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ON
THE HOUSE OF GOD.

BY
F. J. ROWAN.

ROBERT L. ALLAN.
LONDON : 15 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
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PRICE TWOPENCE.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following remarks on the house of God were jotted down for the use of a brother in Christ, and formed the substance of a letter to him in reply to some questions which he sent to the author. They were not intended to meet the eye of any beyond the immediate circle of the one to whom they were addressed; but the MS. having been lent by him to several brethren in other parts of the country, the writer is led to give them a more public form, as he does not wish to appear to sanction the circulation of manuscripts in these days, because of the example and opportunity which this gives to those who circulate error. Some notes have been added where they appeared to be necessary.

A FEW THOUGHTS ON THE HOUSE OF GOD.

ALTHOUGH Jacob uses the expression, "the house of God," in Gen. xxviii. 17, it is evident that heaven and not earth is in his thoughts as the place of God's dwelling, and his expression is produced by the awe with which his nearness to heaven in his dream inspired him. "And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." But although heaven is His eternal dwelling-place, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (Psalm cxxiii. 1; 1 Kings viii. 30, 39, 43, 49; 2 Chron. ii. 6; vi. 21, 30, 39; Isaiah lxvi. 1), yet He has been pleased in very deed to dwell with men on the earth, and to choose at various times a place among them where He has recorded His name, that they might know the blessedness of His presence with them. (Exod. xxv. 8; xxix. 45, 46; 2 Kings xix. 15; Psalms lxxiv. 7; lxxx. 1.) Sin has indeed raised hindrances in the way of His presence being fully known, but, while Adam in innocence knew the perfect freedom of intercourse with God when He chose to *visit* Eden, yet, such is His grace, that it is to man after sin has come in, and not to man innocent, that He first speaks of His *dwelling* with him.

The first time the thought of God's habitation *here* occurs in Scripture is subsequent to that which was the type of redemption, and which was also, of course, in itself (see Exod. xv. 2, 13, 17), the redemption of God's people in an external way, that is, from visible bondage and enemies. There is no doubt that *faith*, as ever, connected all with God (not merely recognising His hand in the visible act of power, for even the natural intelligence of man can do this where there is no thought of the *heart* being therefore subject to Him because of His authority, see Exod. viii. 16—19; John ii. 23—25; Acts viii. 6, 9, 10, 13, 20—23, but) owning, what His word declared, that *He* was bringing them *to Himself*, Exod. xix. 4, and thus was able to rise in expression to what was in harmony with the Lord's dealings in the world, seeing, moreover, no hindrances in the way of the accomplishment of the final result of them all, viz., His own permanent dwelling amongst them and reign in blessing for ever and ever. (See Exod. xv. 17, 18.)

Then, in Exod. xxxiii. 7—11, we find a tabernacle set up apart from the camp for a meeting-place with God, for any who were led to seek Him, when the congregation had entirely forsaken Him and bowed down to idols. This was a sort of judicial act as marking the departure of the congregation from God, and was before the building of "the tabernacle" for which Moses had received instructions in the mount (Exod. xxv. &c.) was commenced to (*cf.* chap. xxxvi.). Afterwards the Israelites were (through the mediation of Moses) put back under law, God bearing with them in grace and mercy, and then the tabernacle or sanctuary was erected (Exod. xl. 34—38), and was God's house in its wilderness

character (2 Sam. vii. 5, 6, 7; 1 Chron. xvii. 5), God being known in it in the cloud which rested on it.

When Israel is settled in the land, and war has ceased through David's faithfulness—for the people had entirely failed in every way to carry out God's will before the king was given them, and it was a new beginning with them on God's part when the kingdom was introduced*—Solomon builds Him a house (see 1 Kings vi. and viii., and 2 Chron. i., iii.—vii.), and the way in which God is known in it of course gives the character to this

* 1 Sam. ii., iii., and iv., show the utter corruption of the priesthood, and "the glory departed from Israel" in the judgment by which the Lord broke the link connecting the people with Himself through the priesthood. The ark was taken; and "what could a priest do when that which gave his priesthood all its importance was in the enemy's hands, and when the place where he drew near to the Most High, the throne of God in the midst of Israel, the place of propitiation by which, in mercy, Israel's relationship with God through the sprinkled blood was maintained, was no more there?" "Priesthood was the natural and normal means of maintaining the relationship between God and the people. How could it now be used for this purpose? Nevertheless God, acting in sovereignty, could put Himself in communication with His people, by virtue of His grace and immutable faithfulness, according to which His connection with His people existed still on His side, even when all acknowledged relationship between Him and them was broken off by their unfaithfulness. And this He did by raising up a *prophet*. By his means God still communicated in a *direct way* with His people, even when they had not maintained their relationship with Him in their normal condition" (see Acts iii. 24 for commencement of "the prophets"). "Prophecy introduces the king, and, when he is established, the priest walks before *him* (1 Sam. ii. 35). It is a new institution; the only one capable of maintaining the relationship of the people with God. Priesthood is no longer here in immediate relationship. It provides, indeed, for the wants of the people. The king watches over it, and secures order and blessing."—*Synopsis*, vol. i., pp. 373—377.

house (1 Kings viii. 10—13; 2 Chron. vii. 2). He was known in unapproachable glory, but though none could come *near* Him individually, yet all had their responsibilities to Him and to His house, arising from the relation in which He stood to them. The manner of His being there expressed the way in which He had any relationship *with men* (and not with them only, because they were separated *in the course of His dealings with men* for a further trial) at that time, and so their responsibility was two-fold—towards God and towards men. The house being the witness of God's presence among them, their faithfulness would be proved by their having no other place of worship (see Deut. xii. 13, 14, 18, 21, 26—32; xvi. 2—16; Judges xx. 18, 26; 1 Kings xi. 11—13, &c.), as their unfaithfulness was proved by their doing the reverse (see 1 Kings xi. 1—13; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 7; Neh. xiii. 11; Ezek. xlv. 6—8; Joel i. 13; Matt. xxi. 13).

Thus the people of Israel were entrusted with God's dwelling (see Exod. xxv. 8; xxix. 45, 46; Num. v. 3; xxxv. 34, &c.), and so the responsibility rested on them, to keep that place undefiled where God was found; *outward* or *ceremonial* observances being put in the *prominent* place, in that which was required of them, and although no doubt the fulfilment of these expressed to some extent the state of the people's heart, yet God's requirement was to be met by adherence to *them*.

Ezekiel viii.—xi., which shows the departure of the glory of the Lord from the house or temple of Israel's day, speaks also of the condition to which the failure of the people had reduced everything.

In John ii. 13—22; xiv. 10, &c., we see Jesus in this,

as in everything else in which man has failed, presented as the One who in Himself restores what in man's hand has gone to wreck. It is a blessed sight and a wondrous, because divine thought, and although we may also see side by side with Him the blindness and hardness of man's heart, which is loud in pretension even when confronted by all that proves its miserable incapacity (see also Matt. xxvi. 61; xxvii. 40), yet this should but lead us to value Him all the more.

The house being first spoken of after redemption is therefore linked with a character of God, which was then made known for the first time also, viz., holiness (see Exod. xv. 11; xxviii. 36). This is a character which belongs to God's house always; see Ps. xcv. 5, and 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17, in which latter the house is spoken of as that with the building of which men are now entrusted.

In the New Testament the house is spoken of in different ways. It is necessary to note, that while we trace the history of the house of God from the Old to the New Testament, we must at the same time distinguish between the very different *ways* in which God's presence was known on earth at the various times. In this latter subject is involved the immensely important truth of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit from the day of Pentecost in Acts ii. It was then for the first time that *He came*, and, of course, we find that there are many truths hinging on His presence besides that of the house of God, which He constituted in a new character and manner by His presence. We must also note the marked distinction which exists between the *material* nature of the Old Testament house in all its phases, and the character of that building

which is composed entirely (such is God's purpose) of Christians as its "living stones," forming what 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5, calls "a *spiritual* house." The truth also is that, viewed as God's dwelling-place, the house was formerly apart from His people though among them; while now, redemption being accomplished, it is among and in His people that He dwells, and we thus know in spirit even now the full blessedness of that time when "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell among them."

In Eph. ii. 19, and Heb. iii. 6, we have the house in the sense of family—household—and it is, of course, only the saints who are so described.

In Hebrews, however, while we are spoken of as being the house of Him whose high-priesthood is largely unfolded, and this no doubt with the intention, amongst others, of putting us thoroughly in our place with Him as priests (free to come to the throne, chap. iv.; to enter the holiest, chap. x.; to offer sacrifices, chap. xiii.), yet, it is no less true that we are viewed as standing in the *responsibility* of our *profession*; and therefore it says, "whose house *are we, if we hold fast* the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (chap. iii. 6).

In Heb. iii. 5, the former "house of God" in which Moses was set "as a servant" is spoken of to bring out the contrast which Christ's position as "Son over* His

* Many erroneous notions about "the headship of Christ" have been taught from time to time, and the object of them has always been to claim for the professing church a place of acknowledged authority and importance on the earth. In Scripture Christ is called "head" of the church only when it is viewed as "His body,"

own house" (in ver. 6) affords; and again in chap. x. 21, we have "the house of God" brought in, but here it is plain that what is meant is the heavenly order of things

and this not with the sense of a federal headship, but to teach the union and identification of His members with Himself, by the analogy which a human body presents. (See 1 Cor. xii. 12—27; Rom. xii. 4, 5, &c.) He is never called King of the church in Scripture; and though it is true that He is also made "head *over* all things" (it is *to* the Church, and so distinguished in Eph. i. 19—23); that He has *title* to all government and kingly power (Matt. xxviii. 18; John v. 22, 23, 27; Eph. i. 22; Heb. ii. 6—9); and that He will appear as "king of nations" (Rev. xv. 3), yet it is also true that in the meantime *He has not taken unto Him* His great power (Rev. xi. 17, 18; xii. 10). He sits now not on His own but on His Father's throne, and waits until His enemies be made His footstool. (See Heb. i. 13; ii. 8, 9.) It is this truth which at once makes the present form of "the kingdom of heaven" mysterious, as Matt. xiii. teaches—there being thus a kingdom without any active intervention in judgment on His part who is owned as King—and shows how His people who are in the world now have to do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently (1 Peter ii. 19—23; iv. ; Rev. i. 9), while it also explains how it is that evil is not put down until He comes in judgment at the close of this order of things. (Matt. xiii. 30, 39, 49, 50.) That evil is not made to yield to good now, is, of course, quite incompatible with the idea of His reigning, and, therefore, we cannot wonder that, holding that idea, many Christians, in Covenanting and other—perhaps also more modern—days, have endeavoured to surmount the incompatibility by taking the sword into their own hands, or otherwise using worldly power to put down evil as active against the Church, and so "uplift the banner of Christ's crown," or defend the rights of Christ as King, but in so doing they have manifestly done violence to the whole spirit and character of Christianity, however sincere and godly we may well acknowledge them to have been or to be in their desires. Heb. iii. 6 is the only text in connection with the house, however, into which the thought of a federal headship of Christ could be introduced, but not with the popular sense, as the foregoing will show, and, moreover, the word is manifestly used in the sense of household.

over which Christ as high priest is set, and which is infinitely better than the earthly and material order, which has for us passed away (see chap. ix.).

In Eph. ii. 21, 22, there is what seems to suggest by analogy of circumstances the two thoughts of the temple and the tabernacle; there being the *present* "habitation," while *we go on to* the "temple," but all that is spoken of here is simply the *privilege of the saints*; e.g. "*Ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit,*" &c.

Then in 1 Timothy iii. 15, there is the most distinct statement with which I am acquainted of the present *character* of the house as that which is God's witness on the earth since the resurrection of Christ; that being the only sense in which there is properly any publicly recognized house of God now on earth, and it is connected with the responsibility of the Christians who compose it, for it is the Assembly. "That thou mayest know *how* thou *oughtest* to *behave thyself* in the house of God which is the church (assembly) of the living God, the *pillar* and *support* of *the truth*," it is said, and almost every word marks testimony and responsibility, and not, as in Ephesians, "the Church which is *His body*," for this is *relationship* to Christ which He formed and maintains in present power while we are on earth, by His gifts, ministry, &c., and this we are not responsible to maintain, though our *hearts* should be faithful to Him in that relationship. 1st Timothy, however, shows the house *in order*, the great subject being *administration*—rule and care rather than exercise of gift for edification of the body, as in Eph. iv.—

and everything comes within the range of this order, *e.g.* walk, doctrine (chap. i.), prayer, the woman's position (chap. ii.), bishops, with the duties of a bishop as the head of the house and his responsibility in view of his children (chap. iii.)—the house being selected as a pattern of the church, verses 4, 5, which of course makes it plain that this is viewed as the sphere of government or administration—food, marriage, young men (chap. iv.), elders, widows (chap. v.), servants, riches (chap. vi.), &c. But in it all it is evident that the Spirit speaks of *what should be, rather than* of what actually was the condition of the house at any given time, though no doubt it *was* the condition then.

That which stamps, or ought to stamp, its character on all, and regulate everything, being also the motive to faithfulness, and the measure of what we ought to be faithful to, as the truth or testimony of God now, is to be found in chap. iii. 16. This is the character in which God has to do with men (and of course with His house) now, and faithfulness is measured accordingly. We (or it) must be true to God as *manifested* in flesh, and so displaying to us the character of life *inward and outward* which is suited to Him.

Responsibility always includes the possibility of failure, as far as man is concerned, and the Scriptures show that man has failed in everything which has been committed to his care. The house of God on earth has been thus committed to him, both as regards the visible adding to it or building it, as in 1 Cor. iii., &c., and as regards the administration of its affairs, so as to maintain it in its proper position, as in 1 Tim.; authority being even put into his hands to cut off from visible

participation in its privileges those who become outwardly evil—see 1 Tim. i. 19, 20; 1 Cor. v.; compare John xx. 22, 23; Matt. xviii. 17, 18 (and also Matt. xvi. 19, where the same course is viewed in its connection with the profession of Christianity as “the kingdom of heaven,” and with direct reference to the privilege given specially to Peter, by which he was appointed to inaugurate that order of things).* These latter Scriptures also speak of admitting into the house, which can still go on; but, with regard to the other action, the failure of all is such that excision cannot be carried out now in the sense in which *it* is spoken of there; it can only have a force *similar* to that of the act in 1 Cor. v. 13, but *limited practically* to the extent of those few who are truly gathered “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (*i.e.*, “put away *from among yourselves*,” &c.). The admitting work goes on, but in spite of the apostle’s

* In the historical account of his doing so in Acts ii., we find what may safely be taken as a direct reference to this privilege conferred on him, when he says, in answer to the anxious enquiries of the Jews, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*,” &c. (ver. 38), and that this has also reference to the house of God is plain, if we remember that the testimony committed to the disciples when the Lord had risen was not to begin to go forth till the descent of the Holy Ghost (see Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 4, 8, &c.), which directly connects that testimony with the house of God—the then sphere of privilege and of responsibility as the witness of God—which was thus constituted. We see the same thing in Acts x. 44—48, where the Gentiles are outwardly acknowledged by Peter, and admitted into the place of privilege by his authority. He, indeed, challenges any to forbid that which was the sign of their *reception* by man after God had manifestly marked them for Himself. Baptism thus clearly appears as the means by which any were admitted into the sphere of privilege and outward nearness to God.

warning in 1 Cor iii. all sorts of rubbish have been brought in as parts of the building, and 2nd Timothy describes the condition at which things outwardly had arrived, even before Paul's departure; *and as no subsequent revelation of a different state has been given*, we know that the same description applies with equal truth *now*. Now it is perfectly plain that when the *condition* of things becomes so evil, there is an end to putting out evil persons, because not only is it true that evil men will not put out evil men, but it is also true that the effect of this prevalence of evil is to render it impossible to distinguish with certainty who are the Lord's in that state of matters, and so to-day nothing is more resented in any of the denominations than what they term "discipline," and *practically* it is not carried out among them—which ought to prove to *them*, and would, if their eyes were open to see it, that the present condition of things is a corrupted and not a normal one, as they imagine. I say "what they term discipline," because even if a man were put out from one of them he would be welcomed in another, and so would never leave "the house," so that even when carried out it does not meet the scriptural thought of discipline.

But *cutting off* is the *only way spoken of in Scripture* by which any one can be *separated* from the house, once having entered it; and this leads to another remark which it is important to make, viz., that we are nowhere in Scripture "commanded to leave," or to be separated from the house, even when its state is corrupt. It is true that Paul in writing 2nd Timothy does not *say* that the great house is the house of God, but, on the other hand, he recognises that "a great house," &c., is the

character of *the place in which Timothy finds himself* at that day, and the epistle is written to direct Timothy's course (and consequently ours also) in view of such a state of things, but it does not direct him to leave the house, as we shall see.

In the former epistle, when evil was the exception within that which was the sphere of Timothy's labour and service, the place in which he was found was *distinctively* "the house of God." Now, however, its distinctive visible *character* (*not its privilege or responsibility*) is gone, and *it* (for it is still where Timothy was) can only be described as having the *features* of a great house wherein are not only vessels*

* I quote the following extract from the letter of a Church of England clergyman on this subject, to show the thoughts which men often allow their minds to introduce into the things of God, because there is a necessity upon them to justify to themselves in some way, and, if possible, to harmonize with Scripture, that order of things in which they find themselves at this day. They do not like to go against the stream, and to pronounce that faulty which has been supported by many who are otherwise well worthy of respect, and hence the necessity to get a consistent explanation :—

"In the great house, *i.e.*, the Great Holy Catholic Church, are various rooms. One room is the English Church, it is a reformed, well swept, well kept room; it invites the members from other rooms to join its inmates, by offering them a well lit room—a room with no stumbling-blocks to trip up people—a room with a beautiful view and a glorious landscape. Another room is the Holy Eastern Church; a third is the Western or Latin Church—a very dark room, and one much cumbered and crowded with useless furniture, supposed to be ornamental, but, in truth, directing attention rather to the ornaments than to the Master, and Builder, and Owner, than to the country beyond. Other rooms are the American Church, &c., &c. There are many people in the landings, and lobbies, and out-houses; among whom, in all friendly affection, I would say the

of gold and silver (which may be understood to mean true saints, as it is the *intrinsic character* of the vessels which is spoken of here, not their *use*) but also of wood and of earth (which similarly we may take for mere professors); and some to honour and some to dishonour (these latter distinctions being made, perhaps, in view of the exhortation which follows being hearkened to by some and despised by others). So that there need not be

disunited Brethren were—some are gradually approaching the great English room (church), among whom I trust are you. Some foolish people, I believe, are depending for their salvation on the fact of their being in a particular room; with this, I need not say, I do not by any means agree: being in the house is a different thing, but the true thing is to love the Master. Many outsiders love Him and serve Him; many who are only in the outhouses, or on the lobbies, in confusion, in their hearts are true lovers of the Master, and are accepted by Him, but surely it is best of all when we love the Master and serve Him in the clear atmosphere with the bright view, in company with such old inmates as Mr. Keble, George Herbert, Dr. Pusey, &c.”

Any simple Christian can see that in spite of all that is amiable in this, and although there is the frank admission that even that which is held to be “the church,” answers to the character of the great house (which is not an unimportant admission), the main thought of it completely sets aside the truth taught in 2 Tim. ii. by the use of the figure of “a great house.” The idea of “rooms” is quite foreign to the Scripture, the real point being the various kinds of *vessels* which are found congregated and mixed together; and no saint is told to go from one room to another in which he will find fewer vessels unto dishonour in proportion, but he is told to separate from those *vessels* altogether. Even supposing it true that those thus purged could find no other place than “the lobbies,” they would nevertheless be obeying the Word by being thus separated from the vessels unto dishonour, and could quite well afford to give to others the pleasures to be derived by looking out of the windows, because they could count upon having “a bright view” of “the Master” who would be in their midst.

a doubt that 2nd Timothy describes what the Christian profession, viewed as the place in which God by the Holy Ghost dwells, *grew to* in a short space of time, under the hands of Christians in responsibility. The 13th of Matthew teaches *similar* truth, though there it is the Christian profession, viewed as the mysterious "kingdom of heaven," which is the subject; while 1 Peter iv. 17 shows that the Church *as the house of God*, without any question of whether there is much or little evil present, is subject to the *government* of God, and necessarily so on account of its very place of privilege and its outward nearness to God. That verse (1 Peter iv. 17) being a quotation from Ezek. ix. 6 (one of the chapters already quoted in view of the execution of judgment upon the former house) confirms this as an unalterable principle of the divine acting.

We must be careful to distinguish the thought of *union* with Christ, by the Holy Ghost dwelling *in us*, which the figure of "the Body" teaches us, from that which is taught by the figure of "the House." We can see that there is a vast difference in the positions which a man's wife and his house occupy relatively to him; and the contrast is all the more marked if we take his body instead of his wife. In a certain sense he may be said to *dwell* in his body (2 Cor. v. bears out this thought, 2 Peter i. 13, 14 also), while it is unmistakably *united* to him; and the wife is also united to him, as Eph. v. 28—33 teaches; but although he *dwells* in the *house*, there is *no union* between him and its walls or furniture. And so in divine things, for these are the figures used in them.

This, then, clears away all difficulty, when we think

of the house of God either as the scene of His governmental action in judgment, or as containing what is unsuited to His nature, and therefore unfit to abide in His presence. As to this latter, no evil will be allowed to *abide* there, because the Lord is coming—and that speedily, although He has tarried long in grace to His people and to the world—see 2 Peter iii. 9 and 15—and at His coming will cast out “all *things* that offend, and *those* that do iniquity” (Matt. xiii. 41).

In the meantime, however, evil not only is, but preponderates, in that which should be pure from it, being holy as the dwelling of God; for, as to facts, every awakened and subject-minded saint finds 2 Tim. ii. to be that which describes the professing church of *to-day*, and the question for a true heart therefore is, “How can I act here so as to vindicate God’s character in the midst of that which, as far as it can, belies it, although it is called by His name,” but is *not*, “How can I get out of this place,” for we cannot leave it. The answer, in the mercy of God to us, is most plain, for the same Scripture which points out the existing evil, shows also the path in presence of it.

The great thing needed—God’s desideratum for the time—is *individual faithfulness* to Him. We do not need, and have no right, in such a day, to stop until we can decide who and where are God’s people; *each one* must hear His word, and act in the strength of his own faithfulness to God, for “*the Lord* knoweth them that are His,” but—equally true and weighty—“let *every one* that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” If one is godly in all private and family concerns, inward and outward, it is good, but he must not

stop there, nor think that the presence of evil men in that which professes the name of the Lord, deters him from any *public* actions of the same kind. To think or say so is to make the false use of Matt. xiii. 30 which is constantly made by many in the denominations, by which they would make it appear that because both tares and wheat are to *grow* together until the harvest, therefore there is no need for saints to *walk* separate from false professors. These forget that the question in that Scripture is about *rooting tares out of the field*, when it through the unfaithfulness of man had become thickly strewn with them (as verses 25—29 make plain), and is not about *knowing them as tares*, and acting in personal faithfulness to the Lord, *in full intelligence of their evil character*, while leaving them there for Him to deal with them when His time for judgment comes. This latter is our course, and the truth thus is (as 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21, shows clearly), that we have a course to pursue *with direct reference* to the “vessels of wood and earth, and those unto dishonour,” which are in the house; a course, moreover, made necessary by their very presence there.

In simple words this is *practically to disown them*, or as the Word says, “if a man *therefore purge himself from these*, he shall be a vessel unto honour,* &c.”—he

* I think it not unimportant to note that the distinction between “vessels unto honour” and “vessels unto dishonour” is created by verse 21. There is the general statement in verse 20 that the great house *contains* all the different classes, but verse 21 shows how a man *becomes* a vessel unto honour, and thus *distinguishes* him *from others* from whom he separates. It is plain, therefore, that the point of the separation is, that it is *vessels* from whom he separates, because

must not only be *personally* pure, but *also* purged *from them*. This is the only way in which God is vindicated with respect to the presence of these persons in His house, and it is the path of faith, because faith always acts in view of God's ultimate purpose, and His ultimate purpose about the vile vessels is to separate them for condemnation. Unbelief looks at present results and says, God does not care or He would act, or that He intends things to be just as they are. To take the sword and root these evil persons out of the world, or in other words, to take the way to remove them from the house which man would suggest in the difficulty as to discipline (the way in which the church of Rome has often acted), would be to do the very thing which the Lord commanded the servants not to do,

his act distinguishes them from those who (like him) are vessels unto honour. But if any prefer to say that what is to be separated from is the mixed condition of things described in verse 20, *i.e.*, the mixture of good and bad vessels, there is not, I think, any great objection to this, and it might be urged with some show of reason.

Some have thought that "these" in verse 21 refers to the "profane and vain babblings" of verse 16, but a little consideration would show that this cannot be, for the reasons given above. I should not doubt, however, on the other hand, that Hymenæus and Philetus (verses 17, 18), who are given as samples of the vain babblers of verse 16, were among those vessels in that day who had to be separated from by faithful men, so that possibly what is *meant* by those who so speak may be scriptural, though incorrectly expressed.

To say, however, as others have said, that if "these" refers to vessels at all, it must include both good and bad, is a mistake; for the word clearly does refer to vessels, as we have seen, and yet the alternative is not forced upon us by Scripture that we must separate from both good and bad, which would be equivalent to telling us to go out of the house.

and would ignore the Word which speaks to us as in these circumstances of the great house. God's way is the best; and we may be *sure*, even if we do not understand the *how*, that it is fully consistent with all His character and ways who gives the instructions about the path.

We find out more and more as we go on in the path, and nothing is to me more marvellous than the way in which, when we have taken one step for God, we find ourselves in a position in which we *can act* on further truth—truth that our former position had not only given a direct denial to, but had set entirely aside (as far as it could), as something which it had become impossible to carry out.

It is so here—for *as separated from evil*, within and without, we find the word to direct us in our path, and we are directed to walk *with those* who are calling on the Lord *out of a pure heart** (for no adherence to

* On comparing Matt. v. 8 with 2 Tim. ii. 22, we see what is not only, as I think, a beautiful link between "the kingdom" and "the house," but also a beautiful testimony to the consistency of God's ways. A pure heart is announced at the first as that which is proper to Christianity, and we see that God's requirement is never abated, no matter what the extent of the failure or evil that has come in. And although it is true that *as men* we must say, with Prov. xx. 9, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" yet it is no less true that *as Christians* we find there are two sides to the truth of the pure heart which is ours, to both of which we must give heed. There is in 1 Peter i. 22 that which grace has wrought in us, "seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again . . . by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever;" and in 1 John iii. 2, 3, there is that which is

forms, even though they be pure, will satisfy Him now). To learn the relations in which those stand to one another and that which is to regulate our walk *in fellowship* and *unity* (2nd Timothy being, as I have said, concerned with *individual* walk) we must turn to other parts of Scripture (such as Eph. iv., and this is how it harmonizes with 2nd Timothy), and here again we take the path of faith. For though the proper expression of that which God has formed by the Holy Ghost is not to be found, yet faith owns that God's purpose about it has never changed, and that by and bye the church in all its distinctive purity and unity as His body and His bride will be seen and known, even by the world. And so nothing less than *practical* conformity to this *now* (even though the *measure* of *that which it attains to* in this direction may be small) is what faith seeks and can be satisfied with. And thus the perfect harmony of God's word appears, a harmony which man could never make out of elements so apparently discordant in such a matter as this, and a harmony which consequently man never suspects is to be found in the Word.

One thing more. Although the "Bethesda" or "loose" meetings seem to present a different case from that described in 2 Tim. ii., inasmuch as those com-

wrought out in us practically by the power of the Word and the hope of the Lord's coming, when faithfully applied to all our motives and ways, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

posing them are professedly purged from the vessels unto dishonour, I am persuaded that the difference is *only in appearance and not in fact*. For those who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart are *not* those who *merely profess* to do so, while they at the same time hold and teach evil doctrine, but *they are* those who in purity of life and doctrine are *expressly contrasted* with men of unsound doctrine in that chapter (verses 15—18). But the Bethesda meetings would compel me to fellowship with such mere professors on the score that they may be children of God and members of Christ's body, &c. So that I am clear that those in such meetings *are not really* purged from the vessels unto dishonour, but are even now mixed up with them.

We ought to thank God that we have, in such a day, so simple a path, for we are delivered from all the perplexity into which the trying to determine who are Christians and who are not, in the present condition of the house, would plunge us. The *being Christians* is not the rule for our walking in fellowship with any in this day; we must seek for those who, according to the Word, we can say, are "calling on the Lord out of a pure heart;" and therefore this Word should search *us* through and through, so that *all our* ways may give expression to it. No less ought we to own with full hearts the grace which, in spite of all our failure, gives us to know in any measure the blessedness of being "the habitation of God through the Spirit."

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