

**THE FAITH:
OUTLINES OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE
HAYES PRESS**

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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION



WE ARE PLEASED TO MAKE available again this copy of *The Faith* first issued in September 1969 with various reprints subsequently. This book is one of a number in a series all dealing with vital Bible truths for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture quotes have been changed to the ESV and only minor alterations have been made to the original text mainly to be consistent with the change in Bible version.

M.S. Elliott for General Literature Editors

March 2015

CHAPTER 1: THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

THE SCRIPTURES OF THE Old and New Testaments comprise a collection of writings written over a period of about 1,600 years by men of different types, under the most varied circumstances. Yet the more these writings are examined and compared, the more evident it becomes that they are a harmonious whole. Sometimes it is asserted that there is incompatibility between the writings of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament. This theory cannot be sustained in the light of the orderly structure of Scripture. The Old Testament writers pointed on to the coming of Christ; their writings demanded a sequel. The New Testament writers regard their records as the complement of the Old Testament. This vital affinity between its two main parts makes Scripture an organic whole. If one part is discarded the other must also be rejected - they stand or fall together.

Throughout Scripture the divine authority of its words is repeatedly asserted. So far as the Old Testament is concerned it will be sufficient here to cite the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ. He affirmed that he was the Fulfiller of the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17). He subjected himself to the teaching of the Old Testament, acknowledged its authority and expounded its truths. He instructed his hearers to revere and obey this written revelation of God. He reproved those who failed to grasp its true meaning, but never did he discourage confidence in its divine authority. Following his triumphant resurrection from the dead, our Lord endorsed in unmistakable terms his testimony to the divine authority of Scripture (Luke 24:44-45). To those who acknowledge his Deity our Lord's pronouncements on the veracity of the Old Testament writings are decisive. Further, our Lord promised that the Holy Spirit, when he came upon the apostles, would guide them into all the truth (John

16:13-14). The writings of the apostles and prophets of the New Testament were the outcome of the Spirit's inspiration and had the same authority as the Old Testament writings (2 Peter 3:15-16). The words of the apostles were '... the commandment of the Lord' (2 Peter 3:2).

How did it come about that fallible men were instrumental in the production of writings which are described as '... the word of God' (Mark 7:13)? The term 'inspiration' is used to describe this process. It means that a supernatural influence was exerted on the writers of the various books so that their writings were God's words. The term 'breathed out by God' (2 Timothy 3:16) is the translation of the Greek word *Theopneustos* (*Theos*, God, *pneo*, to breathe). This signifies that Holy Scripture is God-breathed, the product of the creative breath of God. In the counsels of the Godhead the Spirit of God was entrusted with the revelation of God in Scripture and his use of human instruments is described by the apostle Peter in the words, '... men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21).

The Scripture doctrine of inspiration extends to the very **words** of the original writings. Any other view leaves us with an inspired message in uninspired words – an impossibility. Words are the vehicle of thought, and the discovery of the divine Mind depends on the exact meaning of the very words of the Sacred Writings. Fallen humanity needs nothing less than an infallible **written** communication from God. The truth of inspiration makes the authority of Scripture absolute; from it there is no appeal.

The Scriptures having been originally written in Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek, we have for many years have been thankful to make use of the Authorized (King James) Version, the English Revised Version, the New International Version, The New American Standard Bible, the New King James Version and now with this reprint, the English Standard Version also. But as these are after all but human translations we are glad to use

such other means of arriving at the sense of the original Scriptures as are available. In the understanding and interpretation of Scripture certain basic principles should be borne in mind. Scripture being a unitary whole, it is necessary to interpret each part in relation to the rest. The careful expositor will compare Scripture with Scripture. A passage of Scripture will not be taken out of its context nor will a meaning be forced upon it that it cannot possibly mean.

The Scriptures contain many types, parables, allegories and so forth, and for the interpretation of these due heed must be given to the analogy of the Faith and to the principles outlined above. We must beware of the so-called spiritualizing of Scripture which obscures or evades the first simple truth of historical passages such as the early chapters of Genesis. To understand Scripture aright we need not only diligent application and unquestioning faith but also the enlightenment of the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER 2: THE GODHEAD

SCRIPTURE SPEAKS TO us with authority about God. It does not set out to prove his existence. The opening statement of Genesis, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth', discloses in plain and direct terms that there is one God and that he is the sole Cause of creation. Belief in this basic truth is the first step along the road to the knowledge of God. '... whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists' (Hebrews 11:6), and such belief rests on the revelation of God, given in Holy Scripture. There is, of course, confirming evidence outside Scripture of the existence of God, but the disclosures of revelation transcend anything that can be inferred from his creative acts. In his address to the philosophers at the Areopagus the apostle Paul summarizes the witness to God of creation and Scripture (Acts 17:22-31). This summary merits careful study because of its precise treatment of the doctrine of the Godhead.

The revelation of God in Scripture is progressive (Hebrews 1:1-2). There is a gradual and orderly unfolding until the climax and fulness is reached when God sent his only Son into the world. God does not change (Malachi 3:6). His wisdom being complete does not mature, therefore his character is invariable (James 1:17). The idea, frequently asserted, that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament is untenable. If the revelation of God in Scripture is progressive it is not therefore defective at any point. The stream deepens and widens but it ever flows from the same source. We can launch out on its waters with complete confidence that it will bear us onward to a fuller knowledge of God.

We refer briefly to some of the basic truths Scripture reveals of the being and nature of God. There is one God (1 Timothy 2:5; see also 1

Corinthians 8:4; Galatians 3:20). This is commonly believed where there is Christian influence but there are millions who believe in a multiplicity of gods. Such belief is called Polytheism. The God revealed in Scripture is the only God (John 17:3).

Underlying many of the religions of the East and some of their Western equivalents is the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God. This is called Pantheism. It is a denial of the personality of God and reduces him to a mere force or influence. But Scripture reveals not only that there is one God but that he is a living God (Jeremiah 10:10; Joshua 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:15). He is a living Being not an abstract force or influence. There is a great gulf between a god who is a force and the living God revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

God is not only a living personal Being, he is also self-existent and eternal (Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 1:20). And he is the cause and goal of all material and spiritual existence (Colossians 1:2-20). Scripture does not teach the eternity of matter as do some false religions. It reveals that, '... you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created' (Revelation 4:11).

There is a heresy known as Deism. Deists do not accept Scripture as divine revelation. Many of them believe that the God who created the universe no longer exercises control over it. Everywhere Scripture denies this. The God revealed in Scripture is the sovereign Lord and Judge of the universe: '... he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"' (Acts 17:27-28). He upholds the universe by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3), and in him all things consist or hold together (Colossians 1:17).

As Scripture proceeds to unveil the mystery of the Divine Being it discloses that there are three Persons in the Godhead. The Father is God (Philippians 2:11), the Son is God (Hebrews 1:8), the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). Because the mode of existence of the Divine Being is

unique the utmost reserve is necessary when attempting to illustrate this great mystery. Some have suggested that the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit are used to describe three manifestations of one and the same Person, as in human affairs the same person may be the father of a family, the commander of an army and the sovereign of a kingdom. Such a conception is contrary to the revelation of God in Scripture. The Father is described as **sending** the Son (1 John 4:14), and the Father and the Son as **sending** the Spirit (John 14:26; 16:7). At the Jordan when Christ was baptized the Father spoke from heaven, and the Spirit descended in bodily form as a dove upon the Son (Matthew 3:13-17). Such examples of the activities of the Persons in the Godhead are plainly inconsistent with the idea of the Trinity being three manifestations of one Person.

'The Trinity in unity, being the mode of the existence of the eternal, is a thing essentially unique, and is therefore lifted far above the possibility of complete comparison or illustration' (Moule). The doctrine of the Trinity is discernible in the Old Testament but is fully demonstrated in the New Testament. The command of the risen Christ, '... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19), demands acceptance of this doctrine by all who submit themselves for baptism as his disciples. Our Lord's use of the singular '**name**' is significant. The full revelation of the triune God to humanity could be accomplished only through the incarnation of the Son and the sending forth of the Spirit.

The relationship of the Persons in the Godhead is eternal. Some have affirmed that our Lord's divine Sonship was a development which took place in time, either at his incarnation or after his resurrection, and is therefore not original and eternal. Several passages of Scripture (e.g. Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:15-16) plainly indicate that the relationship existed before Creation. Further, the Fatherhood in the Godhead is the primary pattern from which the concept of fatherhood is derived. To say that the divine Fatherhood commenced at some point in time is clearly

inconsistent with such a passage as Ephesians 3:14-15. It is not possible to define all that is involved in the unique relationship of Father and Son in the Godhead, but glory of the Son of God is bound up with it. We believe that the teaching of Scripture on this important truth demands acceptance of the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of our Lord Jesus Christ as an article of faith.

CHAPTER 3: THE INCARNATION

WHEN ADAM SINNED IN the garden of Eden God gave a promise of a deliverer (Genesis 3:15), and throughout the Old Testament Scriptures this promise was repeated in prophecy and type until ‘... when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman’ (Galatians 4:4). The virgin birth of Christ is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian Faith. It was predicted in Isaiah’s prophecy (7:14) which is confirmed by its quotation in Matthew’s Gospel, ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (1:23). The truth of the incarnation was revealed to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) and also to Joseph to whom she was betrothed (Matthew 1:18-21). These plain pronouncements are sufficient for those who accept the New Testament writings as truth. Birth from a virgin was an essential element in the sinlessness of our Lord’s humanity.

By this means the taint of sin transmitted to all humankind since Adam’s fall was precluded. The perfect holiness of Mary’s Child was attributed, not to an immaculate mother, but to the action of the Holy Spirit in his conception (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). And although the birth of this Baby resembled that of others as to its mode (Hebrews 2:14), it was unique in one important respect. In every other birth there is the beginning of a new personality but in the birth of Jesus Christ an existing divine Person entered a new mode of subsistence.

In the early centuries following the apostolic age a number of heresies were advanced regarding our Lord’s Person. We cannot deal with these in detail here. It will suffice to say that, broadly speaking, there were some who detracted from his essential Deity by overstressing his Manhood, and there were others who treated his Manhood in such a way as to make it appear unreal. These heresies are perpetuated in some modern cults.

This is one important reason why we must contend for the true doctrine of our Lord's Person. Many are deceived by cults which profess to accept the Bible as God's word and at the same time propagate blasphemous heresies concerning our Saviour and Lord.

The opening verses of the epistle to the Romans give a clear statement on the two natures of our incarnate Lord, and the passage in Philippians 2:5-8 gives further emphasis to this important truth. 'Being' (v.7) or, subsisting in 'the form (Greek, *morphe*) of God' (v.6), our Lord took the form (*morphe*) of a servant' (v.7). This does not mean that he changed the one form (*morphe*) for the other. This could never be: his nature as God is unchangeable and eternal. He took the nature of man at his incarnation but in no sense did he discard his essential Deity. The Man Christ Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30), and the Jews were in no doubt as to the implications of that claim. He was the eternal Word who '... became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). Our incarnate Lord is very God and truly Man. He did not exchange Deity for Manhood but took Manhood into Deity. Thus he is of two natures - God and Man: he is the Son of God and the Son of Man. But there are not two Christs, He is always the one Person. In him the nature of God and the nature of Man co-exist: '*... without confusion, without change, without division, without separation*' (quoted from the Chalcedon Creed of 451 AD).

Any other view of the doctrine of Christ's Person falls short of New Testament teaching. The precise manner of the union of the two natures in one Person has been described as: '*... a mystery the most to be admired by all, and the least possible to be expressed by any living man, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity alone excepted*' (Jackson).

Many New Testament passages bear witness to our Lord's perpetual humanity. Manhood was not assumed merely for the period of his time on earth and then laid aside. He rose from the dead, and the body which

hung on the Cross and was laid in Joseph's tomb was the body in which he appeared to his apostles and others after his resurrection. And when he ascended where he was before to take his place at the right hand of the Father, he did so in his human body, now glorified. His dual nature abides. The God-Man, bearing in his body the marks of his passion, awaits the day of manifestation, when, '... every eye will see him even those who pierced him ... Even so. Amen' (Revelation 1:7).

CHAPTER 4: THE ATONEMENT

FROM PSALM 51:5 WE learn we were sinful at birth and are subject to death both on account of Adam's transgression and our personal misdeeds (Romans 5:12; 3:9-19). The fearful nature of sin, and the ruin it has brought to mankind, are frequently emphasized in Scripture. Sin is not only our problem, it is God's problem too. The demands of his righteousness shut out guilty men and women from acceptance with God. Through sin, we are '... alienated from the life of God' (Ephesians 4:18). When Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden there seemed to be no hope that he would be able to recover himself from the consequences of his rebellion. And Scripture makes it abundantly plain that of ourselves we can do nothing to rectify our fallen, sinful state. God must provide the means to secure the sinner's acceptance or else we must be banished for ever.

In Old Testament times men and women of faith learned that they could find acceptance with God only by virtue of the death of a sacrificial victim. Every sacrifice offered to God under the Old Covenant foreshadowed the sacrificial death of Christ. The meaning of 'to make atonement' (used here as the equivalent of the Hebrew word *kappār*, and the Greek word *hilaskomai*) is, 'to cover'. (See, for instance, Leviticus 1:4 and Numbers 15:28). Animal sacrifices made a covering in the sense that sin was covered from God's sight and his wrath was averted. Scripture makes clear that God had no pleasure in animal sacrifices except as they were shadows of the Substance, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and expressed the faith of the penitent offerer (Hebrews 10:1-9).

The doctrine of the Atonement is the heart of the Christian Faith. Our guilt as human beings and God's wrath made a sacrifice necessary – a sacrifice that would make payment for the guilt incurred. The Son of God

came to earth for this very purpose (1 John 3:5) and at the beginning of his public ministry was pointed out by John the Baptist, ‘... Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29). Jesus’ death on the cross was the only means whereby God could pardon and accept the sinner.

Throughout the Old Testament the substitutionary nature of sacrifice is emphasized, and the imposing ritual on the Day of Atonement in Israel’s year was a striking illustration of the great atoning Sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:25-26). With this agrees the prophetic word, ‘... he was wounded for our transgressions ... and with his stripes we are healed’ (Isaiah 53:5). Paul had such passages in mind when he wrote, ‘... Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures’ (1 Corinthians 15:3).

The mystery of our Saviour’s atoning death is holy ground, and illustrations of its meaning should be used with reserve. Because it is basic in Christian doctrine it is safer to keep close to the words of Scripture. There is a wealth of reference to the subject in both the Old and New Testaments. Illustrations such as the Passover (Exodus 12), the offering of Isaac (Genesis 22), and the bronze serpent (Numbers 21) should be carefully noted. In the New Testament the death of Christ receives comprehensive treatment. The substitutionary element in his death is expressed in our Saviour’s own words, ‘... the Son of Man came ... to give his life a ransom for many’ (Matthew 20:28). The Epistles abound with references to the death of the cross of Christ, as the sole basis on which guilty man can be reconciled to God (e.g. Romans 3:23-26; 5:12-21; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 1 Peter 2:24; Revelation 1:5).

The New Testament doctrine of atonement is well expressed in the verse of the hymn, ‘Man of Sorrows’ which reads:

‘Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,

Sealed my pardon with His blood,

Hallelujah! what a Saviour!' (*P.P. Bliss*)

CHAPTER 5: THE RESURRECTION

THE APOSTLE PAUL DESCRIBED the raising of Christ from the dead and his exaltation to God's right hand in heaven as an outstanding example of divine power (Ephesians 1:19-23). If our Lord's atoning death had not been crowned by his triumphant resurrection the gospel would not have the power to save us. Paul states this forcibly: '... if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain ... you are still in your sins ... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15:14-19).

Christ was '... raised on the third day **in accordance with the Scriptures**' (1 Corinthians 15:4). His resurrection was planned by God and foretold in the Old Testament writings. Our Lord acknowledged the witness of prophecy to this great event. He came to fulfil the Scriptures and his resurrection from the dead was an essential part of that fulfilment. Not only is there direct prophecy of the resurrection, but this wonderful truth is also hidden in some of the types and shadows in the Old Testament. Throughout these writings there are numerous references to the glories which would follow the sufferings of the Christ. The prophets delighted to dwell on this precious theme, as the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed forward to the glorious triumph of the Redeemer over sin and death (1 Peter 1:11).

During his public ministry our Lord revealed that he would be humiliated and crucified, and that he would be raised from the dead on the third day. So open was his claim that he would rise from the dead that his enemies were fully informed of it. After his crucifixion they said to Pilate, '... Sir, we remember how that impostor said ... "After three days I will rise." Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day' (Matthew 27:63, 64). Their testimony to our Lord's prediction of

his own resurrection and the steps they took to nullify his words are confirming evidence from hostile witnesses. As the Cross cast its shadow across his path, the suffering of death was always associated in our Lord's thought with the triumph of his resurrection. On the Mount of Transfiguration the coming glory was glimpsed, and coming down from the mount our Lord commanded, '... Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead' (Matthew 17:9). From that time his ministry to his apostles was to prepare them for the imminent fulfilment of the great purpose of God in his death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21). The centrality of the resurrection of Christ in God's saving purpose for humanity is fully demonstrated in New Testament revelation.

After his resurrection our Lord ascended to heaven in his glorified human body. Thus he is '... the firstborn from the dead' (Colossians 1:18) and '... the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Corinthians 15:20). The presence of one glorified Man in heaven is the guarantee of a mighty harvest to follow. His death and resurrection have secured for the redeemed a glorified bodily nature like his; he '... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself' (Philippians 3:21).

The resurrection of Christ signified the acceptance by God of the Saviour's atoning death; '... Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Romans 4:24-25). It also secures for the believer union with Christ. As we are all 'in Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:22) and share the consequences of Adam's sin, so believers are 'in Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17) and share his life and righteousness. They are eternally secure; the second Man will never fail.

One of the great truths emphasized by the apostles was that of the believer's identification with Christ. His death and resurrection were our death and resurrection. We died with him and we have been raised with him: '... God ... raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly

places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:4-6). Thus while the believer still lives on earth he really belongs to the heavenly sphere. In Romans 6:4-14 Paul reasons out the implications of the believer's identification with Christ in terms of victorious Christian living. This accords with his own great desire, '... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection' (Philippians 3:10).

Resurrection from the dead has to do with the body. When it takes place, spirit, soul and body are reunited. After his resurrection our Lord appeared to his apostles in bodily form and showed to them his wounded hands, feet and side. This is clear evidence against those who teach that our Lord's resurrection was spiritual and not physical. It is true that his body underwent some changes in its properties, nevertheless the body that came from the womb of the Virgin was the body buried in Joseph's tomb and restored to life on the third day. The resurrection of all is clearly taught in Scripture. Our Lord has been given authority by his Father to execute judgement and his solemn pronouncement is all-embracing: '... an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out' (John 5:28-29). Resurrection will take place in three stages. Paul uses the phrase, 'each in his own order' (1 Corinthians 15:23). Those 'in Christ' will be raised at the 'rapture' that is, caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Old Testament saints, and the faithful of the tribulation period, will also be raised at a pre-Millennial resurrection (Revelation 11:18; see also Revelation 20:4-6). The rest of the dead will be raised at the end of the Millennium and will appear at the great white throne judgement (Revelation 20:11-15).

CHAPTER 6: ETERNAL SALVATION

BY THE ATONING DEATH of Christ on the Cross God made provision for our salvation. Scripture testifies that all we are all under condemnation (Romans 3:9-23; 11:32) and that none will be saved apart from the merits of that death (Acts 4:12). In the gospel salvation is offered to guilty humanity on the ground of God's grace (Romans 6:23). Repentance and faith are necessary on our part before the merits of Christ's atoning work are reckoned to us (Acts 20:21). Those who believe on the Lord Jesus are justified by faith and accounted righteous in God's sight (Romans 3:24-28). That salvation is not of works but by grace through faith is a vital element of the gospel. The apostle Paul affirms this in clear terms in his letter to the Ephesians: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast' (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Those who receive Christ as Saviour are born again and become children of God (John 1:12-13). This is a relationship which cannot be dissolved. Many New Testament passages assert the eternal security of the believer. It will suffice here to refer to the words of our Lord cited in John 10:22-30. Those who believe in him are described as 'my sheep' (v.27). To them he gives eternal life and they shall never perish. He says that they are held in his hand, and to confirm their complete security he states further that they are held in his Father's hand. From the safety of this double grasp no one is able to snatch his sheep. Certain passages of Scripture are sometimes adduced to support the view that children of God may fall away and be eternally lost (e.g. Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20-21). These passages do not refer to the believer's eternal security but are warnings against failure to continue in the Christian way of life. We comment on the warnings of Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31, in a later chapter on 'The House of God'.

While Scripture asserts that there is provision in the death of Christ for all (1 Timothy 2:4-6), the gospel is a proclamation calling for repentance and faith as necessary conditions in the salvation of each person. Scripture also teaches that God does all things after the counsel of his will. Human responsibility is not incompatible with divine sovereignty. Both are given emphasis in Scripture and are to be accepted by faith. Undue emphasis should not be placed on the one truth at the expense of the other; they are to be held in equal balance. Again, our Lord's words assure us, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out' (John 6:37) and, '... whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life' (John 5:24).

Scripture makes clear that those who reject the gospel will suffer eternal punishment (John 3:36). They are '... condemned already' (John 3:18) and are given no hope either of salvation or annihilation. Those who die in their sins, without their names written in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire (John 8:21-24; Revelation 20:15).

Those who die before reaching an age of understanding not having had the opportunity to accept or reject God's mercy, we believe, will enjoy salvation from wrath through the merits of the atonement (2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 18:10). It should not be necessary to say that this cannot in any way depend on their being made the subjects of the unscriptural ceremony known as infant sprinkling or christening.

Those who live beyond the reach of the gospel of God's grace will be judged by a merciful and righteous God (see Romans 2:7-11; Revelation 20:12-14). In all questions relating to human destiny God is sovereign and it is not for mortal man to reply against him. The God who has shown infinite grace to mankind and given his Son for '... us men and for our salvation' (taken from the Nicene Creed) cannot be unjust. His throne is founded on eternal principles of righteousness and justice. We

can resolve all our anxieties on these profound problems by casting them on the unerring wisdom of a faithful God.

‘... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’ (Genesis 18:25).

CHAPTER 7: THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BELIEVER

EVER SINCE ADAM SINNED in the Garden of Eden the triune God has been at work for the salvation of the human race. As God unfolded his plan he disclosed that redemption would be secured by the incarnation and atoning death of the Son of God, then the Spirit of God would be sent to abide in the hearts of the redeemed. These two great acts of God are placed side-by-side in the epistle to the Galatians: 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman ... to redeem ... and ... God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts ...' (Galatians 4:4-6).

During our Lord's ministry he made many references to the Spirit of God and his work, but in the upper room on the night of the betrayal he gave to his apostles the fuller revelation of the Spirit's work in the believer. Although the Spirit of God has been at work in human affairs ever since he '... was hovering over the face of the waters' (Genesis 1:2). He was soon to come to earth in saving activity as never before. His presence was to be as real and as personal as that of our lovely Redeemer, but the Spirit was to come not by incarnation but by pouring out. This form of manifestation was indicative of the work he was chosen to fulfil in God's saving activity since the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. The coming of the Spirit was to await our Lord's ascension to the Father: '... if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you' (John 16:7).

The apostles had already known the Spirit's presence and power. They and all others reached through our Lord's ministry had been 'born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). But the **indwelling** of the Spirit became possible only when he was given at Pentecost. '... You know him, for he dwells with you

and will be in you' (John 14:7). Following our Lord's great utterance on the Spirit's indwelling fullness (John 7:38) we are told, '... for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.'

A study of the Acts and the Epistles reveals that, after Pentecost, receiving the Holy Spirit occurred at the new birth. There are two exceptions to this in the early chapters of the Acts. On the day of Pentecost Peter said to his hearers, '... Repent and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). Those to whom Peter preached were Jews whose guilt for the crucifixion of Christ placed them in a unique category. They were promised the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit if they were prepared to give evidence of their repentance and faith by submitting to the public act of baptism in water.

In the case of the Samaritan converts (Acts 8), these received the gospel and were baptized before they received the Holy Spirit. This is another unusual case. Jews and Samaritans were sworn enemies. The apostles signified their fellowship with this work in Samaria, 'Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit' (Acts 8:17). But whatever may be said of the events of Acts 2 and 8, when we come to Acts 10 we see clearly, in the case of the Cornelius household, reception of the Holy Spirit coinciding with belief of the gospel message.

Peter's visit to Cornelius was a unique historic occasion. He was sent there by the Holy Spirit and later drew attention to the significance of that event in the development of God's saving work among the Gentiles (Acts 15:7-9). It is noteworthy that thereafter in the narrative of the Acts there is no record of an interval between belief of the gospel message and reception of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul came to Ephesus (Acts 19) he found there some disciples who were acquainted with the way of the Lord only in so far as it had been made known by John the Baptist. They were unaware of the coming

of the Spirit. Their spiritual experience belonged to the period before Pentecost ‘... for as yet the Spirit had not been given.’ In order to discover the spiritual standing of these men, Paul asked the question, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ (Acts 19:2). The implication of that question was that reception of the Holy Spirit upon belief of the gospel message was a distinguishing feature of apostolic preaching. The answer of these men was decisive, ‘... No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ It is clear, then, that the question, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ is not applicable to present-day believers. Today, we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe.

When our Lord promised his apostles that after his ascension to the Father they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit he outlined the range of the Spirit’s activity (John 14-16). These references to the Spirit’s work are of great importance. He promised that the Helper would come to be with them ‘for ever’ (John 14:16). The permanence of the Spirit’s dwelling in the believer is also emphasized in the Epistles. He is the divine seal (Ephesians 1:13) marking the believer as a divine possession. He is also ‘the guarantee of our inheritance’ the guarantee that in due course the believer will enter into full possession of his or her eternal inheritance. While we may grieve or quench the Holy Spirit we are assured that he will not depart from us. This is further confirmation of the eternal security of the believer.

Our Lord indicated that when the Spirit was given at Pentecost those upon whom he came would be ‘... baptized with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 1:5). The account of this great event in Acts reads, ‘And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ...’ (Acts 2:4). Because they occurred concurrently at Pentecost, are the ‘Baptism’ and the ‘Filling’ synonymous terms? We will give separate consideration to each of these terms.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

There are seven references to this matter in the New Testament. Four of these occur in the Gospels and refer to the prophecy of John the Baptist 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Our Lord identified the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as the fulfilment of John's prophecy (Acts 1:5), as did Peter when recounting what occurred in the Cornelius household, 'And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 11:16).

The seventh reference to baptism in the Holy Spirit is: 'For just as the body is one and has many members ... so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...' (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This shows that baptism in the Spirit is the means of entrance into the Church which is Christ's Body. When a person receives Christ as Saviour that person becomes a member of that Church. Baptism in the Holy Spirit, therefore, occurs at the time of conversion.

The Filling of the Spirit

Although all believers are baptized in the Holy Spirit and indwelt by him, not all are filled with the Holy Spirit. The command, '... be filled with the Spirit,' (Ephesians 5:18) places on believers the obligation to make room for the Spirit to fill their hearts and lives. In the context of this command we are told of the evidences of the Spirit's infilling (Ephesians 5:15-21). In verse 17 we read, 'Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.' The Spirit-filled Christian will be practical, not dominated by emotions but exercising understanding to learn the will of God from the word of God. And one of the most profound results of the Spirit's infilling is that he controls the person he indwells without any alteration to the human personality.

Another quality of the Spirit-filled Christian is indicated in verse 21, 'submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.' The Spirit-filled disciple will value the counsel of other spiritually-minded disciples. '... be

filled with the Spirit, and ‘submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.’ are complementary commands not to be dissociated. Awkwardness and petulance will be absent from the Spirit-filled Christian who will be modest and reasonable; joyful and thankful, ‘giving thanks always and for everything ...’ (verse 20).

The question is sometimes raised whether the filling of the Spirit is a continuous or a once-for-all experience. The present tense in the Greek in Ephesians 5:18 has the force of ‘**be getting filled.**’ This points to a continuous experience depending on the believer opening the inner regions of his or her life to the indwelling Spirit.

In the Acts there are many examples of Spirit-filled believers being used at crucial times to further the work of God (e.g. Acts 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:9). Stephen and Barnabas are described as men ‘filled with the Holy Spirit.’ We need more than clear minds to do God’s work. The Spirit of God must empower our service if it is to be effective.

The Fruit of the Spirit

Among the higher ranges of the Holy Spirit’s work in the believer is the production of the fruit of the Spirit. This is presented in nine components which may be considered in groups of three:

Love Patience Faithfulness

Joy Kindness Gentleness

Peace Goodness Self-control

(Galatians 5:22-23)

They comprise the elements of Christian character which are produced only by the Spirit of God. They describe a **whole** Christian, and the degree of our subjection to the Spirit’s influence will be revealed in the proportionate development of all these qualities. They are seen in perfection

in the incarnate Christ. If the believer walks to ‘... gratify the desires of the flesh’ (Galatians 5:16), then the works of the flesh will be evident in that person’s life and character.

The graces of the Spirit will appear only as the believer walks by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). The word ‘walk’ is used in Paul’s epistles to signify the whole round of the believer’s life. If the Spirit’s guidance is sought and his leading followed in all things then will appear without apparent effort the beautiful Christian character which is the fruit of the Spirit.

The Gifts of the Spirit

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost ‘...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance’ (Acts 2:4). The gift of tongues was also given when the Holy Spirit came upon Gentile converts in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:46), and when he came upon the twelve men at Ephesus (Acts 19:6). We have already considered the special circumstances of these events. There is no evidence that the gift of tongues was given when the Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritan converts (Acts 8). We understand the gift of tongues to be the ability to speak under the power of the Spirit in a language the speaker had never learned. This and other miraculous manifestations occurred in New Testament times.

A list of gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit (some of which involved the miraculous) is given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28). Their purpose was:

- (1) To demonstrate that the message of the gospel had divine authority and that the churches founded in apostolic days were of divine origin (Hebrews 2:4).
- (2) To make provision for the instruction of the disciples, for the confirmation of their faith, and to make their witness effective (1 Corinthians 12 and 14).

(3) To build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12), the divine purpose being that this should be within the frame-work of the churches of God.

The gifts were bestowed by the sovereign choice of the Holy Spirit, and their operation was under his control and in accordance with such instructions as are supplied in 1 Corinthians 14. Certain gifts distributed by the Spirit were necessary for the communication of the divine mind in the period before the New Testament was completed. When the Scriptures were finished under the inspiration of the Spirit they became the only channel used by the Holy Spirit for the communication of the divine mind.

That the working of miracles through human instrumentality has not been part God's normal way of dealing with humanity is abundantly demonstrated in the Old Testament. Miracles occurred on special occasions for specific purposes. This weighs strongly against the assertion that miraculous gifts were intended by God to continue throughout this age and that their absence is due to lack of faith.

Claims to the possession of miraculous gifts, in particular the gift of tongues, are prevalent today. Not being convinced that miraculous gifts were intended by God to continue throughout this age, we question the validity of modern claims. The gift of tongues in apostolic days was for public use in the church and its alleged use by women is a clear contra-vention of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

Whatever place miraculous gifts had in the purposes of God it was always secondary and subordinate to the production in the believer of those graces of the Spirit which were in perfect manifestation in the Man Christ Jesus. It is quite clear that some in the Corinthian church were hankering after spectacular gifts but were deficient in Christian graces. We need warning against a similar tendency today.

CHAPTER 8: ‘MY CHURCH’ – HIS BODY

A DISTINCTIVE TRUTH of the New Testament is the formation in the present age of the Church which is Christ’s Body. The first mention of it occurs in the important announcement made by our Lord at Caesarea Philippi: ‘He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”’ (Matthew 16:15-18).

It was later revealed that the Church of which our Lord spoke was the subject of divine counsel before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; 3:11). It is clear from Ephesians 5:23-32 that this wonderful purpose of God, which our Lord announced as imminent, was in the mind of God when he created Adam and Eve. Further, the very manner of Eve’s creation prefigured a great design which had been kept a secret throughout the ages (Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:3-6) but was now disclosed by our Lord himself.

This wonderful divine project, ‘my church,’ does not absorb or supersede the purposes of God with the nation of Israel. That system of Scripture interpretation which spiritualizes the divine promises of a glorious future for the nation of Israel and applies them to the Church obscures the whole outline of the future purposes of God. ‘My church’ and Israel are distinct entities which should not be confused. When the nation of Israel rejected her Messiah, God set her aside for the time being and will recommence his dealings with her in the future. In the present interval

the divine objective is 'my church' which must be completed before the prophecies relating to Israel's glorious future can be realized.

In his historic declaration at Caesarea Philippi our Lord not only expressed his intention to build his Church but also specified the foundation on which it would be raised. Much controversy has arisen over the words, 'You are Peter (Greek *petros*), and on this rock (Greek, *petra*) I will build my church ...' (verse 18). Our Lord did not say to Peter, 'on you I will build my church.' Shortly afterwards Peter, although a chosen apostle, is seen to be a failing man like ourselves (Matthew 16:23). There is not the slightest hint elsewhere in the New Testament that Peter is the rock on which the Church is founded.

It has been thought by many that the confession of Peter, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,' is the bedrock fact on which the Church is founded. Others have thought that the Lord used the term 'this rock' to describe himself. These two interpretations are practically synonymous. What is signified is the stability and security of the Church. Between Christ and his Church there is an indestructible bond. The designation used in Paul's epistles, '... the church which is his body' (Ephesians 1:22-23) emphasizes the closeness and permanence of the union of Christ and his members.

The Church is composed of those who, Peter-like, confess, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Such a confession comes only through divine enlightenment. The name Peter (Greek, *Petros* - a stone), was given to him by our Lord when he first met Simon (John 1:42), and this foreshadowed the use he was to make of it at Caesarea Philippi. The words, 'I will build my church' indicates future application. He had not commenced to build. The building of the Church would commence at Pentecost when the apostles and others together in Jerusalem would be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). Paul's words to the Corinthians, 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...' (1 Corinthians

12:13), show that baptism in the Holy Spirit is the means of entrance into the Church which is his Body.

We conclude then that all who receive Christ as Saviour forthwith become members of the Church and can never be severed from it. They are secure by virtue of his own assurance, ‘... the gates of hell (Greek *Hades*) shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18). The bond of the members to the Head and to each other is not severed by death; it is eternal. ‘My church’ which began at Pentecost will be complete at our Lord’s coming to the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Then will emerge in glorious manifestation the great masterpiece of divine wisdom constructed during this age under the gaze of principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10). Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:2). At long last, glorious and spotless, the Church will be beside him sharing his glory and displaying his grace – ‘... the fullness of him who fills all in all’ (Ephesians 1:23).

The subject we have been considering needs safeguarding by rightly dividing the word of truth. It is necessary to distinguish between churches of God, which are local and conditional, and the Church which is his Body. We refer in more detail to this in a later chapter. Churches of God occupy an important place in the apostles’ teaching, but we are dealing here with ‘my church’ which in origin, purpose and destiny is to be distinguished from them. Undoubtedly the New Testament envisages members of the Body of Christ finding their place, during their earthly pilgrimage, in churches of God, standing together in divine testimony. But failure in this, deplorable though it is, cannot invalidate the act of divine grace by which all believers become members of the Church which is his Body.

‘to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen’ (Ephesians 3:21).’

What raised the wondrous thought,

Or who did it suggest,
That we, the Church, to glory brought,
Should with the Son be blest?
O God, the thought was Thine,
Thine only could it be;
Fruit of the wisdom, love divine,
Peculiar unto Thee.' (*G.V. Wigram*)

CHAPTER 9: DISCIPLESHIP

WHEN THE RISEN LORD sent forth his apostles into all the world, he charged them to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15), and commanded them to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19). They were to proclaim the message of salvation by grace through faith, but their message was not to stop there. Those who became children of God were taught to yield wholehearted obedience to the Redeemer who bought them with his precious blood. Thus the authority of the Lord Jesus became a prominent theme in the preaching of the apostles (Acts 2:36; 10:42). Here was the crucial test of the believer's love for his Saviour, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). Those who signified their willingness to follow the Lord were required to give public witness to their allegiance by submitting to baptism in water. This symbolized their acceptance of the obligations of discipleship, the essentials of which were expressed by our Lord in his instructions to his apostles: 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me' (Luke 9:23).

No man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). The disciple must die to self and follow his Lord if he is to save his life. Because he is a child of God he cannot forfeit the eternal life which has been given to him, but he can be a disciple only by continuous subjection to the will of his Lord. This will entail conflict. The world, the flesh and the devil will be his constant foes. He may fail and be tempted to turn back, but the indwelling Spirit will give him strength to overcome. Daily reading of the Word, prayer, and communion will nourish the new life, and the help of other spiritually-minded disciples will bring assurance and encouragement.

The way of life for the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is plainly marked in the New Testament writings. It is not enough to avoid falling into bad

habits or those sins which everyone acknowledges as wrong. The Christian way of life is not an ordinary life with a few higher standards superimposed it is a new way of life altogether. Our Lord said of his own, ‘... they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world’ (John 17:14). The word ‘world’ here (Greek, *kosmos*) describes a system of things in opposition to God, arranged to gratify the sinful desires of mankind. Warnings against its evil influence on the disciple are frequent in the Scriptures. ‘Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him’ (1 John 2:15). ‘Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?’ (James 4:4). The disciple must be always on guard against the subtle temptations of the world, its pleasures, its ideals, its politics and its religion. Only in separation from it can the disciples maintain loyalty to their Lord. Many have foundered and made shipwreck of their lives by failure to maintain this separation. A solemn warning is given in the serious failure of one of the apostle Paul’s fellow-workers: ‘For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me ...’ (2 Timothy 4:10).

The disciple is to be separate from the world but is not to be a recluse having positive responsibilities to let their light shine. Their manner of life should be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27), so displaying Christian virtues in their earthly calling and in domestic life, doing good unto all, being ready to give answer to those who ask a reason for the hope that is in them, yet with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

While each disciple is personally responsible to his or her Lord, each is also required to join with other disciples in church fellowship. Nothing is clearer in the New Testament than that it is the will of God for disciples to be together in churches of God. We refer to this in more detail in a later chapter but mention it here because of its relevance to discipleship. The apostles were commissioned not only to make disciples and to baptize them, but also to teach them ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ...’ (Matthew 28:20). The apostles’ teaching is the

standard to which the loyal disciple must conform as did those first disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42).

CHAPTER 10: THE CHURCHES OF GOD

THE ENGLISH WORD ‘CHURCH’ may be used to describe a building set apart for religious purposes. The word is never used in the New Testament with this meaning. It always signifies a group of persons. There are two main usages of the word translated ‘church’ (Greek, *ekklēsia*, from *ek*, out of, and *klesis*, a calling) in the New Testament. It is used to designate, (a) the whole company of the redeemed from Pentecost to the Lord’s return – ‘my church,’ ‘the Church which is his Body’ (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22), and (b) a local company of baptized disciples gathered under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ – ‘the church (churches) of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:4). There is also a secular use of the word in Acts 19:32,39 (assembly).

In an earlier chapter, in reference to the Church which is Christ’s Body, we noted the clear word in 1 Corinthians 12:13, ‘For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...’ This describes the means by which the believer becomes a member of that glorious Church. Upon belief in the Saviour the believer is ‘... sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance ...’ (Ephesians 1:13-14). Much confusion of teaching has arisen among believers through a vague use of the word ‘church.’ In particular, failure to distinguish between ‘my Church,’ which is universal and inviolate, and churches of God, which are local and conditional, has obscured an important area of New Testament teaching on church constitution and practice.

The first church of God was established in Jerusalem (compare Acts 8:1 with Galatians 1:13). When the Holy Spirit descended upon the assembled disciples ‘... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ...’ (Acts 2:4), and at the same time they were formed into a church of God. This was

a divine beginning in relation to God's New Covenant people. Then, in response to Peter's preaching, about three thousand persons received his word, were baptized and added to the church. It should be observed that baptism in water, the symbol of subjection to the lordship of Christ, preceded addition to the church of God in Jerusalem.

We learn from the Acts of the Apostles that the church of God in Jerusalem was the first of many churches of like pattern which were established in various parts of the world through the labours of the apostles and their fellow-workers.

The risen Lord's commission to his apostles was:

- (1) 'Make disciples of all nations,
- (2) baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:
- (3) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matthew 28:19-20).

It is plain that these objectives were to be secured by the preaching of the Word, and then by gathering the disciples into local churches after the pattern of that first church, the church of God in Jerusalem. Following the day of Pentecost, the work of God in Jerusalem spread rapidly. We read: '... the number of the men came to be about five thousand' (Acts 4:4). 'And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both men and women' (Acts 5:14). '... and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7).

It is important to observe that in spite of the great increase in the number of the disciples in Jerusalem, the church of God there remained a unit. It is inconceivable that so many thousands could assemble regularly in one place but no matter how many places of meeting there were, the church

was one. All the churches of God mentioned in the New Testament followed this pattern. There was never more than one church of God in a city, town or village. The conception of a number of autonomous churches in a city or town is without precedent in Scripture.

The church in Jerusalem was a clearly defined company of disciples separated to God and separated from the world: 'None of the rest dared join them ...' (Acts 5:13). The relationship to each other of those within the church is expressed in the words:

'And all who believed were together and had all things in common' (Acts 2:44).

'Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32).

Moreover, 'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42).

They were 'together' in a sense which went far beyond merely assembling at regular intervals. They were joined together in a fellowship or partnership which accepted certain corporate obligations and responsibilities. The history of the church in Jerusalem reveals the unity of purpose with which those obligations and responsibilities were performed.

Our Lord indicated to his apostles that their work was to begin at Jerusalem and then extend to the uttermost part of the earth. An important development occurred when the work spread to Antioch in Syria and resulted in the formation of a strong and vigorous church of God in that city. This development was brought about by the preaching of men who were already identified with the church of God in Jerusalem, and the work was fostered and sustained by the sending of adequate help from that church. This was characteristic of the work of God in those days. Churches of God did not spring up sporadically; they were established by those who were already together in church capacity. The work was one

and its progress was due to the movements of the Spirit of God, who not only chose and fitted men for the work but also directed them to the precise localities in which they were to labour.

When Paul and Barnabas were sent forth on their first missionary journey they followed the pattern already established. Their preaching and teaching always had in view the gathering of disciples into churches of God. When writing to the church in Thessalonica Paul commended them because they ‘... became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea’ (1 Thessalonians 2:14). The churches of God in New Testament times were linked together in groups. Thus we read of ‘... the churches of Judea’ (Galatians 1:22), ‘The churches of Asia’ (1 Corinthians 16:19), ‘... the churches of Galatia’ (Galatians 1:2), ‘...the churches of Macedonia’ (2 Corinthians 8:1). These groups were linked in larger areas. Peter’s first epistle is addressed to five groups of churches in adjacent provinces (1 Peter 1:1). Certain customs were common to all the churches (1 Corinthians 11:16), and the same ordinances were observed throughout (1 Corinthians 7:17).

Provision was made for the care and government of the churches of God by means of elders or overseers (see, e.g. Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). Such men stood out by reason of their gift and fitness and were known and acknowledged by the churches. They were to be men of exemplary character, with spiritual discernment and ability to feed, shepherd and rule the flock. Each church had a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23). There was no such thing as one-man rule in a church of God.

Elders are seen acting together on behalf of groups of churches. We read of the elders in Judaea receiving a gift on behalf of the brothers in Judea. (Acts 11:29-30). The churches of Macedonia and the churches of Achaia acted together in the appointment of a brother to accompany Paul when he took their gift to the poor at Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:18-19; Ro-

mans 15:26). Elders of a group of provinces (1 Peter 1:1; 5:1-7) were directed, 'shepherd the flock of God that is among you ...' There were '... leading men among the brothers' (Acts 15:22): acknowledged leaders among the elders are here seen acting on behalf of their brothers in the discharge of certain responsibilities. All this indicates joint-responsibility among elders for the care and guidance of the churches of God of New Testament times. The unity of the churches was safeguarded by a united elderhood.

This brief sketch of an important subject leaves us with the question, Does the New Testament pattern of church constitution and practice apply to our times? There is substantial agreement among born-again believers that Holy Scripture is the supreme authority in matters of faith and doctrine. Yet there is widespread departure from the New Testament pattern in matters of church constitution and practice. We hold that the pattern laid down by our Lord and his apostles was intended not only for apostolic times but for the entire age, until he return. We believe this to be an essential part of the Faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (see Jude 3), and that New Testament churches of God supply the pattern to which we must conform today. Loyalty to our Lord demands that in all humility we should endeavour to give expression to his will, even though the greater number of believers may be content to follow other paths.

CHAPTER 11: BAPTISM AND ADDING

‘... MAKE DISCIPLES ... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19), was the plain command of the risen Lord to his

apostles. There could be no higher authority for the ordinance of baptism than this. Our Lord himself gave instructions that those won for him through the preaching of the gospel were to be enlisted as his disciples, and were to submit to baptism as the outward sign of their allegiance to him. The words of our Lord clearly define Christian baptism to be the baptism of believers who are prepared to submit to his authority. The baptism of infants and any others not in the category of disciples is excluded by the terms of our Lord’s commission to his apostles.

Baptism in water is not the means of regeneration. Salvation is ‘... by grace ... through faith’ (Ephesians 2:8). We are born again by the imperishable seed of the word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Although in the New Testament baptism is regarded as the normal sequence to belief (Mark 16:16), it plays no part in securing for the believer the merits of the atonement (Romans 3:24-28). Baptism is ‘... not ... removal of dirt from the body’ (1 Peter 3:21). It is the symbol of the believer’s identification with Christ in death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12). The words of Ananias to Saul of Tarsus, ‘... Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins ...’ (Acts 22:16), cannot refer to the forgiveness of sins, for Saul was already a converted man. They must be understood to mean that by the public act of baptism he would dissociate himself completely from his former manner of life.

Christian baptism is to be distinguished from that practised by John the Baptist. John's baptism was associated with his unique office, and ceased to apply when his ministry was completed. It pointed forward to the coming of the Christ and was not applicable to the age which began at Pentecost. This is plain from the words of Paul to certain disciples he met at Ephesus who knew only the baptism of John. When these men heard the command of the risen Christ they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:4,5). The mode of baptism is by immersion or dipping. This is always the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*. Sprinkling or pouring as a substitute for immersion has no place in the New Testament. The figure of burial and resurrection, so prominently associated with the ordinance, requires that the disciple be completely immersed in water and raised up again.

In considering the meaning of baptism in its practical results in the life of the believer it is helpful to follow the apostle Paul's reference to the crossing of the Red Sea by the people of Israel. Of this he writes, '... all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Corinthians 10:2). The words 'into (Greek, *eis*) Moses' imply a committal by the people to their appointed leader, and may be compared with the expression, 'baptized into Christ' (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). Here subjection to the authority of Christ and identification with him are in view. The further lesson to be learned from Israel's Red Sea crossing is that it severed them from their old life. When they reached the wilderness side of the sea there was no possibility of return, the waters had completely cut them off from Egypt. So with the believer; baptism is a confession that in Christ he or she has died to sin and henceforth will '...live a new life' (Romans 6:4 NIV).

The prominence given to Christian baptism by our Lord and his apostles, and the important teaching attached to it in the Epistles, should evoke willing compliance to the ordinance by the loyal-hearted believer. It is

one of the anomalies of our times that many born-again believers minimize its importance and overlook its significance.

Adding

We referred in an earlier chapter to the establishing by the apostles and others of churches of God into which disciples were to be gathered. Baptism in water, the symbol of allegiance to Christ as Lord, was essential before reception into a church of God. The word 'added' is used in Acts of the admission to church fellowship: 'So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls' (Acts 2:41).

Those received into churches of God were added by the Lord (Acts 2:47), and added to the Lord (Acts 5:14; 11:24). They became part of a distinct and separated company of people, known and acknowledged as such, 'None of the rest dared join them ...' (Acts 5:13).

Disciples in churches of God were required to '... continue in the faith' (Acts 14:22). Purity of doctrine and holiness of life were vital for the maintenance of the spiritual tone of the churches. A high standard of morally correct behaviour was demanded, and subjection to godly rule was necessary to preserve order and promote harmony. Discipline was imposed for specified ill-conduct (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15), extending in certain cases to excommunication from the church. All this indicates the total involvement of the disciple in church relationships.

'So the church ... had peace and was being built up. And walking in fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied' (Acts 9:31).

CHAPTER 12: THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

ON THE NIGHT OF HIS betrayal our Lord gathered his apostles together in an upper room in Jerusalem to keep his last Passover with them. In these closing hours of his ministry before the Cross, he bequeathed to them the precious ordinance which they were to observe in remembrance of himself after his ascension to the Father: ‘And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”’ (Luke 22:19-20).

When the first church of God was established in Jerusalem we read that ‘... they devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread’ (Acts 2:42). It is clear that this ordinance was intended by our Lord to be observed by his people throughout the present age, until his return. The apostle Paul was not present at the institution of the Breaking of the Bread but he received a special revelation from the Lord regarding its order and meaning (1 Corinthians 11:23). It was to have an important place in the public gatherings of the churches on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

It is a sad reflection that this heart-moving ordinance, instituted by our Lord himself in sublime simplicity, should be made complicated and ideas, not found in Scripture, should become associated with it. Loyalty to our Lord demands that we should return to Holy Scripture as our sole guide as to the meaning and purpose of the ordinance. In the early centuries following the apostolic age there was serious divergence from the simplicity and purity of apostolic doctrine. The simple ordinance of the Breaking of the Bread became corrupted by pagan influences. It was

eventually propounded that, 'At the instant of consecration, the elements are changed into the body which was born of the virgin: the outward appearance only remains as before.' From this emerged 'the sacrifice of the Mass.' Not only is this void of Scriptural authority, but it is a denial of the sufficiency of our Lord's once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross (Hebrews 10:12; 1 Peter 3:18).

The breaking of the bread is in no sense a sacrifice; it is a remembrance. The words 'This is my body,' cannot mean that the bread becomes the actual body of our Lord, for at the time of the institution of the Remembrance he was with the apostles in person. The bread represented his body, the wine represented his blood. When we do with the symbols what he did with them we carry out his command, 'Do this in remembrance of me' and this brings our adorable Redeemer vividly to remembrance:

'Only bread, and only wine,

Yet to faith the solemn sign

Of the heavenly and divine.' (*H. Bonar*)

When the church in Corinth was '... together as a church' (1 Corinthians 11:18); 'in congregation' (RV margin) on the first day of the week the observance of the Remembrance was associated with other spiritual exercises. The purpose of that gathering was three-fold:

(1) to keep the Remembrance (1 Corinthians 11:17-34),

(2) to offer praise to God (1 Corinthians 14:16-17), and

(3) that the church might be edified by the exercise of Spirit-given ministry (1 Corinthians 14:26).

The Remembrance was a corporate act focusing the hearts of the disciples on the excellencies of the incarnate Redeemer. This could have no

other result than to evoke a spontaneous outflow of praise, ‘... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name’ (Hebrews 13:15). In this service the people of God are viewed as a ‘holy priesthood’ whose privilege it is to ‘... offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Peter 2:5). Thus the breaking of the bread was the focal point of the worship of the church when in congregation on the first day of the week.

From 1 Corinthians 14:26 we learn that ministry of the word for the edification of the church had its place at the meeting for the breaking of the bread. Having rendered to God what is due to him in praise and worship the Spirit may lead in the ministry of the word for the edifying of the church. At no time, perhaps, are God’s people so well attuned to listen to his voice as when they have looked upon him in the sanctuary. In all these spiritual exercises there should be that reverence becoming such high service. ‘... Let all things be done for building up’ (1 Corinthians 14:26), and ‘... all things should be done decently and in order’ (1 Corinthians 14:40).

If the gathering of the disciples on the first day of the week is conducted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit there will be such harmony and power that even the uninstructed onlooker will be constrained to declare, ‘... God is really among you’ (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

CHAPTER 13: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

IN SCRIPTURE THE TERM 'kingdom of God' describes the sphere in which his rule is acknowledged and where his will is supreme. Under the Old Covenant the people of Israel were a theocracy, and so long as they complied with the conditions of the Sinaitic covenant the kingdom of God was expressed among them (Exodus 19:5-6). The kingdom of God will be in full manifestation in a future age when Messiah reigns in Jerusalem in the midst of a restored Israel (Luke 13:28, 29; 19:11; 21:21,31). Our concern here is with the meaning of the term as relevant to the present age which began at Pentecost and extends to our Lord's return.

At a crucial point in our Lord's ministry he foretold his rejection by Israel, and in the parable of the vineyard he placed the responsibility for that fateful decision upon the rulers of the nation, and announced: '... the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruit' (Matthew 21:43). To which nation did our Lord refer? This is clearly indicated in his earlier declaration, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32)

This, we understand, accords with our Lord's words to the Pharisees, '... the kingdom of God is in the midst of you' (Luke 17:21). The 'little flock' of disciples was the nucleus of a nation to whom the kingdom would be given. A people would be brought together under divine government among whom a new phase of the kingdom of God would be expressed. This people would not possess a material inheritance as did Israel in the past, but would nevertheless have a divine constitution as authentic as Israel's; they would be '... a holy nation, a people for his (*God's*) own posses-

sion' (1 Peter 2:9). Although few in number at the beginning they would increase as the work of God expanded through the labours of the apostles and their fellow-workers.

Before the risen Lord ascended to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God, he met with his apostles during a period of forty days, '... speaking about the kingdom of God' (Acts 1:3). The purpose of those meetings was to disclose to the apostles the plan to be followed in the extension of the kingdom of God in the present age. He disclosed the plan, and then revealed to them the power which would ensure its execution. The Holy Spirit would come upon them at Pentecost, and they would be his '... witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

The dominant feature of the kingdom in this age is the Lordship of Christ. Its charter is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12) embraced not only salvation by grace through faith but also submission to Christ as Lord. '... make disciples ... baptizing them ... teaching them' (Matthew 28:19-20), commanded the risen Christ. The baptized disciples were united in church fellowship in local churches and so brought under divine rule. The kingdom was extended as churches of God were established in various parts of the world. Paul went around '... proclaiming the kingdom' (Acts 20:25) and as the curtain falls on the narrative of the Acts he is portrayed in his Roman prison, 'proclaiming the kingdom of God' (Acts 28:31).

Sound exegesis demands that we distinguish between the kingdom of God in its present phase and the kingdom in its future manifestation. There are some references in the Gospels, and in the Epistles, which relate to the future kingdom. Care is necessary lest we misapply these passages and obscure the purposes of God in the present age. It is clearly evident that in New Testament times the kingdom of God was expressed among his gathered people. John wrote to the seven churches in Asia, he

‘... made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’ (Revelation 1:6); words reminiscent of the declaration of the Lord at Sinai (Exodus 19:6). Israel were ‘a kingdom of priests’; God’s New Covenant people were a ‘royal priesthood’ (1 Peter 2:9). The parallel is plain.

As Moses received from God statutes and judgements for the orderly government of the kingdom of God among his earthly people, so the apostles received from the risen Lord directions for the administration of the kingdom of God under the New Covenant. The law of the kingdom of God in its present phase is embraced in the apostles’ teaching. This is the sole basis for the corporate fulfilment of the will of God, as authentic and complete for God’s people today as was the law of Moses for Israel in the past.

The people of Israel received from God a rich inheritance - the land of Canaan, but the divine inheritance of God’s New Covenant people was a **spiritual** one. We do not refer here to the eternal inheritance of the believer set forth in such Scriptures as Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4; but to that which is to be held corporately by the people of God in this age. This is described as, ‘... the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3). ‘The faith’ is a comprehensive term embracing the precious heritage of divine doctrine which God has given to us in the completed Scriptures. It includes the truths concerning the Person and work of his beloved Son, his way of salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the pattern of God’s house, the second coming of Christ and much else. It contains all the will of God for the people of God. We are instructed to ‘... contend for the faith’ (Jude 3), and to ‘... stand firm in the faith’ (1 Corinthians 16:13). Paul exhorts Timothy to ‘Fight the good fight of the faith’ (1 Timothy 6:12), and at the end of his life Paul writes, ‘... I have kept the faith’ (2 Timothy 4:7).

All this indicates the worth of the inheritance committed to God’s people and the struggle waged by the apostles to possess and defend it. Men

who valued the divine inheritance under the Old Covenant were prepared to hazard their lives in its defence. Have we less cause than they to prize, above all else, the precious spiritual heritage which has been delivered to us?

Separation from the nations of the world must be maintained if God's will is to be done among a gathered people. This was imperative in Israel's case and remains an instruction for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; he said, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). The nations of this world follow a course from which the disciple must stand aside. The disciple may not take part in the world's politics or warfare but must, however, '... be subject to the governing authorities' (Romans 13:1), and pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1), and as opportunity presents itself, '... do good to everyone' (Galatians 6:10).

The rule of God among his gathered people covers their collective life when gathered together and extends to their private and personal relationships. Where there is subjection to the will of God in all things then there will be spiritual prosperity, which is not the same as popular acclaim. 'For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men' (Romans 14:17-18). There will also be spiritual power, for 'the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power' (1 Corinthians 4:20). And there will be not the coveting of worldly prosperity but constant endeavour to do the will of God at all costs, in accordance with our Lord's instruction to his disciples, 'But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you' (Matthew 6:33).

CHAPTER 14: THE HOUSE OF GOD

THE HOUSE OF GOD, HIS dwelling place on earth among his gathered people, is given a prominent place in the Holy Scriptures. Like many of the great doctrines of Scripture the first reference to it occurs in the book of Genesis. At that early stage in his dealings with the patriarchs God gave to Jacob a remarkable prophetic revelation concerning his dwelling among people on earth (Genesis 28).

The place where the lonely fugitive lay down to sleep had been chosen beforehand by God as the place he would meet Jacob and confirm to him the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac. Jacob dreamed and saw a ladder set up on the earth as a way of communication between earth and heaven. The impact the divine presence made on Jacob that night is evident from his exclamation on awaking, ‘... Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it ... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven’ (Genesis 28:16-17). Now Jacob wished to mark the place where God met with him and to pledge his allegiance to the God of Beth-el. He took the stone he had used for a pillow, set it up as a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it. Then he made a solemn vow that if God prospered him he would give a tenth of all his substance to God (verses 18-22). All these details had a prophetic significance and foreshadowed subsequent revelation regarding the house of God on earth and its service.

Before a dwelling place for God on earth could be constructed there must be a people to serve him. The Lord’s demand to Pharaoh was: ‘Let my people go, that they may serve me’ (Exodus 9:1). When that people, redeemed by blood, liberated by divine power and separated by water, were assembled in the wilderness of Sinai then God gave to them through his servant Moses the terms of his covenant: ‘Now therefore, if

you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5-6).

Then in the sight of all the people the LORD came down to the top of Mount Sinai. The mountain burned with fire and trembled greatly, and amid thunders and lightnings Moses received the words of the covenant from the LORD. These words Moses recounted to the people, who answered with one voice, '... All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do' (Exodus 24:3). They were then sprinkled with the blood of the covenant, which covenant was the charter of their nationhood.

The first requirement from God's newly-acquired people was expressed in the words, '... let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst' (Exodus 25:8). The Lord desired that the former slaves of Egypt should now build for him a dwelling place in the desert. Israel were to journey to the land of promise, but so intense was God's desire to dwell in the midst of his people that he would not wait until they were settled in the land but gave instructions for a tabernacle to be constructed suitable to wilderness conditions. Specific instructions were given by the Lord about the materials to be used in constructing this tabernacle. They would build according to the pattern shown to Moses in the mountain (Exodus 25:40). And when at last the work was finished and the tabernacle stood on the desert sand, every detail assembled according to the divine pattern, 'Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle' (Exodus 40:34).

According to the terms of the covenant Israel were a kingdom of priests. To fulfil their priestly service they needed a high priest to appear before God in his sanctuary to offer gifts and sacrifices on their behalf. Jacob described the house of God as 'the gate of heaven' (Genesis 28:17). But no priest of Israel was able to enter the heavenly sanctuary. Not until the Great High Priest of the New Covenant entered the heavenly sanctuary

could the Genesis conception of God's house be fully realized (Hebrews 10:19-22). '... the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing' (Hebrews 9:8). Accordingly, in the divine arrangement for God's earthly people, a copy of the heavenly sanctuary was embodied in the Mosaic tabernacle (Hebrews 8:5) for the use of priests of the Aaronic order. The tabernacle in the wilderness was at once God's earthly dwelling place and the sanctuary where his people performed their priestly service.

When, at last, Israel entered the land and after much conflict subdued it, the tent which had served as God's dwelling place was superseded by the magnificent house built by Solomon. God chose the place, '... mount Zion, which he loves' (Psalm.76:68), and Solomon built the temple to the divine pattern given to David his father (1 Chronicles 28:19). When all the work was completed, '... the glory of the LORD filled the temple' (2 Chronicles 7:1). Magnificent as it was this temple could be acknowledged by God as his dwelling place only so long as Israel remained faithful to the Sinaitic covenant. Moses warned the tribes of the fearful consequences of departure from God's statutes (Deuteronomy 28-30).

Alas for Israel! She forsook the Lord '... despising his words and scoffing at his profits, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who ... burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem ... He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword' (2 Chronicles 36:16-20). Away from the place of the Name the captives languished in Babylon. They had no song and no priestly service, for God's house lay waste (Psalm 137).

After seventy years the hearts of a small remnant of the captives were moved to return to the land and to rebuild the temple on mount Zion, and restore the walls of Jerusalem. This house was but a shadow of Solomon's magnificent temple; nevertheless, God took pleasure in it and

honoured those who laboured to build it. Once more priests of the Aaronic order entered the sanctuary to offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people. But this was followed by further declension, and the book of Malachi reveals the sad state of Israel in his day. When at last the promised Messiah was presented to Israel, the people and their rulers, in spite of much formalism, were away from God in heart. Although a magnificent temple stood on mount Zion, Israel crowned her record of infamy by rejecting her Messiah, and he wept over the city, pronounced its doom, and said in his sorrow, ‘... your house is left to you desolate’ (Matthew 23:38). Once again God forsook his earthly dwelling place because of the unfaithfulness of his people. When on the Cross at Golgotha our Lord bowed his head in death, ‘... the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom’ (Matthew 27:51). The glory had departed.

This brief outline of the history of the house of God under the Old Covenant demonstrates the prominence given to this great truth in the inspired record. God’s desire to have a dwelling place on earth captivated the hearts of godly men down the ages. David, a man after God’s heart, makes many references to it in his psalms. The house of God had a foremost place in his aspirations: ‘One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to enquire in his temple’ (Psalm 27:4).

We now take a brief look at the subject of the house of God as it is presented in the New Testament. The apostle Peter addressed the believers gathered in churches of God in five provinces of the Roman Empire in these terms: ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession ...’ (1 Peter 2:9).

The striking resemblance of these words to those addressed to Israel at mount Sinai is worthy of note. Those to whom Peter wrote stood in a

similar relationship to God as did Israel in Exodus 24. They had been redeemed by blood, baptized in water, and they were elect '... in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood' (1 Peter 1:1-2). The sprinkling here referred to is clearly analogous, not to the blood of redemption but to the blood of the covenant of Exodus 24. The same pattern is discernible. Under the New Covenant God's will is to have a people together for himself on earth among whom he will dwell. With this important difference; his dwelling place will not be a material building, but a spiritual one composed of living stones built up together. Peter writes: 'you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:5).

So we see that the people of God gathered in churches of God formed God's spiritual house in apostolic times. Their continuance as such was conditional '... And we are his house if indeed we hold fast ...' (Hebrews 3:6). It was their privilege to offer service to God as a holy priesthood, and for this purpose they used the offices of the High Priest who has entered the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 10:21). The epistle to the Hebrews deals largely with God's spiritual house and its service under the New Covenant. It was written to show the superiority of the house of God in this age to that of former ages. Hence the frequent use of the word 'better.'

The temporary arrangements which operated in what was a copy and shadow of the heavenly things have now been superseded, and warnings are given against turning back to these outmoded things of the past. Some misapply the warnings in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-31 and claim that these passages support the theory that the believer can fall away and be lost. What is in view in Hebrews is not the believer's standing in Christ, which remains secure by divine grace, but the forfeiture by disobedience of his or her standing in God's house. If, through unbelief,

God's New Covenant people failed to hold fast their boldness and the boasting in their hope, (see Hebrews 3:6), then the spiritual house of New Testament times would be forsaken by God as truly as was the material house under the Old Covenant.

'The language of the epistle to the Hebrews is largely sanctuary language, suited only to a collective people who know themselves to be together of God' (*W.J. Lennox*). This is a key to the understanding of this wonderful epistle. The collective worship of the churches of God when gathered to keep the Remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ on the first day of the week consists in the offering up of spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this purpose they enter the heavenly sanctuary and use the offices of the great High Priest who ministers there. The way of approach from God's house on earth, seen in the prophetic revelation given to Jacob, is now open to God's New Covenant people.

The grand climax of the theme of the epistle to Hebrews is reached in chapter 10:19-22: 'Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near ...' Such high privileges demand a corresponding spiritual condition on the part of God's gathered people. Paul gave to Timothy instructions as to '... how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth' (1 Timothy 3:15).

The truth of the house of God is integral to the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. The desire of God to dwell among his gathered people is the testimony of all Scripture. But this can be realized only by a return to scriptural principles of gathering for God's children. God will surely honour any exercise in the hearts of his children today towards the expression of this precious ideal. Because of the prevailing confusion and division among believers the prospect of large-scale return to apostolic

simplicity seems remote. But if love for God's house today impels faithful people to build again after the divine pattern, they can be assured of his approval. They must be prepared for opposition and ridicule as were Ezra, Nehemiah and their fellows. But the message of encouragement to that struggling Remnant applies equally today: '... be strong ... declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you ... Fear not' (Haggai 2:4-5).

CHAPTER 15: THE COMING AGAIN OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

THE PROPHETS OF THE Old Covenant wrote of ‘... the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories’ (1 Peter 1:11). Prophecies of a suffering and a reigning Messiah frequently appear side by side in the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 53; Psalm 22). It is a feature of Scripture prophecy that events predicted do not always occur in immediate sequence. We have an example of this in our Lord’s use of Isaiah 61:1-2, in the synagogue at Nazareth. He ceased reading at a certain point, and said, ‘... Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4:21). He did not read the next phrase, ‘... and the day of vengeance of our God’, because this awaits fulfilment. A long interval of time separates the events predicted in this prophecy.

The Old Testament prophets clearly foretold that Israel would reject her Messiah at his first appearing. For that fateful decision she came under divine chastisement; nevertheless, a glorious future is assured to her ‘For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Romans 11:29). The system of Scripture interpretation which appropriates the promises of future blessing for Israel and applies them to ‘the Church’ is untenable. Israel, ‘... beloved for the sake of the forefathers’ (Romans 11:28), will one day turn to the Lord and greet her once rejected Messiah with the glad words, ‘... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Matthew 23:39). But first she must be scattered among the nations (Ezekiel 22:15), and then gathered back to her land to be purified in the furnace of affliction (Ezekiel 22:19-22). This latter may well be in process of fulfilment in our time. Eventually a purged and repentant Israel shall look on h Him whom they pierced and shall mourn over him (Zechariah 12:9-12; 13:1). Then Messiah will reign in Jerusalem and have ‘... domin-

ion from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth!' (Psalm 72:8; see also Daniel 7:13-14).

We believe that the interpretation of the prophecy of the seventy weeks (Daniel 9:24-27) which leaves the last seven years of that period as yet unfulfilled, is the correct one. This seven-year period coincides with the period foreshadowed by the ten toes of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Daniel 2). Its commencement will be marked by the signing of a covenant between Antichrist and 'many' of Israel (Daniel 9:27). From that point seven years will elapse before the coming of the Son of Man to set up his kingdom.

In the middle of this seven-year period Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews, then will follow that fearful persecution, the Great Tribulation (Daniel 12:1; Revelation 7:14; 13:7). Our Lord referred to some of these events in his discourse to his apostles on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24). He spoke of the fearful tribulation of those days and then made this important announcement, 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days ... Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man ...and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory' (Matthew 24:29-30).

Israel will be at the centre of all these great events. The prophecies to which we have referred reveal that God will renew his dealings with Israel in her land in the period preceding the coming of the Son of Man to reign. It is important to detach from these events that other great purpose of God which is a distinctive feature of the present age. We refer to the building 'my church' (Matthew 16:18). The Church which is his (Christ's) Body is in process of building and will be completed in the interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy. We have already drawn attention to that feature of Biblical prophecy whereby predicted events do not always follow in immediate sequence. At the conclusion of the sixty-nine weeks (483 years) Messiah was 'cut

off' (Daniel 9:26), Israel was set aside (Romans 11:15), and scattered among the nations.

Then, at Pentecost, the building of the Church began. After the Church is complete, the seventieth week, the last seven years of the predicted period of 490 years, will commence with the signing of Antichrist's covenant and conclude with the coming of the Son of Man. This, we understand to be the main outline of future events set out in the prophetic word, leading up to the glorious kingdom of Messiah. Into this outline the vast detail of the prophetic programme is to be fitted.

In the upper room on the night of his betrayal our Lord gave to his apostles the precious promise, '... I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also' (John 14:3). The reason for his return, as indicated in the promise, differs in circumstances and manner, from that described in our Lord's Olivet discourse. We believe these are two distinguishable aspects of his coming again. What he said to his apostles in the upper room refers to a phase of his coming which precedes the events of Matthew 24. There are certain matters relative to the present age which were unrevealed to the prophets of the Old Covenant (Romans 16:25-26). One of these matters is the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ to the air to receive to himself the saints of this age who form the Church which is his Body.

When instructing the saints concerning this event, Paul wrote, 'Behold! I tell you a mystery' (1 Corinthians 15:51). Again, 'For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4:15). These were matters outside the scope of Old Testament prophecy and Paul was given a special revelation from the Lord with regard to them, In contrast to what our Lord said in Matthew 24 about specific signs which would precede his coming as Son of Man, Paul taught the saints to live in constant expectation of the Lord's coming to the air. If these events were concurrent then we should look for the fulfilment of the signs outlined in Matthew

24. We believe that the Lord will first come to the air, when the dead in Christ will be raised and, together with the living saints, caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then will follow the events outlined in Matthew 24 and elsewhere, culminating in the coming of the Son of Man to judge the nations and set up his glorious kingdom.

The coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ occupied an important place in the teaching of the apostles. It was 'a living hope' (1 Peter 1:3), purifying in its influence (1 John 3:3), bringing comfort in sorrow and bereavement (1 Thessalonians 4:18), and assurance of victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:57). In addition to the two great passages (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), there are numerous other references in Paul's epistles to, this great event. This hope occupied a leading place in the apostle's thought and was a mighty influence in the life and service of this great man of God.

In some passages Paul associates the judgement-seat of Christ with the Lord's coming. The judgement seat of Christ is to be distinguished from the judgement of the living nations (Matthew 25:31-32) which takes place prior to the Millennium, and from the great white throne judgement (Revelation 20:11) which takes place after the Millennium. Believers of this age will appear at the judgement seat of Christ. The issue will not be salvation or condemnation - this question was settled for the believer at the Cross (John 5:24). At the judgement seat of Christ the life and the life-work of the believer will be appraised (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), and rewards given or loss suffered. Those entrusted with the care of God's people will also be required to give account of their stewardship (Hebrews 13:17). The words of the ascended Lord, 'Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done' (Revelation 22:12), suggest that, the judgement seat of Christ, at which those rewards will be dispensed, will follow closely upon his coming to the air (compare also, 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:19).

Large areas of Scripture relate to things to come and these have been bequeathed to God's people for their spiritual edification. Unhappily, the study of the prophetic word is sometimes discredited because of irresponsible exegesis and speculation. There are in Scripture clear landmarks giving an over-all view of God's future purposes. We should hold firmly to these, remembering that there are many details which will be fully understood only as the events to which they refer unfold. Undue dogmatism with regard to obscure details is to be avoided but reverent research into the prophetic word will confirm faith and bring spiritual enrichment. 'Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near' (Revelation 1:3).

ABOUT THIS BOOK

A WONDERFUL RECOVERY of Scripture truth began in the 16th century in the movement generally known as the Reformation. We owe a great debt, under God, to the Reformers and to the martyrs who laid down their lives in the cause of truth. The Reformers restored Scripture to its rightful place as the supreme authority for Christian doctrine and practice.

The recovery of truth initiated by the Reformers did not end there. It was followed by gradual, if less spectacular, progress in the succeeding centuries. By the early 19th century men raised up by God applied their vast learning and spiritual insight to the study of Scripture prophecy. They discerned the framework of the future purposes of God which is so necessary to the right dividing of the Word of truth. The truths of the Church, the Body of Christ, the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ and related events, were once more seen in proper perspective. The Bible became a new book to many in this golden age of Scripture exposition.

Towards the end of the 19th century there was considerable exercise towards the recovery of scriptural principles of church fellowship. Prevailing ideas in Christendom on 'the Church' were far removed from apostolic simplicity and purity. Many believers came to see that 'the Church which is Christ's Body' and 'churches of God' were not synonymous terms and that to confuse them was to obscure an important area of New Testament doctrine. One of the early brethren, among others, used by God to clarify New Testament teaching on church truth was a godly young man, F. A. Banks. He was an outstanding expositor with mature spiritual discernment. Among his writings, first published in 1888, was a pamphlet entitled: **The Church, and the Churches of God: a sugges-**

tive outline of truth. This was appraised by many godly and competent students of the New Testament as a great step forward in the understanding of church truth. It set forth with clarity and power what many had been groping after for a long time.

It is not unfair criticism of the Reformers to point out that they failed to recover the New Testament pattern of church constitution. They attempted the reform of Christendom from within - an impossible task. The futility of the attempt was exposed in the centuries which followed. The fallacy of the argument that Christendom can be reformed from within is amply demonstrated in our own times. The truths recovered by the Reformers are being bartered in the cause of ecumenism.

It soon became evident that those who desired to put into effect the truth they had discovered on church constitution would be unable to do so in their sectarian associations. If they were to build on a divine foundation it would be necessary to start afresh. This would mean separating themselves from many of their dearly beloved brethren and sisters in Christ. It was a high price to pay but there was no other way if they were to follow the new light. Many counted the cost and decided it was too high.

In the years 1892 to 1894, after much searching of heart, a number of believers withdrew from their former church associations and came together as churches of God in accordance with what they deemed to be the apostolic pattern. Many did so at great personal cost, and nothing less than loyalty to the revealed will of God would have induced them to do so. It demanded great courage. This was a remnant movement and it was ridiculed and maligned by many who should have been its friends, but it survived. This book is sent forth on behalf of those who hold, and amid weakness seek to practise, the New Testament teaching on churches of God. This teaching is outlined in the later chapters.

It is sometimes asked, Where do the churches of God stand on other fundamental doctrines of the Faith? Our general understanding of Scripture

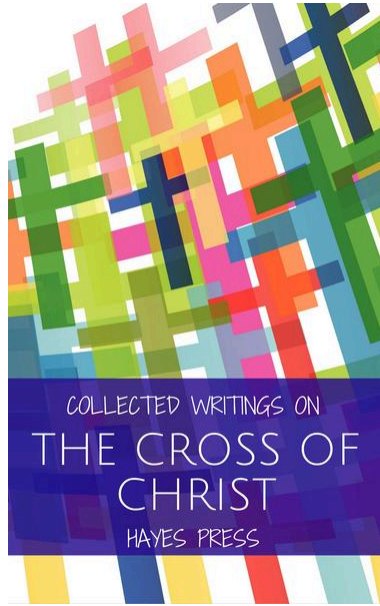
doctrine has been set forth in many of our publications but it has been thought well to bring together in this booklet some outlines of what has been held and taught amongst us during the past 75 years. We emphasize that these are outlines; we have not attempted full treatment of any subject. The object throughout has been to give guidelines so that what we teach and endeavour to practise will be clearly seen. Where a controversial note is struck, this is because we are aware of diverse views among believers on certain subjects and we wish to set forth where we stand on these issues.

The days darken around us, 'the godly man ceaseth ... the faithful fail from among the children of men.' As we move forward to the closing of the age the struggle for truth will be intensified. None of us knows as he ought, much less practises what he knows. There is room for neither complacency nor pride. But if in our hearts we value, even above life itself, the precious heritage of divine truth committed to us, then we shall serve the counsel of God in our generation. We send forth these outlines as a contribution to the understanding of the word of God for the strengthening of those who love the Lord and who are pledged to 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

T. M. Hyland, J. L. Ferguson

(Scripture references throughout are from the Revised Version, 1881)

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