

# The Church- God's Habitation Through the Spirit

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon explores the Church as God's dwelling place through the Spirit, emphasizing its significance in the lives of believers and the unity it fosters among them.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:19

**Topics:** "The Church as God's Dwelling", "The Presence of God"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that the Church is a habitation of God through the Spirit, highlighting the dual nature of the Church's existence: its future glory and its present reality. He explains that while the Church awaits its inheritance in glory, it currently enjoys a unique communion with God, who dwells among His people. This presence is made possible through the redemptive work of Christ, which allows believers to be filled with the Spirit and experience God's grace. Darby stresses the importance of recognizing the Church as God's dwelling place, which carries both privilege and responsibility for holiness. Ultimately, he calls for believers to understand and embrace the profound truth of God's presence in their lives.

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## Transcript

THE CHURCH, AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT

EPHESIANS 2

There are two great ideas in this epistle as regards the saints. The grand thought all through it is the grace of God towards them ; but, as regards the saints, there are these two ideals about the church : firstly, its hopes ; secondly, what it is now meanwhile.

It is looked at, on the one hand, as having a certain place in glory, and as enjoying the , inheritance ; and, on the other, there is this second point, what it is even now before it gets there. And this last gives it, in a certain sense, a higher character of communion and fellowship in blessing than is contained in the glory itself which it expects, though doubtless the other will not then cease. You will see these two things in considering the prayers of the apostle (chaps. 1 and 3).

We shall be in glory before Him, as children (that is the expression), to bring out the glory of His grace, who had predestinated us according to the good pleasure of His will - holy and without blame before him in love." And here we have, " In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit "-before Him in glory-and God dwelling in us.

We will just consider a little, beloved friends, how it is that the church becomes thus the " habitation of God." It is of the deepest importance to us. I 'said that the blessings connected with -this are in some respects superior to what might properly be called glory. And this is important, because we find that, even now, this blessing is brought to us. In glory we shall be able to enjoy it better, but we have it now.

At the end of chapter 1, where the apostle has been speaking concerning God's purpose about the saints, the thought is the " exceeding greatness of his power," and he prays. See v. 17-23. At the close of chapter 3 we have a prayer founded upon the other point I have spoken of. See v. 14-21. The character of this prayer is higher, and it goes farther than the former. There are two titles given to God in this epistle. In the one He is called the " God of our Lord Jesus Christ," because Christ is looked at there as the glorified Man, who has been down here, suffered, died, and been raised again. In the other He is called the " Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," because Christ is not thus looked at as the risen and glorified man, but as the Son of God.

Now the prayer in chapter 1 is founded upon the first of these titles (v. 17), and is connected with the glory of the risen man. In chapter 3, the apostle bows his knees unto " the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," and, therefore, he looks more at intimacy of communion, and to our being " filled to all the fulness of God." It is not God giving us knowledge of the inheritance, but God filling us with Himself.

We find these subjects, and the distinction between them, all through. In the one the Lord Jesus Christ is considered as man, whom God has raised from the dead, and there the church is looked at as " the fulness of him that filleth all in all " ; in the other as the Son of the Father in the power and unity of that relationship, and so of the divine nature ; this latter point being more especially connected with our being cc an habitation of God through the Spirit."

There are two points in this expression, beloved friends one, that of our being the " habitation of God " ; and the other, that this is " through the Spirit." He is not speaking of our dwelling with God (although that is true), but of our being "an habitation of God." He says, " ye are builded together," etc. And this is evidently a different thing. It is a different thing, our having glory together with Him, and God's dwelling in us. This is, I repeat, a most peculiar

and special blessing.

God came down to talk with man (Gen. 3)-man already fallen; and " they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." But God then had no " habitation " on earth. God's Spirit had dealt in power in various ways in the history of man ; but the moment the people are called out, it is, " The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation," etc. (Exod. 15 : 2.) This is the first thing we find in the song of Moses.

David had the same thought ; 2 Sam. 7. He would not dwell in a house of cedar, whilst the ark of God dwelt within curtains. But the Lord answers him and says, " I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a

tabernacle." " But Solomon built him a house." Having settled His people in the land, the " habitation of God " was built-a carnal worldly temple, but it was the " habitation of God." And then, when the Lord Jesus came into the world, this truth applied properly to His Person. He says, " Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He is regarded as the temple of God. Therefore God was then dwelling (in Him) with man, in the midst of the sorrow and evil into which man had fallen. Well, here it is the church (V. 22).

Beloved friends, it is touching to see the place which God takes (referring to the passage I have quoted about David's thought of building a house), according to the state of His people. God always takes the place that suits His people : a marvelous thought, but a most gracious one on His part! If His people are enslaved under burdens as in Egypt, He becomes their redeemer. If they are a journeying people and in tents, He dwells there Himself. He takes the same place as His people, for He is to be the centre of their blessing, and leads them by the cloud. This He did up to Solomon's time. When Joshua comes in and has to fight with the Canaanites, He presents Himself as " captain of the Lord's host," Josh. 5. When the people are settled (settled as far as they could be in their fleshly condition) under Solomon in fulness of peace and in blessing, God builds a settled house. And God dwells among them. Whatever the circumstances His people are in, God takes a place suited to them.

The place that God takes to dwell in now (until His people come into the rest) is, properly speaking, a tent or tabernacle. It is surely just as blessed, but, so to speak, more movable. In glory it will not be so. While we are on our journey, it is a tabernacle, not a temple, but still God dwells among men. His own grace has built " an habitation " for Himself. I am speaking, let us remember, not at all of that place of glory into which we are to come before God, but of that other thing, that God will come and dwell down here upon the earth.

When Jesus was in the world, God's presence was there. And it was that which was the centre of all blessing. They gathered around Him. Well now, it is the same thing with regard to the church ; God dwells upon the earth in the church, as a " habitation," though not visibly, not in manifested glory. And this comes to be of the last possible importance. If it is really true, that God dwells on the earth in a " habitation," evidently the " habitation " wherein He dwells must be of the greatest importance. And this remains always true. Failure though there may be, still the church is His dwelling place. Until Christ came, or, at any rate, until Lo-ammi was pronounced upon Israel at the Babylonish captivity, God dwelt there, and the blessing of the people and the guilt of the people were in respect of God's dwelling. If it was a question of idolatry, " they have set (He says) their altars by my altar." So when He is going to judge the people in Ezekiel, He goes on, and shews the prophet what they were doing in the temple. It might be the ancients of the house of Israel in the chambers of imagery; or women weeping for Tammuz; or the men at the door of the temple of the Lord between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, worshipping the sun; but it was in the temple. This was the place to which sin referred itself. Having stated this general truth, I would now just see here how this " habitation " is brought about.

All the first chapter of the epistle, as also the beginning of the second, is taken up with the other point of which I spoke, that is, that God has raised up Christ from the dead ; as it is said, " according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when," etc. God is here in power stepping in (not merely a judge having satisfaction, but in His own power stepping in for the accomplishment of His purposes) to deal with man looked at as under the consequences of sin. It is not only man in evil that is looked at in this epistle, responsible to God, and having to find that which meets his state in the cross (we see that in Hebrews, and elsewhere, it is not specially treated of here), but it is God acting in His own power (when

man was on this ground-in utter ruin) for the deliverance of man. Christ takes this place. He descends into the lower parts of the earth, making Himself responsible for the consequences of sin. He descends into the whole consequences of sin-He comes down from the throne of God in the perfectness of divine love, humbles Himself, takes upon Him, and comes down into, the consequences of sin, where man had brought himself.

Marvelous and blessed truth! Where we were looked at as sinners, " dead in trespasses and sins," Christ has come down-and put Himself there. Alas! the judgment of those who reject Christ! they will find the full consequences of sin in themselves. But that is where faith first sees the full consequence of sin-in Christ. Sin was fully matured (man had behaved lawlessly without law-the law had been broken -Christ slighted and rejected) ; and He then enters into this place, and goes under the full power of the consequences of sin. We see Him brought down into the weakness of man under the power of death-Satan's power (though He could not be holden of it), and under the wrath of God, into " the dust of death."

All that which the heart of Christ felt and suffered is told out wonderfully in the Psalms: whether it be from the hiding of God's countenance, or from His enemies surrounding Him, or from Satan's power, or from God's waves and billows going over Him, all is freely expressed there. Occasionally we find this breaking forth in the gospels, but it is more especially given in the Psalms. What the gospels present to us, generally speaking, is the perfect walk of Christ-of Him, who, by virtue of His living by the Father, and His perfect obedience and love, was always towards man, what man needed in order to approach God; man could see all that, while His thoughts about that which pressed upon Him were hidden within His own heart. " I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished! " Constantly His soul was straitened, whilst, if you look at Him among men, they were not straitened in Him ; all was grace and love still. He shewed forth the great principle of the offering up of Himself as man to God. He had power to take that place, and He took it. Though without sin, He suffered all the consequences of sin, even to " the dust of death He went down into it. But there He could not remain.

Having thus perfectly glorified God, it then became a question what God should do for Him. And we read, " He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places," etc. " He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Having descended, in the perfectness of love and obedience, to the dust of death, He went thence back to the throne of God and is set above all. And thus, whatever exercise of heart there may be, or whatever the evil and rebellion of unconverted man, faith knows perfectly that from the throne of God down to the uttermost consequences of sin, and from the uttermost consequences of sin up to the throne of God, Christ fills all things. There is not one thing to the eye of faith, from the throne of God to the dust of death, and from that up to the highest point of glory, that is not filled with the redemption power of Christ. The love of God has come down into the place of the sin and ruin of man ; and faith rests in that love, and in the full accomplishment of redemption, as shewn out in that He who went down into the dust of death is now at the right hand of the throne of God. " He that descended," etc. Woe be to those who reject this! but that is what faith knows about the work of Christ. He has gone down into the dust of death, and the " exceeding greatness " of God's power has raised him from the dead; chap. I : 19, 20.

That is the redemption power of God. The results, it is true, will be brought out afterwards ; God is waiting, and souls are being gathered unto Christ ; but that is the redemption in the power of which we stand.

Well, now, the consequence of that is seen in the second chapter: You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins and then too (because God has done it for us in Christ), He " hath raised us up

together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The great result of this salvation will be our being with Christ in the glory by and by, but even now, by faith, we can see ourselves "in Christ Jesus" (not "with" Him, as has been observed) there. I know that the redemption power which has visited me touched me, and has taken me up, when I was "dead in trespasses and sins." I know that this has not stopped short of the throne of God itself. It has united me to Him who is at the right hand of God, and has therefore placed me there "in" Him, as having the same life, the same righteousness (God's righteousness now), and hereafter the same joy, and the same glory.

This would have been true if there were but one saint. But there is a further thing. The apostle goes on to shew that, looked at according to the largeness of the purpose of God, Jew and Gentile (whatever the distinction between them, and that of God, "in the flesh") were on one broad platform of ruin-"among whom we 01 had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh," etc. Having taken that ground, he says, "remember" where you are-"He is our peace," etc. (See v. 11-17.) "Peace" having been made, the dealings of God with man down here on the ground of redemption are begun. Christ sat down on the throne of God, having completed the work-the peace being made redemption accomplished. He could not go farther than the throne of God. He has carried the "wave-sheaf," the firstfruits of redemption-power in His own Person up to the throne of God.

Well, on this the "peace" that is "preached" is based. And here I would just for a moment (supposing there may be some here who have not peace) notice how it is that He preaches peace. He does not come and say to man, You have to make your peace with God. He preaches peace. He does not preach a peace to be made-a peace that is not made. He preaches peace, a made peace. He has "made peace through the blood of his cross," having sat down at the right hand of God, the whole work being accomplished, so that He is "expecting until his enemies are made his footstool," Heb. 10. He comes to Jew and Gentile, no matter to whom, and preaches peace, not a progressive work, but a peace completely made. The soul may be a long while struggling under the sense of unanswered responsibility, it may cling to the law, it may mistake the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ, be looking for results in itself (we naturally look to our own righteousness, and even the saints often mistake holiness for the ground of peace), and the like: all that may take place in the soul, but it does not at all touch the perfectness of the work of Christ, or alter the strain of what Christ preaches as being at the right hand of God. Blessed thought! It is simple enough, and there is nothing more suitable. For, as we shall see (without the thought of holiness having anything to do with the ground of peace), holiness flows forth as the consequence of peace. Wherever there is simplicity of faith, there is peace. That is the first point-perfect peace, independent of anything in ourselves. No matter what we were, Jew or Gentile, sinners or honourable in the earth, it is a peace that has been brought to us in Christ. The next thing (and that as a consequence) is, that "through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father," v. 18.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners," etc. (v. 19-22). Christ, having wrought this redemption, having ascended to God, having sat down at the right hand of God, having gathered us together, makes us, thus gathered together, "an habitation of God through the Spirit." It is not God merely acting in certain men; it is God dwelling in the church down here, as gathered through the word of the gospel. The church is the place of God's presence on the earth. He has set us in redemption, and He comes and dwells in us. When the church was gathered together with one accord in one place, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down and dwelt there, the result of the accomplished work of Jesus. And this is a real thing. I am not speaking now merely of gifts, but of the presence of God Himself.

Now it is quite clear that the presence of God down here must be of the last importance. His " habitation " is that which He possesses, which belongs to Him, and nothing that does not recognise the fulness of this blessed cost of salvation, can be. It is those who are His redeemed ones, brought together by the peace which Christ preaches, those who have, through Christ, access by one Spirit unto the Father, that come to be the place where God dwells.

There are many places in which the Spirit of God could act. We find the expression, " The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him," 2 Chron. 16 : 9. If we turn to certain dealings of God as assuring the work He established by His Spirit, for instance the laying the foundation of the temple by Zerubbabel (Zech. 3, 4), we there find mention of these eyes of the Lord." So in Ezekiel's throne (chap. 1 18 chap. 10 : 12), the operations of God in His governing power in the world. See, too, Revelation 5 : 6. All this is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God. It might act in glorious power, or it might act in silent energy, but in all it is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God going out and dealing in the world, and is quite another thing. I am not speaking of that. We are cc an habitation of God through the Spirit," in grace to us it may be a tabernacle, but still it is " an habitation of God " - place where He dwells, where He lives, so to speak, where He has taken up His abode, where He can have around Him the things that suit His presence, that in which He delights. Beloved friends, this is what we are; we may have dishonoured it, but that is just what we are made, and in this world-the place where God dwells.

Now to take a simple example of the effect of this (I said a simple example, and yet it is a very important one), let us look at the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). That was not a question of gift. Peter said, " Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ? " God was there; there was no gift exercised at all; and Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead. They had had the folly and madness not to understand that God was there, and therefore, when they came and brought only part of the price of the possession, lying to God (it was not to Peter and John they were lying), God shewed the indignation of His presence, and they fell down dead. There was wonderful effect in this : we read, " And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things," etc. The fact was known that God did " in very deed (as Solomon speaks at the dedication " of the temple) dwell with men." It was the real presence of God the church was there, having God dwelling in it, and acting in it, by the Holy Ghost-and He proved it; His presence sanctified the place.

Well now, beloved friends, that is always and constantly true. As I have said, we may have grieved the Spirit, dishonoured the house, and been unfaithful (that alas! is also too true), but it depends upon the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What is the consequence of redemption ? It is not merely that I have peace individually, nor yet that we are heirs together of glory, nor yet that we have access through Christ by the Spirit to the Father ; besides all this, it is the ground on which God dwells down here. It is in virtue of the accomplishment of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ that God can come down here, and make His " habitation," that He can comfort and strengthen those who are within (not merely act in providential power without), that He can be at home in the midst of His people. This, His being at home in the midst of His people, practically sanctifies us ; it involves great responsibility : His house should be according to His holiness. " Holiness becometh thy house for ever." But, at the same time, it becomes the source of our power and blessing.

Suppose, for a moment, God was here, and we were all His saints (the Lord grant it may be so!) and all the saints of God that are in the world were here (which is not the case, God forbid that it should be!) is it not quite evident that the eye, the ear, all would refer to that, that every movement would be consequent

upon God's being there, the presence of God governing and stamping its character on the whole ? Again, if that were the case, supposing we could say that God was there, and all the enemies in the world were raging about us, beloved, would not the one thought be, that God was there, and that it was God's concern ? He would be the strength, the help, the confidence of the soul. Yes, and that was so beautifully shewn when the Jews came back to Jerusalem, and were in fear of their enemies. The first thing they built was what ?-a high wall ? No, they built an altar. God was their confidence and strength.

Well, we are " builded together for an habitation of God." And see what a blessed truth is connected with this. On what ground could God come into our midst and dwell with us ? It is not on any uncertain ground. It is upon the ground of God's perfect and entire complacency in the church-His perfect delight. It is not God's coming down to call us, as He did Adam after the fall, in order to find out that he was lost. Neither is it God's coming down, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, to see whether the cry that has gone up is such as it seems to be. Neither is it God's coming down, as He did to Israel, to put to the test whether He can stay. He comes down on the ground, and in consequence of, completed redemption-of peace being perfectly made. His presence is the witness and evidence of accomplished redemption. He says, as it were, I have so accomplished this redemption, I am so pleased with you, so satisfied because of Jesus, that I am come to dwell with you, to make My abode with you: you are to be My " habitation." What a character does this give to the church 1 What manner of men ought we to be ?

But then there is another thing. If we are the " habitation of God through the Spirit," the consequence is, not merely the favour of God, but all the consequences of this favour. The Holy Ghost comes down as the witness and testimony of the fulness of the Father's delight in Christ and of our joy in Him. " Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come," etc. (John 16 : 13-15). He ministers (I am not now talking of the instruments) to us these things. He has all " the goods (as it is expressed of Eliezer, Gen. 24) in his hand," to minister the comfort and strength of what belongs to us as the bride of Christ, the true Isaac, unto whom the Father hath given all that He hath. And that is the case in the midst of infinite difficulty and trials (in that sense more blessed than if there were none). This is one of the present special blessings of redemption, one that we shall not know or want in glory; we shall have the full result of redemption there. But it is not merely to be brought into glory, to be at home in perfect peace in the presence of God and with God. Redemption is so perfect, that, before we get into glory, God by His Spirit can come and dwell with us here, in the midst of our weakness, and because of our need.

As the apostle speaks in the Philippians, " What then ? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Paul was tried, persecuted, taken as a prisoner to Rome, and they were going on preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds, etc. Well, all this, he says, will " turn to my salvation," etc. His soul thus being fed and nourished by the Spirit, everything in which he found trial and exercise of heart became but the means really of working out of him that which was contrary to God, in order that his sympathy might have free course, and his soul joy only in Christ.

Again, beloved friends, in speaking of the sympathy of the Spirit of God with the saints, and in the saints amidst a groaning creation (Rom. 8), he says, " Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities," etc. (V. 26). Here I find the Holy Ghost taking notice of certain trials, sorrows, weaknesses, difficulties, and the like, of everything, in short, that can press upon the heart of the saint, and that even when it " cannot be uttered," and " groaning " is its only expression. It is the groaning of the Spirit of God in such a poor feeble heart, that it does not know how to express it. But it is said, " And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth,"

etc. (v. 27). That is what He has found there-" the mind of the Spirit." It is not merely that human feelings are brought out, but that the things (the very trials and sorrows) that would have produced human feelings, have now produced, if I may so say, divine feelings-feelings " according to God," which go up to God, and which God can answer; so that they become the means by which He pours into the heart all the fulness of His consolation, not perhaps taking them away, but shewing that He Himself is the sufficient blessing of the soul, because He dwells with it, and makes Himself the portion of it. Now if we look at the way in which this meets us where we are, and what we are, this is how it works. He comes down into all our circumstances, and, for a poor trifle of affliction, I get to find (not the thing set aside, but) God Himself taking the place of our sorrow.

In the prayer in chapter 3 the apostle loses himself, as it were, and no wonder. After he has said, " I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he adds, " that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love [that is what God is-the divine nature], may be able to comprehend with all saints [taking in the whole unity in which the Holy Ghost dwells], what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height "-he has now got into the infinitude of all God's thoughts and purposes of blessing, and he cannot say of what. Just as the groanings could not be uttered, so the thought cannot be uttered. It is God that has come in, and Christ fills all things according to the power of redemption, from the throne of God, down to the dust of death, and from the dust of death up to the throne of God. Having all things, and filling all things (he says), here I am placed, in the midst of this infinitude. And then he adds, " and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." He could go to no place, but there he found infinite love and infinite power-the love that brought Christ down, and the power that took Christ up again.

This meets all the exercises of the heart. If brought down, even (as Christ came down) into the dust of death, the Holy Ghost comes down to the poor man, who feels this power of death in his soul, and dwells in him, and carries him up, by the knowledge of redemption, into all the fulness of God Himself

Well, that, beloved, is the result of the dwelling of the Holy Ghost down here, consequent upon redemption accomplished by Christ. The Holy Ghost can come and bring peace to our souls, and the effect of that peace to our souls is to make us pass through all the evil around " according to the power of God." When the apostle speaks to Timothy, he says, " Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

Where shall we stop ? The soul rejoices in that which must be the joy and gladness of the heart which knows God has come down to dwell in it, the immutable blessedness of God's presence. Then, whatever the circumstances in which we are placed, if they be only those of sorrow and trial, what is the consequence ? God ministers of the fulness of the sympathy of His love to our souls ; and thus they become, so to speak, as a door, or a chink, to let in God. All the riches, " the unsearchable riches of Christ," are ours. And Christ fills everything. There is not anything we can think of, but we find there of the fulness of Christ. If we think of death, we see Christ there-of sin, we do not know what sin is fully until we see Christ " made sin "-of God, it is only in Christ we can know God-of man, it is only in Christ we can see man raised to the height of his blessing-of peace, it is through Christ we know the peace of God-of life, Christ is our life of glory, it is all in Christ. There is not anything, no matter what we think of, whether in creation, or above it, or between God and man, but we must think of Christ in it all. He is the " head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." We can turn our thoughts to no one thing in which we do not find the fulness of Christ ; and by the power of the Holy Ghost our souls

are brought into the joy of this fulness, as that to which we are, through living union with Him, everlastingly and perfectly united.

There is another point which I have not touched upon, the practical effect of this. What would the effect be on our souls, if we really felt we were " builded together " etc. ? if we felt that, in the whole world, Christians were in truth the dwelling-place of God ? What a thought should we have to act upon as to everything! That by which the church of God has been corrupted, ordinances and the like, would disappear as clouds before the presence of the sun. And what thoughts of glory should we have-what thoughts of holiness -what peace as to practical circumstances-what jealousy of grieving the Holy Ghost-what love toward all saints-what joy-what confidence! How we should (not in pride, but in the sense that God was there) mock at all our enemies (Isaiah 37 : 22, 23)-how live and act among men, as " sons " and " heirs " of God! What power for everything, in short, would be ours, if we remembered the completeness, the peace-giving completeness, of redemption, and could really say, that God was dwelling with us!

This is our portion, and whatever our weakness and infirmity (and alas I it is very great), whatever our failure, still it remains true. We may grieve the Spirit, we may weaken the consciousness of our joy, but still God is with us. The Holy Spirit dwells among us.

May the Lord give us to know and to own what this presence of God in the earth, and that with men, is by reason of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus!

[Go to Table of Contents](#)

-----  
[Return to the Main Page](#)

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We shall be in glory before Him, as children (that is the expression), to bring out the glory of His grace, who had predestinated us according to the good pleasure of His will - holy and without blame before him in love." And here we have, " In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit "-before Him in glory-and God dwelling in us.

We will just consider a little, beloved friends, how it is that the church becomes thus the " habitation of God." It is of the deepest importance to us. I 'said that the blessings connected with -this are in some

respects superior to what might properly be called glory. And this is important, because we find that, even now, this blessing is brought to us. In glory we shall be able to enjoy it better, but we have it now.

At the end of chapter 1, where the apostle has been speaking concerning God's purpose about the saints, the thought is the "exceeding greatness of his power," and he prays. See v. 17-23. At the close of chapter 3 we have a prayer founded upon the other point I have spoken of. See v. 14-21. The character of this prayer is higher, and it goes farther than the former. There are two titles given to God in this epistle. In the one He is called the "God of our Lord Jesus Christ," because Christ is looked at there as the glorified Man, who has been down here, suffered, died, and been raised again. In the other He is called the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," because Christ is not thus looked at as the risen and glorified man, but as the Son of God.

Now the prayer in chapter 1 is founded upon the first of these titles (v. 17), and is connected with the glory of the risen man. In chapter 3, the apostle bows his knees unto "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," and, therefore, he looks more at intimacy of communion, and to our being "filled to all the fulness of God." It is not God giving us knowledge of the inheritance, but God filling us with Himself.

We find these subjects, and the distinction between them, all through. In the one the Lord Jesus Christ is considered as man, whom God has raised from the dead, and there the church is looked at as "the fulness of him that filleth all in all"; in the other as the Son of the Father in the power and unity of that relationship, and so of the divine nature; this latter point being more especially connected with our being an habitation of God through the Spirit.

There are two points in this expression, beloved friends one, that of our being the "habitation of God"; and the other, that this is "through the Spirit." He is not speaking of our dwelling with God (although that is true), but of our being "an habitation of God." He says, "ye are builded together," etc. And this is evidently a different thing. It is a different thing, our having glory together with Him, and God's dwelling in us. This is, I repeat, a most peculiar

and special blessing.

God came down to talk with man (Gen. 3)-man already fallen; and "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." But God then had no "habitation" on earth. God's Spirit had dealt in power in various ways in the history of man; but the moment the people are called out, it is, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation," etc. (Exod. 15 : 2.) This is the first thing we find in the song of Moses.

David had the same thought; 2 Sam. 7. He would not dwell in a house of cedar, whilst the ark of God dwelt within curtains. But the Lord answers him and says, "I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle." "But Solomon built him a house." Having settled His people in the land, the "habitation of God" was built-a carnal worldly temple, but it was the "habitation of God." And then, when the Lord Jesus came into the world, this truth applied properly to His Person. He says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He is regarded as the temple of God. Therefore God was then dwelling (in Him) with man, in the midst of the sorrow and evil into which man had fallen. Well, here it is the church (V. 22).

Beloved friends, it is touching to see the place which God takes (referring to the passage I have quoted about David's thought of building a house), according to the state of His people. God always takes the place that suits His people : a marvelous thought, but a most gracious one on His part! If His people are enslaved under burdens as in Egypt, He becomes their redeemer. If they are a journeying people and in tents, He dwells there Himself. He takes the same place as His people, for He is to be the centre of their blessing, and leads them by the cloud. This He did up to Solomon's time. When Joshua comes in and has to fight with the Canaanites, He presents Himself as " captain of the Lord's host," Josh. 5. When the people are settled (settled as far as they could be in their fleshly condition) under Solomon in fulness of peace and in blessing, God builds a settled house. And God dwells among them. Whatever the circumstances His people are in, God takes a place suited to them.

The place that God takes to dwell in now (until His people come into the rest) is, properly speaking, a tent or tabernacle. It is surely just as blessed, but, so to speak, more movable. In glory it will not be so. While we are on our journey, it is a tabernacle, not a temple, but still God dwells among men. His own grace has built " an habitation " for Himself. I am speaking, let us remember, not at all of that place of glory into which we are to come before God, but of that other thing, that God will come and dwell down here upon the earth.

When Jesus was in the world, God's presence was there. And it was that which was the centre of all blessing. They gathered around Him. Well now, it is the same thing with regard to the church ; God dwells upon the earth in the church, as a " habitation," though not visibly, not in manifested glory. And this comes to be of the last possible importance. If it is really true, that God dwells on the earth in a " habitation," evidently the " habitation " wherein He dwells must be of the greatest importance. And this remains always true. Failure though there may be, still the church is His dwelling place. Until Christ came, or, at any rate, until Lo-ammi was pronounced upon Israel at the Babylonish captivity, God dwelt there, and the blessing of the people and the guilt of the people were in respect of God's dwelling. If it was a question of idolatry, " they have set (He says) their altars by my altar." So when He is going to judge the people in Ezekiel, He goes on, and shews the prophet what they were doing in the temple. It might be the ancients of the house of Israel in the chambers of imagery; or women weeping for Tammuz; or the men at the door of the temple of the Lord between the porch and the altar, with their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, worshipping the sun; but it was in the temple. This was the place to which sin referred itself. Having stated this general truth, I would now just see here how this " habitation " is brought about.

All the first chapter of the epistle, as also the beginning of the second, is taken up with the other point of which I spoke, that is, that God has raised up Christ from the dead ; as it is said, " according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when," etc. God is here in power stepping in (not merely a judge having satisfaction, but in His own power stepping in for the accomplishment of His purposes) to deal with man looked at as under the consequences of sin. It is not only man in evil that is looked at in this epistle, responsible to God, and having to find that which meets his state in the cross (we see that in Hebrews, and elsewhere, it is not specially treated of here), but it is God acting in His own power (when man was on this ground-in utter ruin) for the deliverance of man. Christ takes this place. He descends into the lower parts of the earth, making Himself responsible for the consequences of sin. He descends into the whole consequences of sin-He comes down from the throne of God in the perfectness of divine love, humbles Himself, takes upon Him, and comes down into, the consequences of sin, where man had brought himself.

Marvelous and blessed truth! Where we were looked at as sinners, " dead in trespasses and sins," Christ has come down-and put Himself there. Alas! the judgment of those who reject Christ! they will find the full consequences of sin in themselves. But that is where faith first sees the full consequence of sin-in Christ. Sin was fully matured (man had behaved lawlessly without law-the law had been broken -Christ slighted and rejected) ; and He then enters into this place, and goes under the full power of the consequences of sin. We see Him brought down into the weakness of man under the power of death-Satan's power (though He could not be holden of it), and under the wrath of God, into " the dust of death."

All that which the heart of Christ felt and suffered is told out wonderfully in the Psalms: whether it be from the hiding of God's countenance, or from His enemies surrounding Him, or from Satan's power, or from God's waves and billows going over Him, all is freely expressed there. Occasionally we find this breaking forth in the gospels, but it is more especially given in the Psalms. What the gospels present to us, generally speaking, is the perfect walk of Christ-of Him, who, by virtue of His living by the Father, and His perfect obedience and love, was always towards man, what man needed in order to approach God; man could see all that, while His thoughts about that which pressed upon Him were hidden within His own heart. " I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished! " Constantly His soul was straitened, whilst, if you look at Him among men, they were not straitened in Him ; all was grace and love still. He shewed forth the great principle of the offering up of Himself as man to God. He had power to take that place, and He took it. Though without sin, He suffered all the consequences of sin, even to " the dust of death He went down into it. But there He could not remain.

Having thus perfectly glorified God, it then became a question what God should do for Him. And we read, " He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places," etc. " He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Having descended, in the perfectness of love and obedience, to the dust of death, He went thence back to the throne of God and is set above all. And thus, whatever exercise of heart there may be, or whatever the evil and rebellion of unconverted man, faith knows perfectly that from the throne of God down to the uttermost consequences of sin, and from the uttermost consequences of sin up to the throne of God, Christ fills all things. There is not one thing to the eye of faith, from the throne of God to the dust of death, and from that up to the highest point of glory, that is not filled with the redemption power of Christ. The love of God has come down into the place of the sin and ruin of man ; and faith rests in that love, and in the full accomplishment of redemption, as shewn out in that He who went down into the dust of death is now at the right hand of the throne of God. " He that descended," etc. Woe be to those who reject this! but that is what faith knows about the work of Christ. He has gone down into the dust of death, and the " exceeding greatness " of God's power has raised him from the dead; chap. I : 19, 20.

That is the redemption power of God. The results, it is true, will be brought out afterwards ; God is waiting, and souls are being gathered unto Christ ; but that is the redemption in the power of which we stand.

Well, now, the consequence of that is seen in the second chapter: You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins and then too (because God has done it for us in Christ), He " hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The great result of this salvation will be our being with Christ in the glory by and by, but even now, by faith, we can see ourselves "in Christ Jesus" (not "with" Him, as has been observed) there. I know that the redemption power which has visited me touched me, and has taken me up, when I was " dead in trespasses and sins." I know that this has not stopped short of the throne of God itself. It has united me to Him who is at the right hand of God, and has therefore placed me there " in " Him, as having the same life, the same righteousness (God's

righteousness now), and hereafter the same joy, and the same glory.

This would have been true if there were but one saint. But there is a further thing. The apostle goes on to shew that, looked at according to the largeness of the purpose of God, Jew and Gentile (whatever the distinction between them, and that of God, " in the flesh ") were on one broad platform of ruin-" among whom we 01 had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh," etc. Having taken that ground, he says, " remember " where you are-" He is our peace," etc. (See v. 11-17.) "Peace" having been made, the dealings of God with man down here on the ground of redemption are begun. Christ sat down on the throne of God, having completed the work-the peace being made redemption accomplished. He could not go farther than the throne of God. He has carried the " wave-sheaf," the firstfruits of redemption-power in His own Person up to the throne of God.

Well, on this the " peace " that is " preached " is based. And here I would just for a moment (supposing there may be some here who have not peace) notice how it is that He preaches peace. He does not come and say to man, You have to make your peace with God. He preaches peace. He does not preach a peace to be made-a peace that is not made. He preaches peace, a made peace. He has " made peace through the blood of his cross," having sat down at the right hand of God, the whole work being accomplished, so that He is " expecting until his enemies are made his footstool," Heb. 10. He comes to Jew and Gentile, no matter to whom, and preaches peace, not a progressive work, but a peace completely made. The soul may be a long while struggling under the sense of unanswered responsibility, it may cling to the law, it may mistake the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ, be looking for results in itself (we naturally look to our own righteousness, and even the saints often mistake holiness for the ground of peace), and the like: all that may take place in the soul, but it does not at all touch the perfectness of the work of Christ, or alter the strain of what Christ preaches as being at the right hand of God. Blessed thought! It is simple enough, and there is nothing more suitable. For, as we shall see (without the thought of holiness having anything to do with the ground of peace), holiness flows forth as the consequence of peace. Wherever there is simplicity of faith, there is peace. That is the first point-perfect peace, independent of anything in ourselves. No matter what we were, Jew or Gentile, sinners or honourable in the earth, it is a peace that has been brought to us in Christ. The next thing (and that as a consequence) is, that " through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father," v. 18.

" Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners," etc. (v. 19-22). Christ, having wrought this redemption, having ascended to God, having sat down at the right hand of God, having gathered us together, makes us, thus gathered together, " an habitation of God through the Spirit." It is not God merely acting in certain men; it is God dwelling in the church down here, as gathered through the word of the gospel. The church is the place of God's presence on the earth. He has set us in redemption, and He comes and dwells in us. When the church was gathered together with one accord in one place, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down and dwelt there, the result of the accomplished work of Jesus. And this is a real thing. I am not speaking now merely of gifts, but of the presence of God Himself.

Now it is quite clear that the presence of God down here must be of the last importance. His " habitation " is that which He possesses, which belongs to Him, and nothing that does not recognise the fulness of this blessed cost of salvation, can be. It is those who are His redeemed ones, brought together by the peace which Christ preaches, those who have, through Christ, access by one Spirit unto the Father, that come to be the place where God dwells.

There are many places in which the Spirit of God could act. We find the expression, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him," 2 Chron. 16 : 9. If we turn to certain dealings of God as assuring the work He established by His Spirit, for instance the laying the foundation of the temple by Zerubbabel (Zech. 3, 4), we there find mention of these eyes of the Lord." So in Ezekiel's throne (chap. 1 18 chap. 10 : 12), the operations of God in His governing power in the world. See, too, Revelation 5 : 6. All this is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God. It might act in glorious power, or it might act in silent energy, but in all it is the activity of energy of the Spirit of God going out and dealing in the world, and is quite another thing. I am not speaking of that. We are cc an habitation of God through the Spirit," in grace to us it may be a tabernacle, but still it is "an habitation of God" - place where He dwells, where He lives, so to speak, where He has taken up His abode, where He can have around Him the things that suit His presence, that in which He delights. Beloved friends, this is what we are; we may have dishonoured it, but that is just what we are made, and in this world-the place where God dwells.

Now to take a simple example of the effect of this (I said a simple example, and yet it is a very important one), let us look at the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). That was not a question of gift. Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ? " God was there; there was no gift exercised at all; and Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead. They had had the folly and madness not to understand that God was there, and therefore, when they came and brought only part of the price of the possession, lying to God (it was not to Peter and John they were lying), God shewed the indignation of His presence, and they fell down dead. There was wonderful effect in this : we read, "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things," etc. The fact was known that God did "in very deed (as Solomon speaks at the dedication of the temple) dwell with men." It was the real presence of God the church was there, having God dwelling in it, and acting in it, by the Holy Ghost-and He proved it; His presence sanctified the place.

Well now, beloved friends, that is always and constantly true. As I have said, we may have grieved the Spirit, dishonoured the house, and been unfaithful (that alas! is also too true), but it depends upon the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What is the consequence of redemption ? It is not merely that I have peace individually, nor yet that we are heirs together of glory, nor yet that we have access through Christ by the Spirit to the Father ; besides all this, it is the ground on which God dwells down here. It is in virtue of the accomplishment of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ that God can come down here, and make His "habitation," that He can comfort and strengthen those who are within (not merely act in providential power without), that He can be at home in the midst of His people. This, His being at home in the midst of His people, practically sanctifies us ; it involves great responsibility : His house should be according to His holiness. "Holiness becometh thy house for ever." But, at the same time, it becomes the source of our power and blessing.

Suppose, for a moment, God was here, and we were all His saints (the Lord grant it may be so!) and all the saints of God that are in the world were here (which is not the case, God forbid that it should be!) is it not quite evident that the eye, the ear, all would refer to that, that every movement would be consequent upon God's being there, the presence of God governing and stamping its character on the whole ? Again, if that were the case, supposing we could say that God was there, and all the enemies in the world were raging about us, beloved, would not the one thought be, that God was there, and that it was God's concern ? He would be the strength, the help, the confidence of the soul. Yes, and that was so beautifully shewn when the Jews came back to Jerusalem, and were in fear of their enemies. The first thing they built was

what ?-a high wall ? No, they built an altar. God was their confidence and strength.

Well, we are " builded together for an habitation of God." And see what a blessed truth is connected with this. On what ground could God come into our midst and dwell with us ? It is not on any uncertain ground. It is upon the ground of God's perfect and entire complacency in the church-His perfect delight. It is not God's coming down to call us, as He did Adam after the fall, in order to find out that he was lost. Neither is it God's coming down, as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah, to see whether the cry that has gone up is such as it seems to be. Neither is it God's coming down, as He did to Israel, to put to the test whether He can stay. He comes down on the ground, and in consequence of, completed redemption-of peace being perfectly made. His presence is the witness and evidence of accomplished redemption. He says, as it were, I have so accomplished this redemption, I am so pleased with you, so satisfied because of Jesus, that I am come to dwell with you, to make My abode with you: you are to be My " habitation." What a character does this give to the church 1 What manner of men ought we to be ?

But then there is another thing. If we are the " habitation of God through the Spirit," the consequence is, not merely the favour of God, but all the consequences of this favour. The Holy Ghost comes down as the witness and testimony of the fulness of the Father's delight in Christ and of our joy in Him. " Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come," etc. (John 16 : 13-15). He ministers (I am not now talking of the instruments) to us these things. He has all " the goods (as it is expressed of Eliezer, Gen. 24) in his hand," to minister the comfort and strength of what belongs to us as the bride of Christ, the true Isaac, unto whom the Father hath given all that He hath. And that is the case in the midst of infinite difficulty and trials (in that sense more blessed than if there were none). This is one of the present special blessings of redemption, one that we shall not know or want in glory; we shall have the full result of redemption there. But it is not merely to be brought into glory, to be at home in perfect peace in the presence of God and with God. Redemption is so perfect, that, before we get into glory, God by His Spirit can come and dwell with us here, in the midst of our weakness, and because of our need.

As the apostle speaks in the Philippians, " What then ? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Paul was tried, persecuted, taken as a prisoner to Rome, and they were going on preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds, etc. Well, all this, he says, will " turn to my salvation," etc. His soul thus being fed and nourished by the Spirit, everything in which he found trial and exercise of heart became but the means really of working out of him that which was contrary to God, in order that his sympathy might have free course, and his soul joy only in Christ.

Again, beloved friends, in speaking of the sympathy of the Spirit of God with the saints, and in the saints amidst a groaning creation (Rom. 8), he says, " Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities," etc. (V. 26). Here I find the Holy Ghost taking notice of certain trials, sorrows, weaknesses, difficulties, and the like, of everything, in short, that can press upon the heart of the saint, and that even when it " cannot be uttered," and " groaning " is its only expression. It is the groaning of the Spirit of God in such a poor feeble heart, that it does not know how to express it. But it is said, " And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth," etc. (v. 27). That is what He has found there-" the mind of the Spirit." It is not merely that human feelings are brought out, but that the things (the very trials and sorrows) that would have produced human feelings, have now produced, if I may so say, divine feelings-feelings " according to God," which go up to God, and which God can answer; so that they become the means by which He pours into the heart all the fulness of His consolation, not perhaps taking them away, but shewing that He Himself is the sufficient blessing of

the soul, because He dwells with it, and makes Himself the portion of it. Now if we look at the way in which this meets us where we are, and what we are, this is how it works. He comes down into all our circumstances, and, for a poor trifle of affliction, I get to find (not the thing set aside, but) God Himself taking the place of our sorrow.

In the prayer in chapter 3 the apostle loses himself, as it were, and no wonder. After he has said, " I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he adds, " that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love [that is what God is-the divine nature], may be able to comprehend with all saints [taking in the whole unity in which the Holy Ghost dwells], what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height "-he has now got into the infinitude of all God's thoughts and purposes of blessing, and he cannot say of what. Just as the groanings could not be uttered, so the thought cannot be uttered. It is God that has come in, and Christ fills all things according to the power of redemption, from the throne of God, down to the dust of death, and from the dust of death up to the throne of God. Having all things, and filling all things (he says), here I am placed, in the midst of this infinitude. And then he adds, " and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." He could go to no place, but there he found infinite love and infinite power-the love that brought Christ down, and the power that took Christ up again.

This meets all the exercises of the heart. If brought down, even (as Christ came down) into the dust of death, the Holy Ghost comes down to the poor man, who feels this power of death in his soul, and dwells in him, and carries him up, by the knowledge of redemption, into all the fulness of God Himself

Well, that, beloved, is the result of the dwelling of the Holy Ghost down here, consequent upon redemption accomplished by Christ. The Holy Ghost can come and bring peace to our souls, and the effect of that peace to our souls is to make us pass through all the evil around " according to the power of God." When the apostle speaks to Timothy, he says, " Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

Where shall we stop ? The soul rejoices in that which must be the joy and gladness of the heart which knows God has come down to dwell in it, the immutable blessedness of God's presence. Then, whatever the circumstances in which we are placed, if they be only those of sorrow and trial, what is the consequence ? God ministers of the fulness of the sympathy of His love to our souls ; and thus they become, so to speak, as a door, or a chink, to let in God. All the riches, " the unsearchable riches of Christ," are ours. And Christ fills everything. There is not anything we can think of, but we find there of the fulness of Christ. If we think of death, we see Christ there-of sin, we do not know what sin is fully until we see Christ " made sin "-of God, it is only in Christ we can know God-of man, it is only in Christ we can see man raised to the height of his blessing-of peace, it is through Christ we know the peace of God-of life, Christ is our life of glory, it is all in Christ. There is not anything, no matter what we think of, whether in creation, or above it, or between God and man, but we must think of Christ in it all. He is the " head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." We can turn our thoughts to no one thing in which we do not find the fulness of Christ ; and by the power of the Holy Ghost our souls are brought into the joy of this fulness, as that to which we are, through living union with Him, everlastingly and perfectly united.

There is another point which I have not touched upon, the practical effect of this. What would the effect be on our souls, if we really felt we were " builded together " etc. ? if we felt that, in the whole world,

Christians were in truth the dwelling-place of God ? What a thought should we have to act upon as to everything! That by which the church of God has been corrupted, ordinances and the like, would disappear as clouds before the presence of the sun. And what thoughts of glory should we have-what thoughts of holiness -what peace as to practical circumstances-what jealousy of grieving the Holy Ghost-what love toward all saints-what joy-what confidence! How we should (not in pride, but in the sense that God was there) mock at all our enemies (Isaiah 37 : 22, 23)-how live and act among men, as " sons " and " heirs " of God! What power for everything, in short, would be ours, if we remembered the completeness, the peace-giving completeness, of redemption, and could really say, that God was dwelling with us!

This is our portion, and whatever our weakness and infirmity (and alas I it is very great), whatever our failure, still it remains true. We may grieve the Spirit, we may weaken the consciousness of our joy, but still God is with us. The Holy Spirit dwells among us.

May the Lord give us to know and to own what this presence of God in the earth, and that with men, is by reason of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus!

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