

"An habitation of God through the Spirit."

Eph. 2.

Lecture 9 of 'The New Testament Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.'

W. Kelly.

Rouse 1906.

Though I have read this chapter of the epistle as a whole, my intention is to take up almost exclusively the last few words: the reason why will appear presently. The Holy Spirit views the Church, not merely as the body of Christ, but as the habitation of God. The body of Christ specially brings before us our communion with Himself as a head in heaven; the habitation of God connects itself just as simply and clearly with the actual place of the Church now on the earth. This is not the only difference; but it is considerable, and important too. Nevertheless both agree in this, that there can be neither the body of Christ any more than the habitation of God, save through the, Holy Ghost, and founded upon redemption. This is of great consequence doctrinally, but it is not less so practically. Collaterally also it decides, to any man who is really subject to God's word, the limits of the Church — the time when its formation began. Thus the Church is consequent on redemption.

There was no such thing as either the body of Christ or God's habitation through the Spirit, till sin was judged in the cross, when the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven to the earth to form it. To know this is an immense step for many a heart. There is not one in this room that has known this truth long; there are comparatively few of the children of God who admit it to be a truth at all; and so much the worse for them. It is not that the participation of the blessing is lost thereby; for not the relationship, but our enjoyment depends on our knowledge of it. And this is a very great mercy on God's part. So far, it is with this as with other privileges that His grace confers. Many a soul really looks to Christ alone, and consequently has eternal life; but if you asked, "Have you life everlasting?" there might be no little hesitation there; and even those who are not conscious of this difficulty, have no adequate conception of the nature of eternal life. They would not question the words that Scripture makes use of; but what the character, nature, and consequences (now and by-and-by) of eternal life are they are exceedingly ill-acquainted with. So it fares with the truth of the Church of God in either aspect — its union with Christ above, or its affording God's dwelling-place by the Spirit below. Last night we looked a little at the former of these truths; tonight we shall search the Scriptures an the latter, though one cannot do more than direct the enquirer to those parts of God's word which develop with divine certainty either great truth. I shall touch by the way on some of the practical consequences; for, certainly, we never do taste the blessing of any truth, any more than we honour God by it, until we are sufficiently awakened by the Holy Ghost to gather for our souls, and also to cultivate in our experience, ways, and worship, the fruits of that which God has made known to us.

In reading the verses that have just been before us, it is obvious that the point to which the Holy Ghost has arrived in this epistle is the setting aside of the Jewish system, and the bringing in of that which was entirely new on the earth. Being altogether unprecedented, God dealt in a wholly new way. He brought in Gentiles, who before this were, as He says, the uncircumcision in the flesh. Not only so; but having brought in those Gentiles, who, before they received the gospel, had been aliens and strangers, without hope and without God in the world, He put both them and those who now believe from Israel together in one new position before Himself. Why all this? Because redemption is now

accomplished. Now, is it not strange that Christians should have any question as to this? Is it not an extraordinary fact (for it is a fact), that theory should be allowed to upset that which is the most evident and unquestionable teaching of God's own word?

Our whole epistle, from beginning to end, contemplates Christians and Christians only. If I take some isolated word, I may, no doubt, apply it to Old Testament saints (for instance, the very word "saints"); but then I never find even such an expression alone. If we read of saints, all is set in a new connection. Thus it is said in the very beginning, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." There was nothing of the kind in the Old Testament: we could not possibly hear of any faithful *in Christ* there. The language would have been wholly unintelligible, and could not in anywise be conceived to be spoken in those times. Not that some were not faithful; not that there were not saints; but they could not be thus spoken of. They were waiting, according to promise and prophecy, for the Messiah. God's Spirit had not failed to work in them, of course. Precious fruits too there were in their season; but not a single phrase, as far as I am aware, of this epistle could have been uttered at any moment of any one soul in the whole course of Old Testament times. What, then, must one think of men who apply every word of it to all times? Why simply that they do not at all understand its bearing. I do not in the least deny that they have reaped good from the Saviour, because they do see Himself; they have tasted grace in Him; they do see some sweet mercies that are shown the Christian, But assuredly the depth of present privileges and their peculiarity, as well as their force and heavenly character, are obscured, attenuated, and blunted to their souls by the vague haze which is thrown over the whole, by unduly extending to all saints what God has revealed distinctly and solely of the souls that are now brought into the knowledge of His grace since He manifested Himself in Christ, and the work of redemption was wrought. Hence I maintain that, as a whole, every thought, every sentence, contemplates exclusively the saints that have been called since Christ appeared in the world to die in atonement, and before He comes again to receive them to Himself.

All this needs no argument, I suppose, to most here. It is a simple question of believing the word that opens the New Testament mystery, and of comparing the language with any part of the Old Testament, which, of course, is the part of Scripture alone capable of letting us know with unerring certainty the state, condition, and experiences of the Old Testament saints. My motive for alluding to this which, after all, ought to be here, at least, a trite and familiar truth, is to remark, that all attempts to fritter away the differences of the word and the ways of God have an enfeebling effect on our appreciation of that to which God is now calling His children. And there is no one mistake which has wrought greater mischief, as to the very truth which is now before us, than allowing these generalities to swamp the precision of God's revelation. Men think that it has been always the Church, for instance, that God has been dealing with in this world; that it now has a little more light, and a little more blessing (for differences cannot be denied); but that, nevertheless, substantially it is the same system from beginning to end. This I wholly deny; but I entreat those who have not as yet duly considered the matter, not to receive what I have said, but to examine it by the word of God; I entreat them to examine what they have hitherto held by the word of God; I entreat them to bring all their own thoughts, and the suggestions of others, on this great matter to the sole test that God acknowledges, the only means of light and truth possible for any one.

If we are willing thus to subject our thoughts touching the Church, as God's habitation by the Spirit here below, we learn, first of all, that the work of redemption is applied to souls after a wholly indiscriminate sort. That is, there is no question now whether a man be a Jew or a Gentile: if there had been this difference in the ground on which the Church is formed (whether in the aspect of the body of

Christ on the one hand, or of God's dwelling-place on the other), in either case there is supposed for this new work the total subversion of that which God had sanctioned and set up in former days. Hence we find the language proceeds: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity." Thus vanishes the partition which subsisted in Old Testament times by God's appointment, "even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man." That is, it is not merely blotting out our sins, nor simply ensuring heaven by-and-by; but forming here below a creation entirely unknown before. It is the communication of privileges unheard of and impossible, while God still dealt with His ancient people, and acted among them and governed them by a law as in Israel. "That he might [consequently we are told] reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

Here we come to the point which is more particularly before us to-night. "Now therefore," it is said, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Take notice that it is not a question of the Old Testament prophets here. The order in which the Holy Spirit wrote excludes this sense; for if the Ephesian saints were "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," what could be less natural than an allusion to the Old Testament prophets in such a case or fashion as this? "The apostles" are put before "the prophets." More than this, the construction of the phrase means a common class of persons who form a foundation for this building, that God was about to construct. And when was this foundation laid? Not just after man had sinned, not in the time of the elders, did God begin to execute this great work in the earth. Here we find that late in the day, after four thousand years had passed, and Christ had come and died, then was the *foundation laid* (not the work, long in course, brought to a completion) by the apostles and prophets. The common class, signified by one Greek article, forbids our thinking of the Old Testament prophets that were past. The prophets were then present, and associated with the apostles in this work.* Both apostles and prophets, namely, of the New Testament, were those that laid this new foundation, "in whom all the building," says he, "fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." Such is the ultimate result. This holy temple will be seen by-and-by: but note the last clause; "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." What I draw from it is, I conceive, a simple and sure inference — that there is now, before the holy temple is grown to its full proportions, this work on earth displacing the system of Israel, a new building altogether, which really is God's habitation in virtue of the Spirit's presence.

* Compare Eph. 3: 6. "It is *now* revealed" to both.

Thus, believers now, were they Gentiles in nature before they had received the gospel, are brought, with Jews who may now believe, into this dwelling-place of God, "in whom ye also" — addressing the Ephesians — "are builded together for an habitation of God." The manner of it is declared to be "through" or "in the Spirit." That is, the Spirit is just as necessary for the habitation of God, as for the body of Christ, into which we were last enquiring. Nevertheless, the habitation of God is, in some respects, not so exclusively a new thought as the body of Christ. We find, at least, more distinct types of the great truth of God's dwelling among men on earth in the Old Testament Scriptures. But nothing whatever was revealed of the joining of Jew and Gentile in one body; still less that they together should compose the body of Christ. Of course we have the type of Adam's marriage, or union, with Eve; but this discloses nothing of its components, tells us nothing of Jew and Gentile — a

distinction not then hinted at — joining in one. The fact can only be used, and we know it was used by the Spirit of God, when the Church came to light, but nothing more.

As to the habitation of God, we have, as is well known, no trace whatever of it in Genesis. There is not even a promise as yet. And this is the more striking, because if there is a book in the Old Testament that is more than any other fertile in germs of divine truth, it is the book of Genesis. All the other books put together, it is not too much perhaps to say, do not present so many views of that which God was about to work in due time; yet there is this remarkable exception: God's habitation, God's design to have a dwelling-place on earth, is never once alluded to. The reason is manifest. Though we see the beginning of sacrifices in Genesis, though burnt offerings are spoken of, though covenant dealings are often brought before us, there is yet no redemption. Redemption is also as remarkable an exception as God's dwelling-place throughout this wonderful book.

Then comes the second book of the law, not so remarkable for presenting in this manifold way the unfoldings, so to speak, of the ways of God and the counsels that were afterwards to have effect given to them in Christ. But certainly the book of Exodus claims our special attention now; inasmuch as it presents us, in type, the very truth we are in quest of — first, indeed, redemption, and then God's dwelling with men. We may add by the way, that although of course the law comes in too, within that law we find the renewed assurance of this very truth. Thus the great truths which stand out in the book of Exodus are among the things revealed in Ephesians 2, and in similar order.

The first part of Exodus is occupied in showing us the forlorn, miserable, debased condition of the people of God. Thanks be to God, it was not merely that they cried out of the depth of their ruin, but the Lord hearkened, and occupies Himself for their deliverance. Not content with sending messages of mercy, in due time He works, not first in judgment, though He did judge, but claiming His people for Himself. He sends Moses and Aaron, and, as signs following their mission, plagues, in which He chastises the pride of the world that kept His people in bondage. Finally comes before us the most remarkable type of redemption that the Old Testament affords, and this in both its parts — the blood of the Lamb with death and resurrection, the Passover and the Red Sea. Either one or other alone was inadequate to set forth redemption, which can only be rightly known when they are both received together. For if we look at the Passover, we find, after all, God still judging; and it must be so. God is armed with power, God is dealing in vengeance on that which was evil, but at the same time in His own admirable wisdom providing a righteous means of shelter for His people.

Thus the most prominent truth that appears in the Passover is God in judgment, though with provision to spare His own. Substantially the same thing appears in one aspect of the gospel. One of the central thoughts in the gospel is, that God is righteous therein. (Rom. 1: 17) It is not mere mercy. However precious this may be, it is quite a different thought from the righteousness of God, though there never could have been the founding or display of the righteousness of God without His mercy; but His righteousness in justifying is the boast of the gospel. While the sinner is accounted righteous, it is not merely that God pardons and shows mercy, but is *just in justifying*. So it is with the Passover. God that night came down in judgment of man as well as of the gods of Egypt. He was marking His hatred of sin as He had never done before; and this, too, in quite as evident a manner in His dealings with Israel as with the Egyptians. No doubt there was death. That night, in every Egyptian house, the first-born lay dead, and the wail of sorrow declared all over the land what it was to despise the admonitions of the Lord; but in every dwelling of the Israelites the bloodstained doorposts as truly and still more blessedly declared that God is just, and at the same time the Justifier — spoke of a substitute indeed — of another's blood; spoke, at least in God's ears of His death, who should become man, though most truly God; spoke of the Lamb of God, and the shedding of His blood.

Nevertheless this was not all the blessing, even typically. The Paschal Lamb simply kept God outside, only stayed His judgment from falling on the persons of the Israelites themselves. Is this the full character of redemption — to shut God out from His own? It is the notion that too many have of redemption; but how far short it falls of redemption according to God! Most important as it unquestionably is, it is not the whole truth of the matter, but very far from it. And therefore it is we find that along with this God appends another type as its complement — namely, the Red Sea, where the flower of Egypt found a grave, and God gave the Israelites to pass through what seemed to be sure death to them, what in truth became in type life everlasting, and their best security. So it is precisely that the believer finds the death and resurrection of Christ. Then for the first time God deigns to speak of *salvation* in relation to His people. (Ex. 14: 13, 30, Ex. 15: 2.) He never speaks of anything, however glorious, wrought previously as "salvation."

It may be remarked by the way, that it is a great injury to souls to speak of an immature and partial knowledge of God as salvation — knowledge, I mean, even of the love of Christ. Thus one often hears such talk as, "It is true, the man is not happy yet; he has no liberty of soul; but, at any rate, he is saved." Scripture never sanctions such language. What it designates as salvation is not that a soul is converted or quickened merely — is not that a soul has received of Christ that which makes it judge itself, and cry out to God, yet with a certain measure of hope. Scripture reserves "salvation" precisely though not exclusively, for the being brought into conscious liberty, for the realization of the present deliverance through the gospel from every enemy by the power of God in Christ. And hence it is that we only hear of salvation when Israel comes to the Red Sea, and when there is, therefore, the full and final quittance of the land of Egypt, and the total destruction of their proud foes. "Today," says Moses, "ye shall see the salvation of the Lord." It was not the night of the Paschal feast; it was the day when they could look back on the Red Sea crossed for ever. For this reason, it is of the greatest importance that we should speak according to Scripture as to this, not owning as salvation anything short of it. Otherwise we do not help God's children, as we might, to a settled assurance of the mighty victory of Christ, the lack of which never fails to leave them in a sort of dead-and-alive state — an anxious and struggling condition instead of peace. It is very blessed, indeed, for a soul to be wrought in profoundly by the Spirit, and to find out what it is before God; but till it is broken down to rest with simplicity and confidence on the finished work of Christ, there is nothing that God calls "salvation" in the complete sense.

After this mighty work — as far as the type is concerned, wrought then — we find Israel for the first time singing. The song of Moses is heard on the other side of the Red Sea. Remark particularly the language of this song as bearing on our subject to-night: "I will sing unto Jehovah; for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Jehovah is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation." How strikingly the truth comes out! The full type of resurrection, as well as death, is brought before us then; and then, first, we hear of salvation; and immediately ensuing on this (as far, of course, as the shadow of these things is concerned), the heart desires that God should have a habitation. (Compare also Ex. 29: 45, 46.) How comes this? Are we to suppose for an instant that there was any quality or conduct in those who thus sung in the wilderness, which was more agreeable to God than what He had found in their fathers or other elders of the book of Genesis? The very reverse is true. Among these were some that God had put the most signal honour on — that had been chosen of God to be the depositaries of His secrets, not only exempted from a world-wide judgment, but in one instance at least taken up to heaven without death, as in another God come down to sup with His friend on the earth. Need I remind any how this last was made the object of promises, confirmed to his son, and repeated to his son's son — promises that will not cease to roll their course of blessing, till all the ages have closed in the

eternal rest of God, when good and evil shall have each their lot for ever, according to the judgment of God as well as His grace?

Is it not, then, impossible to suppose it a question of persons? But for this very reason the wonders of redemption are brought into relief. Christ's death, whether in type or in antitype, alone accounts for it; and I do not think it too much to say that redemption ought to account for it. I affirm that it is suitable, and not surprising after all, when we know what redemption deserves, and who has wrought this redemption, and how it was wrought; when we know that it needed the Son of God, and that He should come into this world as a man, not only to give up the enjoyment of all His own proper glory for a season, but that He should enter in grace the circumstances of all man's shame, and sorrow, and suffering; and yet, after all this, instead of emerging into a place of blessedness and glory, on the contrary, should go into a deeper depth, after man had done his very worst, after Satan could do no more. For then, after all the rest, was resolved a question that had to be settled between God and that Blessed One. And that question must have been of all others the hardest for God, and in itself the most trying of all things for the Son of God. For what can compare with that wondrous hour when sin had to be judged of God, and be dealt with in the strangest place in which it was possible for man to conceive it — imputed to the person of the Holy One of God, even the Son of God, by God Himself?

When one reflects on these things, who can wonder that God should see in redemption such infinite worth, and such a resting-place for Him, that the heaven of heavens should cease, so to speak, to contain Him; as though God Himself should say, "I must come down now. My Spirit must dwell where that precious blood is; He can no longer remain above!" It may have been the vilest spot in all creation; it may be that which too often lifted up its puny head in the fiercest, and, at the same time, most shameless rebellion. But no matter what the earth may be, and no matter what the people on the earth may have been proved against God, and against His Anointed, God could not consistently with His estimate of what Christ has suffered, abide in heaven any longer, but must come and find His dwelling-place in this very earth, and among the members of that very race which had treated Him with such habitual contumely. To my mind this, and this alone, accounts for the blessed truth of God's having His dwelling among us on the earth, or even for the possibility of His having an habitation on earth. Redemption accounts for the fact, and the Holy Ghost at once makes it good when redemption is effected. And so, therefore, we see in this very chapter when the type of redemption was fulfilled, that the typical habitation of God immediately becomes desired on the earth; when the true redemption, eternal redemption, was a fact, God comes down really to dwell, abiding for ever by His Spirit in the redeemed. Thus nothing can be conceived more harmonious than either the typical facts, on the one hand, or the real accomplishment of them, on the other, in the eternal redemption Christ has acquired for the Christian.

But there is another thing, too, that should be noticed here. Not only have we now the people, through Moses, expressing their common desire for preparing God a habitation, but farther on we here find (and it is a remarkable fact too) that this is the first chapter in the Bible where God's holiness is presented. No one would suspect this; no one, I am convinced, could believe it until he had ascertained the fact for himself, that God should have waited all this time before giving a revelation of Himself in His holy character, in His dealings with men here below. There was, no doubt, an allusion to the thought of holiness, when He separated the sabbath day; and I mention this because it is the only passage which might appear exceptional. Thus, before there was any question of sin, God saw fit to enunciate in the sabbath day a pledge of that rest which "remaineth for the people of God." So it comes in due season. But when dealing with man, and man was actually before Him on the earth, not one word about holiness is uttered until Exodus 15.

A little lower down we read (in the 11th verse), "Who is like unto thee, O Jehovah, among all the gods, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises?" This, we shall see, connects itself with God's habitation in the New Testament. I merely point you to the striking circumstance, that the two things are for the first time presented together, consequent on the accomplishment of the typical redemption. In point of fact, it is only when redemption has been accomplished, that man can bear the full revelation of the holiness of God. There may be a call to this or that before, but manifestly it was after all only of a fleshly order; it was but ceremonial dealing with the first Adam in one way or another. But the moment there is the type of redemption, in Jehovah accomplishing deliverance, then even the Israelites can speak without anxiety, and in their measure rejoice and praise His name. Of course, it is no more than an earthly deliverance as yet; but they sing of the holiness of God.

Now, if we turn to the New Testament, we see, in the chapter from which I have already read, what answers to all this. Here we have redemption wrought. The Son of man gave His life a ransom for many; the effect of it is the bringing souls, even the most distant, nigh to God, and that in perfect peace — Christ Himself being the expression of it. "He is our peace," with which there can be nothing comparable, nothing — I will not say superior, but — so much as approaching it. But it is exactly on this that we begin to hear of the habitation of God.

Nor is this truth confined to any one epistle. Take 1 Corinthians 3 as an illustration. "We are labourers," says the apostle, "together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." The apostle speaks of his own relation to it. He says: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation." It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So here Paul takes this place, and accordingly, lower down in the chapter, appeals to them. "Know ye not," he says, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" At once this is the ground of a strenuous call to holiness: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." That is, it is not merely a revelation of what the Church is to be by-and-by, but he is speaking of present facts. It seems to me that we should pay more attention to this than is usually done; for it is of the greatest consequence that believers should have a just apprehension that Christianity consists not merely of doctrines, but of facts; and that facts are the foundation of doctrine. There is a person, a real living man born, manifested in this world, who lived here, died here, and rose here, although He is now gone to heaven; and that person is not merely the means of making truth known, but is Himself the substance of the truth that He makes known. Abstract Christ from Christianity, and what remains? And now that He is gone, too, God makes Christianity good by another person, even the Holy Ghost that-is come down, who, instead of supplanting Him that is gone on high, is now the power of our knowing Him. I can only know really and according to God Him who is gone by Him who is come. It is His presence that makes the temple of God. The Holy Ghost dwells in the saints on earth; as it is said, "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Now, I would ask my brethren before me this night, Have you sought to estimate the immense magnitude of such a fact as this? Is it this which fills your heart to overflowing, when you come together, say on the Lord's day, or at any other time when the assembly of God is gathered, either for worshipping Him, or for edifying one another? Does the presence of the Holy Spirit comfort you as a matter of faith? Do you count on the Lord as really in the midst? or are you thinking only of those who compose that assembly, or such as open their lips in worship and edification of the saints? What would be thought of a visitor coming into some grand building, who merely occupied himself with the small accidents here or there? It is evident that the object of all would be lost upon him. But still more when we bear in mind that there is a living, divine person whom I am entitled to count on, and to know

present in the assembly here below' who makes them to be God's assembly, as nothing else does. It is not their faith simply; for this did not make the Old Testament saints to be God's assembly. It is not life again; for certainly all saints from the first were born again, and yet, as we know, till Pentecost God's assembly was not. The only thing that could thus give the assembly of those who have faith, and therefore life, the title of being God's assembly, is the presence of God Himself there; and He is there by the Holy Ghost.

Again, so paramount is this, that the fact of persons slipping in there who are not born of God does not destroy His assembly. It is sorrowful and humiliating; but I am not to be alarmed, nor overmuch cast down by it. It ought to be a pain that we had so little discernment, and that persons were allowed to come into the assembly of God who never were born of God. But there is nothing that Satan would not dare, in order to defile and destroy the assembly of God. It is the nearest thing to God upon earth; it is that in which His Son's glory is most of all concerned now; it is that body to which God commits His truth. From it God demands an answer to His moral glory and character here below; and if He has not given unfailing power of miracles, He has sent down His Spirit to dwell with us and be in us for ever — His own habitation in the Spirit. It is not, then, because of this or that quality He so blessed us, but through His present Spirit.

Supposing there should be the sorrowful fact of those brought in who, having no life in their soul, in time depart from the Church. These are apt to turn out the greatest adversaries not only of it, but also of Christ Himself, the haters of His name, and deniers of His glory (such as, for instance, we find in Heb. 6). They had shared astonishing powers, as we are told, yea, "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." This is a great difficulty to some; whereas, in point of fact, it is no mean help toward understanding the very truth that we are considering tonight. So far from its being an enigma, it seems to me to be that which falls in with the truth generally, and which gives us the key to facts that may occur at any time, as they have happened from the beginning. Thus we find unquestionably that there are men who creep in unawares among the saints, and these men, when alienated, are so much the worse — twice dead, as the apostle Jude calls it — just because, having taken the place of confessors of the Lord Jesus, they have gone from Him, abandoned the truth with disdain, treated it with the utmost contempt, become, therefore, infinitely fiercer zealots against the truth of God than they even were in its favour when they commenced. These men might have had any amount of outward privileges; for there are external mercies of no mean value entirely short of eternal life. It is not said that any of these professors of Christ had ever been quickened of God. Eternal life is in no sense an external privilege. Nor is there such a thing in the Bible as a man, who had once partaken of eternal life, losing that life. Those quickened of God do not afterwards fall back into death in that sense. It is very possible for a man, touched in feelings and persuaded in his judgment, to renounce the Christ he professed, and to walk no more with Him; as we read of certain disciples stumbled by the Saviour's teaching, so unsparing to the flesh and the world. Thus we only can understand these passages consistently with others. The professor, naturally dead, was now twice dead, as Jude says, having given up what he seemed to have, and gone back to earthly ordinances or to open sin, as the case might be, with even greater relish than before, and intenser hatred than he ever had for that which he thus openly abandoned. These are the persons described in Hebrews 6 and 10, and such departures every now and then present themselves before the eyes of sorrowing Christians, as Scripture explains.

Thus the flesh may go to the farthest extent in professing the truth, and may possess every conceivable external privilege and power it is possible to enjoy, and this even now more in Christian than in older times. Thus we know that in the Old Testament Saul had got among the prophets, and others were gifted with mighty powers by the Holy Ghost, who then, as ever, was the sole agent of

divine energy, and might act by whom He would, and in what He would, for God's glory. Now the grace of God opens the door, if possible, for readier abuse, if men dare to take advantage. It is quite possible also for the unconverted to deceive themselves as well as the Church of God and to rush in, assuming the profession of the name of Jesus, so much the more because with less conscience The Holy Ghost now gives His personal seal, which is peculiar to him who has true faith and life everlasting in Christ. But while the Spirit is given as a seal, it would be an error to forget the outward powers He confers. In Hebrews 6 the apostle does not speak of His sealing, any more than of quickening souls, nor of "the earnest" the believer has in Him of the coming inheritance of glory. There is the greatest guardedness of language in speaking of anything that ought to produce a real difficulty. Still, there is participation in the power of the Holy Ghost. This many unregenerate men may have had in the early days of Christianity. Can one wonder that such persons abandon the name of Jesus, because of which alone these powers were conferred on them?

This again explains the present state of Christendom — the extension of the habitation of God to the unbelieving and profane, who nevertheless bear outwardly the name of the Lord Jesus, and venture where God's presence is made good by the Holy Ghost. No doubt, where there was carelessness, outward privileges might be lightly used, as, for instance, baptizing unto the name of the Lord Jesus. All such like things could easily be carried out irregularly by men, so as to bring in multitudes of unconverted professors, as we know was soon the fact. Accordingly it was by some such broad-churchism, in manifold forms, which need not be entered on at present, that the house of God, although the Spirit dwelt there, was gradually corrupted in every direction, as an unhallowed ambition sought increase of sway, outside the intentions of God, and man, as ever, lost sight of his solemn responsibility, and turned the grace of God into licentiousness.

Another thing I would just observe too, which is, I think, of importance for judging rightly on this subject. We have in Scripture, not only the house of God, according to the divine idea described in the close of Ephesians 2, but also its responsible connection with man's labour in chapter 3 of the first epistle to the Corinthians, to which I have alluded. There is, indeed, more than this; for we have a half-moral half-prophetic sketch of that which was working, in a measure, when the apostle wrote his last epistle (2 Tim. 2), to which I must briefly refer, because it bears so powerfully on present duty. The apostle calls on Timothy to study to show himself approved unto God, and tells him of the profane and vain babblings which he was to shun, but which, nevertheless, should increase to more ungodliness. He speaks of persons who, concerning the truth, had erred, but comforts his too sensitive fellow-servant, who was clearly under pressure from the dangers and difficulties of the time, by this consolation: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth firm, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." But this is followed by a very animated figure of what was then in existence, and afterwards to be verified yet more literally. "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. 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." Here we have evidently a most graphic description of what was then in rapid progress, though going on every day yet more and more. This great-house condition has arrived at the present time; it was but the anticipation of full-blown Christendom. That is, we have a vast building in these lands, where vessels of honour, as well as of dishonour, are found.

What, then, is a Christian to do? Is he to abandon the great house? Certainly not. A man cannot go outside the great house without ceasing to be a Christian; for that is precisely the condition into which the profession of Christ's name has got. Therefore it can never be a question in any way of

giving up the profession of the Lord's name: what we have to do is to separate from all that is contrary to His will, never to relinquish the profession of His name. The profession of Christ is in itself the only stand revealed that is good and complete below. Up to it no profession can attain. It is, assuredly, also due to Him, as it is the blessing of the saint to render it, no less than His salvation. For who shall be saved but he that calls on the name of the Lord? And so all through, from the first acquaintance with Him, calling on the name of the Lord, professing His name, is clearly just as much a joy as a duty. In no case, therefore, can it be right to abandon the house which is characterized by the profession of the Lord's name. But in that great house there are vessels of honour, as well as of dishonour. What am I to do? I am commanded to purge myself from the vessels of dishonour. Such is the meaning of the text, such the clear intention of the Holy Ghost when it is said, "If a man therefore purge himself from these" (*i.e.* from the vessels of dishonour). This a man does when he ceases from any evil fellowship that he knows to be judged by the word of God, from all companionship with that which, by God's standing written testimony, is proved to be opposed to His will.

If a man therefore finds himself involved in subjection to an unscripturally formed ministry, for instance, or, again, in any prostitution of an institution of the Lord (say the Lord's Supper), let him have done with it at once. The Lord does not warrant His servant's sanction of what is contrary to truth and holiness. Why should I, as a Christian, endorse any ministry which is not of God? Why should I be a party by my presence to a desecration of the Lord's Supper into a sacrament made a means of grace for the world, for anybody, for every one? He that possesses but little knowledge of God's word about either, knows perfectly well that they cannot be defended by Scripture, and that they frustrate the Lord's will in these grave matters. Am I then to abandon the Lord's Supper? Am I henceforth to do without the ministry of the word? Certainly neither the one nor the other, if wise and obedient. What one has to abandon is the abuse of these things. I am to have done with that which, as being without Scripture, is clearly to the dishonour of God. I do not give up Christian ministry, therefore, I do not give up the Lord's Supper; but I judge according to the word of God, as far as enabled by His grace, what is His will in these respects. The same principle applies to every other. Do you think of worship, for instance? I must search the Scriptures to judge what is Christian worship according to God's word for us now, as a Jew used to do from the Old Testament. Am I not bound so to do? Am I not to follow His will?

As to the question before us — What is it that God would have His saints feel as to their position on earth? That they are nothing less than His assembly. Here, therefore, we have at once an invaluable test for discovering whether that to which we hold day by day as His Church in this world, in the midst of so many conflicting claims, really for our consciences meets His will. It is not enough for me, nor should it satisfy any, the feeblest, of the children of God, that those composing it should be Christians; still less is it a question of arranging Christians in various classes of doctrine as offering the best guarantee for peace. What presumption! Who called me to arrange the saints of God? Who warranted you to order the house of God? Who gave any man title to put those here and these there? The character and testimony of the Church of God is destroyed by any such arrangement. Supposing one could have every soul in communion holding precisely my views or yours on every topic, I should regard it as a very great calamity for the Church of God. What measure could be thought of surer to blot out the truth that we are God's assembly? What more calculated to produce a false estimate of the state of the saints than all thus banded together with identical views, all crammed with just the same thoughts, satisfied with one another, and contemptuous to those outside who did not hold similar sentiments? I am supposing now every notion correct, and the things done to be according to the mind of God. To my mind such a picture in no way answers either to Scripture, or to the love of Christ.

Brethren, let me be plain-spoken. The Church of God is not a citadel for the strong only, nor a niche for the wise and intelligent alone; it is not a front bench for those who have arrived at a certain maturity of holiness any more than of knowledge. He would have me always contemplate all saints (save those in sin or evil doctrine). So far from thinking the eclectic school according to the Lord's mind, to my view it utterly dislocates and spoils the truth God has disinterred about His Church. What I find there is the body of Christ, and doubtless the various members in their place. There are feet as well as hands. The feeble have their use as well as the strong, and all as God is pleased to give and order. As the large-hearted apostle teaches, the uncomely parts, instead of being left outside, are treated, being in danger of scorn, with more abundant honour. Such is the way of our God, such His express word. Have we learnt to bow? Those that are strong are expected to bear the infirmities of the weak, instead of pleasing themselves. Religious rationalism might think it best to have only the strong, only those of the same mind, only such as had attained a certain given point of truth; but is it Christ? The Church of God should be before our hearts, as it is according to His word. The moment we seek to model or even to desire in our heart anything different from what is given us by Him, there is fatal insubjection stamped on the thought, and confusion must be the result wherever that theory is yielded to and carried out. And therefore, brethren, I am persuaded it is the will of God concerning us, especially in the present broken state of the Church, that he who is most strengthened in divine wisdom seek most especially to cherish the ignorant and the feeble who have attained ever so little — that we seek to walk towards all saints according to Christ's love to the Church. Assuredly Christ cherishes, not merely the more worthy and honourable members of His body, but the Church as a whole, cherishes most of all, if there be any difference, those that need His love most. Are we in this to have communion with Him or not?

Just in the same way, as to His habitation in the Spirit, God contemplates in this His whole Church — contemplates every one that names the name of the Lord. Here of course, in Ephesians 2, those that bear His name truly have part in it; but do any one of those that name a false Christ? Not in the least degree, save for judgment. In the present state of Christendom there are vessels of dishonour. Am I to bind myself up with them? I am forbidden by the Holy Ghost. "If a man purge himself from these." Communion with any vessels to dishonour is wrong. I am called to separate myself from all such, if I cannot get them separated from that which bears the name of the Lord. Otherwise I am a party to the mystery of lawlessness; for the continuance of a Christian in fellowship with known evil is as good as saying that Christ holds communion with Belial. Sometimes it is allowance of doctrinal or practical evil; sometimes it is an indifference which ignores the presence of the Holy Ghost, or hinders His operations in that which bears the name of the Lord here below. But no matter what may be the particular forms of allowed evil, which there is no means of judging, a man is to purge himself from these. There stands the plain and positive duty. You are not presumptuous; you are assuming no improper authority; you are only obedient thus. It is not a question of setting up to be somebody, but of obeying God. It is incumbent on every man that names the name of the Lord to depart from iniquity. And instead of leaving the occasion undetermined, instead of throwing a Christian on his own mind or heart to judge what he must separate from, here is the explicit demand of the Lord that he must purge himself from vessels of dishonour, whatever and wherever they may be. If people bearing the Lord's name (and so His name in their persons) committed themselves to sin, they were vessels to dishonour, and the Christian is bound to stand clear and undefiled. It is the prescribed course in a corrupt state of Christendom, as surely as other Scriptures deal with individuals as objects of discipline for the assembly. Value for peace or unity was not to override the character of Christ, which must not be compromised on any account. The saint cannot abdicate his responsibility. The first of duties is what we owe to Christ's name. We can never sanction or wink at evil.

Nor is it, let me say, a question only of flagrant wrongs. The Church, being God's habitation, is intolerant of all that is unfit for His presence, though we have need of patience too; and who is so patient as God? But He will be sanctified in all that come near Him, among whom He dwells: everything contrary to His word must be judged. Supposing there be only, as men say, a little evil, am I to bind up His name and presence, not to speak of myself, with even a small evil? Be it far from us. Not that it is called for, of course, to separate for every fault; but we are never to partake in what is contrary to God, but always by God's grace to keep ourselves pure. At the same time, the manner in which this is done must be determined by the word of God. For instance, not every censurable brother, but those guilty of wickedness (1 Cor. 5), are to be put away from the Church; but in no case is a Christian bound to go along with that which he knows to be offensive to God. Again, we have to judge ourselves, lest we should be hasty in imputing evil. Slowness to suspect, to act, and speak in such circumstances God looks for from His children. Alas! how ready we are, because of the evil of which one is conscious within, to think of it in others.

On the other hand, our comfort as well as spring of responsibility is, that God dwells in us as His habitation by the Spirit. We can and ought to count upon it, assured that He will aid us, hear us, appear for us; and therefore, whatever be the difficulty, whatever the sorrow, whatever the shame, let this be our confidence — God dwells in the assembly, His temple. It might be in a very low state; it might be only (as things are really) represented in a given place, by two or three individuals. Nay, a soul might be obliged to stand alone; or there might be no sense of the truth sufficient even to produce this result. But I adhere as to a fixed and fundamental Christian axiom, that there is no possible circumstance in which a member of Christ is obliged to have fellowship with that which is opposed to God's will. Patient remonstrance and adequate waiting may be called for; but never allowance of evil. It is not the amount of evil (as remarked already) which destroys the quality of God's temple, but the deliberate sanction of known evil, though it may take no stronger outward form than mere indifference. This does destroy its character: else it would suppose God Himself indifferent, who dwells there. When that which bears the name of His house commits itself to binding up His name with the evil it allows, all is over with it. Then it becomes a simple though sorrowful question (not without urgent appeals to the conscience of those who stay) of leaving that which has ceased to be in any sense a true representation of God. What claim can it longer have on the faith of His child to abide there?

This is evidently of the last importance. It makes the Church question to be one of judging according to God's word by His presence. Profession and prejudice, tradition or human will, are equally out of place. It becomes a manifestly serious step to own or to disown an assembly as His. He who does so lightly or falsely trifles with or abuses the name of God. How different this from an ecclesiastical strife! Instead of a man's judging according to what he thinks ought to be in the Church, instead of his own feelings or mind about it, God is the criterion. How right and holy this is! Of course His word is the standard, and His Spirit is the power. Thus nothing can be simpler, but at the same time nothing more certain, than that, where there is simple faith, God will appear, hear the cry, and come to the rescue. He will make the path manifest.

Another thing may be observed. The Church undoubtedly may make mistakes. Measures taken in discipline may be hasty, slow, or erroneous. In fact it is with the habitation of God in the Spirit collectively, as with the Christian individually. If the saints are, so the saint is, the temple of God. Now nobody in his wits could maintain that a Christian is exempted from evil or mistake, because the Holy Ghost dwells in him. It is exactly the same principle with the assembly; as to it the same kind of liability exists. It may be so far in practice guarded against, humanly speaking, in proportion to the men of God who are there. This or that man might easily err; but it would be difficult to think that in the

midst of an assembly not one so looked to the Lord as to gather His mind. Yet it is possible; and particularly where the commanding influence of one or more weakens the dependence of the assembly on God. It is evident that a wrong principle, a false position, or even mere precipitancy, might expose an assembly of God to act amiss. Therefore there is nothing so important, no matter what servant or servants of God may help, as to bear in mind that the one safeguard is, that *God* is there. He may be pleased to correct the wisest of His servants on the earth by a very feeble child.

Hence we must hold to it resolutely and watchfully, that the Church is not the assembly even of a Paul, still less of you or of me; it is God's assembly. Consequently, in a case of discipline, for instance, it would be destructive of that assembly, if the measures taken were to be settled *for* it definitely by any of His servants. Every person who knows either God's word about the Church, or its wants and difficulties practically, must acknowledge the immense value of the help of those He has given to guide and rule. There is as truly rule as there is teaching; and the Church would forsake its own mercies if it despised the help of either. Doubtless some have large spiritual capacity, and great experience in souls; and these are able, as a general rule, to judge rightly about such things much more than those less gifted and versed. Nevertheless, God is jealous, and room must be left for His own free action in His own assembly till the last moment. Where there is no room to revise whatever individuals may judge, where there is no power left to the Spirit to set aside, by the feeblest member of Christ there, the judgment of the best of guides, I no more dare call that assembly *God's* than any other society of believers under the sun.

Therefore it is not a question simply of sound doctrine, or precious saints, or great gifts. What I am insisting on is yet greyer. I admit all these in their place; but the fundamental truth to apprehend and hold fast always, and under all circumstances, is, that the Church is God's own even now; and God, because He is there, will maintain His sovereign action. He can shed fresh light. He may correct the most experienced, where unduly leaned on, by whom He pleases. There must always be this kept open; for God will not permit that we should glory in the flesh; nay, more, He will not permit that we should glory in the gifts He Himself gives us. He will convince us, however thankful we may be for all the fruits of His goodness, however we may bless Him for all He has given us, that the Church is God's, that He loves to be owned, and that will make His presence felt in the assembly that has faith in Him.

Faith loves to see and know Jesus in the midst; and this in the darkest day, if there were but two or three gathered unto His name. And with Him thus looked to, will the Spirit fail to guide? I do not believe it; yet I allow freely that either confidence in a leader or jealousy of a leader, or any other fleshly working, or the haste of unbelief whether lax or self-righteous, may practically sever the assembly from the mind of Christ in any given case. Hence the assembly, as the individual must be ever open to the Spirit's correction through the written word: if it should err in fact, humiliation also is due before the injured Lord.

Time forbids my touching more Scriptures now; indeed, I feel strongly how imperfectly the subject has been treated. Still, I have desired to point out some practical results, as well as the truth that we are God's habitation through the Spirit. If the Lord be pleased to use these hints to stir up His own to examine His word about it for themselves, they will see with surprise how largely His testimony hangs on this truth.