

AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT.

EPHESIANS ii.

WHETHER the church be viewed as the body of Christ, specially bringing before us our communion with Himself as a head in heaven, or as the habitation of God, connecting itself with the actual place of the church now on earth, both are through the Holy Spirit, and founded on redemption. This is of great consequence, doctrinally and practically, while collaterally, also, it decides the limits of the church—the time when its formation began.

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, and the Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven to the earth to form it. It was consequent on the setting aside of the Jewish system, and the introduction of an entirely new thing on earth. For not only were Gentiles brought in, who before were aliens and strangers, without hope and without God in the world, but they, together with believers from Israel,

are now put in one new position before God ; and this, on the ground of redemption now accomplished.

This is the subject of the whole epistle, which contemplates Christians, and Christians only. Not that there were not saints in Old Testament times, but this is addressed “to the saints at Ephesus:” nor that there were not those who were faithful too ; but we could not possibly hear of any faithful *in Christ Jesus* then. They were waiting, according to promise and prophecy, for the Messiah : and the Spirit of God did not fail to work in them of course. But not a single phrase of this epistle, as far as I am aware, 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 ? who think that it has been always the church that God has been dealing with in this world, with a little more light and blessing now (for differences cannot be denied), but that substantially it is the same system from beginning to end ?

The contrary is the fact revealed in Scripture ; for whether the church be looked at as the body of Christ on the one hand, or as God’s dwelling-place on the other, there is supposed for this new work the total subversion of that which God had sanctioned and set up in former days ; as it is written, “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 commandment contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain [rather "the twain," *i.e.*, Jew and Gentile believers] one new man." That is, it is not merely blotting out our sins, nor ensuring heaven by-and-by; but forming here below a creation as entirely unknown before, as it was impossible while God still dealt with His ancient people and governed them by a law as in Israel. "That [consequently] he might 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. Now, therefore, 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." And mark, it is not the prophets and apostles as if it applied to the Old and New Testaments; but the apostles and prophets of the New Testament (compare 1 Cor. xii. 28) who are the foundation of this building God was about to construct. And when was the foundation laid? Not just after man sinned, but here, after 4000 years had passed and Christ had come and died, was the *foundation* laid by the apostles and prophets. "In whom all the building,

fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." Such is the ultimate result, to be seen by-and-by; but note, "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit;" that is, there is now, before the temple is grown to its full proportions, this new building on earth, displacing the system of Israel, God's habitation in virtue of the Spirit's presence.

Nothing was revealed in the Old Testament of the joining Jew and Gentile into one body; still less of their together composing the body of Christ. We have the type of Adam's union with Eve; but this discloses nothing of its components, tells us nothing of Jew and Gentile—a national distinction not yet in being—joined in one. Their oneness is used by the Spirit when the church came to light; but, as to the habitation of God, we have no trace whatever of it in Genesis. And this is the more remarkable as this book is more fertile than any other in the germs of divine truth. The reason is manifest. Though we have the beginning of sacrifices and covenant dealings, there is yet no redemption—itsself as remarkable an exception as God's dwelling-place throughout this wonderful book. But in the book of Exodus we have both presented to us:—first redemption, and then God's dwelling with men. The law comes in too, but within that law we find the renewed assurance of this very truth.

The first part of Exodus is occupied with the miserable condition of the people of God. But God interferes

on their behalf, and sends Moses and Aaron to bring His people out of Egypt. Then comes the remarkable type of redemption in both its parts—the blood of the Lamb, with death and resurrection, the Passover and the Red Sea. Either alone would be inadequate to set forth redemption; they must be both received together to understand this truth.

The most prominent thing that appears in the Passover is God in judgment, though with provision to spare His own. Substantially the same truth as appears in one aspect of the gospel, viz., God's righteousness. It is not mere mercy, however precious and necessary this may be, but that He is *just in justifying*. So with the Passover. God was marking His hatred of sin as He had never done before, in judgment on man as well as on the gods of Egypt; but the blood of the lamb spoke of a substitute, whereby God could be just and the Justifier.

But as the Paschal Lamb simply kept God outside—shut Him out from His own—we have appended to it another type as its complement—viz., the Red Sea, setting forth the resurrection of Christ. Then, for the first time, and never previously, God speaks of *salvation* in relation to His people (Exodus xiv. 13, 30, xv. 2), a term reserved in Scripture, not for a soul when converted or quickened merely, but for the being brought into conscious liberty and deliverance from every enemy by the power of God in Christ. "To-day," says Moses, "ye shall see the salvation of the Lord." Nor, until a soul is broken down to rest with simplicity and con-

fidence in the finished work of Christ, is there anything that Scripture calls salvation in the proper sense.

Here for the first time we find Israel singing, after this mighty work was wrought. "I will sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously The Lord is my strength and my song, and is become my salvation: he is my God: I will prepare him an habitation." Here, founded on death and resurrection, we have first salvation, and immediately the heart desires that God should have a habitation. Not that it was a question of persons or of personal worth. Christ's death, whether in type or reality, alone accounts for it; and surely it ought to account for it, in answer to that wondrous work where sin had to be judged of God, and dealt with in the strangest place where it is possible for man to conceive it—imputed to the person of the Holy One of God, even the Son of God Himself. God sees in redemption such infinite worth, and such a resting-place for Himself, that He can come down and dwell by His Spirit where that precious blood is. It may have been the vilest spot in all creation; but redemption accounts for the fact, and the Holy Spirit at once makes it good when redemption is effected: as in the type, so in the anti-type.

But, further, we find this is the first chapter in the Bible where God's holiness is presented (save an allusion to it in the separation of the Sabbath day). When dealing with man, and man was actually before Him on the earth, not one word about holiness is uttered

until Exodus xv. 11: "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises?" And the connection of this with God's habitation in the New Testament is evident. 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, a ceremonial dealing with the first Adam in one way or another. But, redemption being accomplished, they can speak without anxiety, and in their measure rejoice and praise His name.

Turning to Ephesians ii. we read what answers to this. "He [Christ Himself] is our peace." With this there can be nothing comparable. And on this we begin to hear of the habitation of God. So again in 1 Cor. iii: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" and at once comes 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." And it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes the temple of God; as it is said, "Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." It is not faith simply; for this did not make Old Testament saints to be God's assembly. Again it is not life; for all saints from the first were born again, and yet till Pentecost God's assembly was not. But it is the presence of God Himself there by the Holy Spirit: a

truth of immense magnitude for the consideration of saints gathered on the Lord's Day, or at any other time when the assembly of God is assembled, either for worship or edifying one another.

So paramount is this that, however sorrowful and humiliating it may be, the fact of persons slipping in there who are not born of God does not destroy His assembly. There have been at all times such men who have crept in unawares among the saints, and who when alienated are so much the worse (twice dead, as Jude calls it), just because, having been confessors of the Lord Jesus, and having shared in all the outward privileges of Christianity, they have gone from Him, and abandoned the truth they professed. These are the persons described in Heb. vi. and Heb. x.; and such departures every now and then present themselves to the eyes of sorrowing Christians. True, the Spirit now gives His personal seal, which is peculiar to him who has true faith and life everlasting in Christ; but it would be an error to forget the outward power He conferred (compare Heb. vi. 4, 5). This many un-renewed men may have had in the early days of Christianity, while it also explains the present state of Christendom—the extension of the habitation of God to the unbelieving and profane, whereby, though the Spirit dwelt there, it was gradually corrupted in every direction outside the intentions of God, and man as ever lost sight of his solemn responsibility, and turned the grace of God into licentiousness.

Of this state of things we have a half-moral half-prophetic sketch in 2 Tim. ii.: "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and 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 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. Am I therefore to abandon this great house? No. That would be to give up the profession of Christ's name—to cease to be a Christian. But in that great house there are vessels of honour as well as of dishonour. And I am commanded to purge myself from the vessels of dishonour by ceasing from any evil fellowship with what is judged by the word of God, and from all companionship with those who are opposed to His revealed will.

If a Christian finds himself involved in subjection to an unscripturally formed ministry, or to any prostitution of an institution of the Lord (say the Lord's Supper), let him have done with it at once. Why should he endorse by his presence or fellowship what is contrary to the will of God? He does not thereby give up ministry or the Lord's Supper, but he judges by the word as far as he is enabled by His grace, and does His will in these respects; and the same principle applies to everything.

God would have His saints feel, as to their position on earth, that they are nothing less than *His* assembly. It is not enough that those composing it should be Christians, still less is it a question of arranging Christians in various classes of doctrine to maintain peace. The character of the church of God is destroyed by such an arrangement. Did every soul in communion hold precisely my views or yours, I should regard it as a great calamity for the church of God. Banded together with the same thoughts and views, even though they were all correct, they would be but self-satisfied with one another, and contemptuous to those outside who did not hold similar sentiments. This no way answers to the Scripture, or to the love of Christ.

The church of God is not a citadel for the strong only, nor a front seat 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)—the weak as well as the strong. Those that are strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please themselves. Religious rationalism might prefer to have only the strong. But Christ cherishes not merely the most worthy and honourable members of His body, but the church as a whole—most of all, if there be any difference, those who need His love most. Have we learned in this to have communion with Him or not?

So also as to His habitation in the Spirit, God contemplates in this His whole church. But in the present state of Christendom there are vessels of dishonour. From all such I am called to separate. It is not a question of presumption or setting up to be somebody, but of obedience to the word of God. It is incumbent

on everyone that names the name of the Lord to depart from iniquity, whatever and wherever it may be. Value for peace or unity is not to override the character of Christ. The first of all duties is what we owe to His name. Not that we are to be in haste to separate for every fault. Not every censurable brother, but those guilty of wickedness (1 Cor. v.) are to be put away from the church; but in no case is a Christian to go along with (though he find in himself) that which he knows to be offensive to God.

On the other hand our comfort is that God dwells in us as His habitation by the Spirit. We can and ought to count on Him whatever be the difficulty, assured that He will hear us and aid us; so that there should never be the allowance of evil. It is not the amount of it, but the deliberate sanction of known evil that destroys the quality of God's temple. It thereby ceases to have any claim on the faith of a child of God to abide there.

This is evidently of the last importance. Instead of a man's judging according to what he thinks ought to be in the church of God, God's word is the criterion. How holy and right this is! How different from an ecclesiastical strife! God's word is the criterion, His Spirit the power. Nothing can be simpler to the simple soul. And He will make the path manifest.

Of course the church, as the individual Christian likewise, may make mistakes, and particularly where the commanding influence of one or more weakens the dependence of the assembly on God. Therefore nothing is so important 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 by a very feeble

child; and measures to be taken by the assembly (as in a case of discipline) are not to be settled *for* it definitely by any of His servants. There is as truly a rule in the church as there is teaching (Rom. xii. 7, 8); and the church would despise her own mercies if it despised the help of either. 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 power left to the Spirit to set aside by the feeblest the judgment of the best of guides if faulty, I no more dare call that assembly *God's* than any other society of believers under the sun. The church is God's, and there He will maintain His sovereign action. 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.

How largely His testimony hangs on this truth, that we are God's habitation through the Spirit, will be seen with surprise by any whose hearts may be stirred up in the Lord's grace to examine His own word about it for themselves.—*Abridged, with permission of the author, from "Kelly's Lectures on the Holy Spirit."*

Price, for gratuitous distribution, direct from Manchester, 2s. 3d. per 100; or per post, or through any Bookseller, 3s. 0d.

Published at 93, Bloomsbury, Oxford Road, Manchester.

R. L. ALLAN, 15, Paternoster Row, London.

POST-OFFICE ORDERS PAYABLE TO W. B. HORNER, OXFORD ROAD
POST-OFFICE.