baptized 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*." The composition of that one body depends upon the baptism of the Holy Ghost. By Him are we baptized into the body of Christ, Jews, Gentiles, bond or free; it matters not. Jesus exercises His heavenly rights. He baptizes with the Holy Ghost; and those who are thus baptized become the immediate and the especial field of His presence and operations — the body of Christ. The diversities of gifts, of administrations and of operations, will not be in heaven. Their province is the Church on earth. It is here that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man (*i.e.* in the Church) to profit withal. It is the one and the self-same Spirit who works all these gifts, distributing to each member as He will. For the many members constitute but one body — "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." The importance of these last words will be better estimated, on comparing with them Acts 1: 4, 5, and particularly the clause, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." The disciples were believers at the time this was spoken. They had life, and life more abundantly. Jesus, the quickening Spirit, had breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John 20.) He had also opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24.) But none of these things is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Pentecost first beheld the accomplishment of the promise of the Father. Then and not before, were believers baptized with the Spirit. But it is this baptism which introduces into and forms the "one body." It is the Spirit thus present and baptizing, who began, organized, and recruits the body of Christ. Hence is it that, coincident with the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we first heir, in the Word of God, of this new body and of membership therein. Whatever the privileges, (and they were many,) which existed before, that which is distinctively called in the Bible "the Church of God," appeared here below, as the consequence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, dwelling in the disciples and baptizing them, Jews or Gentiles, into one body.

The apostle addresses, no doubt, the Church of God that was at Corinth, and it is very clear that the New Testament frequently speaks of assemblies in this or that locality, *i.e.*, churches, (compare Rom. 16: 1, 5; Gal. 1: 2, 22; Col. 4: 15, 16; 1 Thess. 1: 1; 1 Thess. 2: 14, etc.) But beside this, Acts 2: 47; 1 Cor. 10: 32; 1 Cor. 12: 28; 1 Cor. 15: 9; Eph. 1, 2, 3, etc. ; Col. 1; 1 Tim. 3: 15, are instances of another sense of the most important bearing, as may be seen in the epistles of Paul, *i.e.* the Church, as a body here below, in a breadth as extensive as the baptism of the Spirit. Thus, to take a single text referred to, that entire society or corporation, wherein He dwelt and wrought, was the assembly in

which God set apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. Certainly, it was impossible to say that He had set all these in the Corinthian assembly, nor will it be maintained that He is to set them in the Church universal, gathered on high. There is, then, a large sense of "the Church," in which unity is predicated of all the members of Christ existing at one time in the world, whatever might be the distances separating their bodies; and that, in virtue of one Spirit baptizing them into one body. The body of Christ, like the natural body, is susceptible of increase; but, as in the natural body, the identity subsists when the old particles have given place to new, so the body of Christ is the body still, whatever the changes in the members in particular. He who, by His presence, imparted unity at its beginning, conserves unity by His own faithful presence. He was given to abide with the disciples for ever.

In fine, by "the Church" is meant not the aggregate of various co-ordinate (much less conflicting) societies, but a body, the one body of Christ, possessing the same privileges, and calling, and responsibility on earth, and looking for the same glory in heaven as the Bride of Christ. If a man was baptized by the Spirit, he was thereby made a member of the Church of God; if he had a gift, it was to be exercised according to the proportion of faith, for the good of the whole . not ministry, nor membership, pertaining to a church, but to the Church ; each joint belonging to the entire body, and the entire body to each joint.

As Israel of old was untrue to its calling, so is Christendom now. The Gentile has not continued in the goodness of God, and has therefore no other prospect than to be cut off, when the due moment comes in the wisdom of God. (Rom. 11.) But as once the godly clave to the ancient oracles revealed to the Jews, precisely analogous is the joy and obligation of the believer now. If Catholics and Protestants have, in various ways and measures, been unfaithful to the Word and Holy Spirit; if the scriptural ground of the Church of God has been everywhere lost sight of in principle and renounced in practice, the more incumbent it is for the glory of the Lord, that those who fear Him and love His name, should sock at once, and in all respects, to eschew the prevalent evils they know, and to submit themselves unreservedly to the revealed will of God. Nothing can justify perseverance in known sin. And if God has given the name of the Lord Jesus, not only for salvation, but as the centre of His assembly on earth, through the recognition of the Spirit's presence and operation therein, what is any other point of union but a rival and a rebel, which every Christian is bound to disown? What is our resource, then, and what His provision for us? "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18: 20.)

(B.T. Vol. 5, p.346.)

There are two ways in which the priesthood of Christ is often wrongly used. First, as if we could not go directly to the Father; secondly, as if we sought thus to obtain righteousness.