

1 Corinthians - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Things New and Old: Volume 27, Standing of the Church: Assembly of God and Its State (1:1-3,10-31)

We now look at the standing of the church of God.

If we take the first nine verses in 1 Cor. 1, we have the standing of the assembly of God. The remaining part of the epistle gives the state.

"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." As the assembly of God, they were separated from the heathen world to God, in Christ Jesus. What a holy standing—in Christ Jesus! God had separated them—He had called them out. They were His holy ones by calling. Such were and are the assembly of God. None "but the sanctified in Christ Jesus form that holy assembly—the called, holy ones. Ah, the standing of the holy assembly of God in Christ Jesus is almost forgotten. Base imitations have taken its place on earth before the eyes of men. This was the assembly of God in Christ. As the gold covered the boards of the tabernacle, so was the assembly covered with Christ. " Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (Ver. 30.)

How perfect the standing of the assembly in Christ! Thus it is presented: "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall confirm you unto the end, blameless [or, irreproachable] in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such is the glorious standing of the assembly of God. How little this is understood! But such is the case, if the reader is a Christian; this is your standing as a part of the church of God. Why did the Spirit thus put the standing of the assembly first, before the state of that assembly? Was it not that we might lay fast hold of that before we compare the state?

There is one important feature of the assembly—that is, that it is the body of Christ. He is the head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." "For we are members of his body." "There is one body." "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." Such was the standing of the assembly of God: every individual of that assembly was a member of the one body of Christ. Thus Christ was displaced in His body on earth: the most perfect union of every member with the Head. This was really a glorious standing, as it is written: "Unto him he glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages," &c. (Eph. 3:21.)

Well, did the state of the assembly come up to its standing? We must say, No. When the apostle turned from its standing to its state, he had to rebuke them on this very point. Instead of manifesting the oneness of the body of Christ, divisions were beginning to spring up amongst them. To say, I am of Paul; and I, of Apollos; and I, of Cephas; and I, of Christ, was surely a state which denied the oneness of the body of Christ. The standing of the assembly as the body of Christ remains the same; but what is our state? Every believer sealed with the Spirit is a member of the one body of Christ. But the state of the church is a denial of this, by its sad divisions.

The moral state of the assembly of God at Corinth fell far short of their standing, as "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." The instructions also, for them and for us, show the points in which they needed to be better taught in divine froth. If we read chapter xii., it would appear they were in great need of instruction as to the body. They needed to be told that "the body is one" and that "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." Their want of knowledge, and consequent failure, did not affect the standing of all the called saints as members of the one body; but it did most seriously affect their state; hence their divisions and lowness of walk.

Is it not so at this day, only in a much greater and sadder degree? All true believers form the one body of Christ. But how many are entirely ignorant of this fact! Nay, they glory in being members of that which is a denial of the one body, the many bodies of human organization. And, in other cases, where the one body is professedly held, what (as to state) an entire ignoring of the unity of the Spirit! Thus, whilst the standing of the assembly of God as the one body of Christ can never alter, the state of the church should fill us with deep humiliation, and bring us before the Lord in confession and prayer.

Yet, let us not forget that, where the standing of the assembly of God is held in the power of the Holy Ghost, there will continue to be its manifestation—however feebly—though in the midst of all the sorrowful divisions of the church. Paul said to Timothy, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them."

There is still another precious aspect of standing of the assembly as the bride of Christ. Let us notice one or two of the types of the bride. Eve, taken out of death, as it were, in figure, had the same standing as Adam—she was one with him. "Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." Her standing in paradise was totally different from all other creatures. We know that this figure is actually applied to the church as the bride of Christ, in Eph. 5. Now, in the case of Eve, her creation was entirely of God, suited to the man.

Ruth, also, may illustrate the standing of the bride. She was brought, in pure grace, from the land of death and the curse, stranger and outcast, to occupy by redemption, as raised from the dead, the highest possible standing in Israel—the standing of her husband, the mighty man of wealth. So of Rebekah. She was fetched from the land of idolatry and distance by the steward of Abraham, to have the highest possible standing in the family of promise—the bride of Isaac.

Let us now turn to the heavenly things in the Ephesians. What is the standing of the church His body? Whatever is the standing of the Head of the body, Christ. There is no limit except, of course, His Godhead, or divine attributes, for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. No limit; no, "with all."

And this high standing is not according to any merit of ours, but, "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him, in love."

This standing was predestinated before all circumstances, before the creation of the world; and when the heavens and the earth shall have passed away, that eternal purpose of God shall be accomplished in the new heavens and the new earth. (Rev. 21)

Our standing is the "glory of his grace, wherein he hath taken us into favor in the beloved." Redemption through His blood, &c, follows, as the outflow of His free favor. But; all is of God, absolute and eternal. Such is the standing of the believer chosen in Christ. Oh, "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height."

What is the standing of Him who became man, and died for His church? Oh, the pre-eminence of the First-born from among the dead! "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name.....And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." Such is the standing of the church, His bride, in the heavenlies, in Him (Eph. 1; 2), and soon to be with Him.

And we must not forget that the church is the object of the tender love of Christ. "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Thus, if, in the figure, Eve had the same standing as Adam, the church, the second Eve, the heavenly bride, has the same standing as Christ. What unspeakable grace! "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus."

Oh, how sad is the present state of the church, when compared with her standing! And why? Is it not because the heavenly glory and standing of the church is so little understood? With most, is it not a question of just being saved, of being able to stand before God in judgment? The present and eternal love of Christ is little known. The more we know the heavenly standing of the church, the more heavenly will be our state.

May God grant to each one of us, both a fuller apprehension of our standing, and a more deep, real correspondence of state of soul, answering to His boundless grace. Soon our standing and our state will forever be alike. We shall see Him as He is, and be like Him. C. S.

First Years of Christianity: And What Is the Church?, First Years of Christianity, The: The Doctrines Taught (15:3)

We have already looked at the starting point, THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, inspired in the full sense of God speaking to us, "Thus saith the Lord." It must be evident then that without this starting point we have no basis. If God has not spoken, all is blank uncertainty. But since God has spoken, we need no man or church to tell us that what He has said is true. What then were the doctrines taught?

Let us begin with the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. What was that death to the apostles, and the early Church, as seen in their inspired writings? We read, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). The more we meditate on these words, the more wonderful they seem. Think how those scriptures of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets bring before us this great fact, that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. What victims had been offered in sacrifice, from Abel downward to the lamb that must be killed, ere Israel could be redeemed from Egypt! There was no escape from judgment and slavery until that lamb was killed. Then what blood had to be shed to make it possible for man to be kept in relation with Jehovah in the wilderness, and in the land! There was no approach to God but by blood.

The faith of Abraham was expressed in those wonderful words, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." Yes, Jehovah-jireh, the Lord, will see, or provide. The faith of the early Church was, that the Lord hath seen to it; God hath provided His Lamb. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh [beareth] away the sin of the world!" Behold the living Person of the Son of God, God's Lamb. God has seen to man's deepest need; God has provided. The doctrine of the First Years of Christianity all centered in Him, God's Lamb. Not man's lamb — not man's providing — but the sent One of God. The Holy One was delivered for our offenses, and was raised from the dead "for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice, all was divine certainty. The whole Church of God had peace with God, and this peace was made by the very blood of Christ. "And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprovable in His sight" (Col. 1:20-22). Thus they HAD peace with God, and that peace was made by the blood of the cross. They had not one thing to do to make their peace with God. Jesus had made that peace by His own blood; they had been enemies, but they were now reconciled. What was the object of Jesus in dying, as to all believers? Through death to present all believers holy, and unblameable, and unreprovable in His sight.

Such was the value of the atoning death of Christ to all believers in the First Years of Christianity, and such was their knowledge of God. And they had such certainty as to the value of the redemption blood of Christ, that they could so peacefully give thanks. Just hear them. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:12-14). Oh, what precious certainty they had in those First Years! How seldom do we see anything like it now. What a separate people they were from the dark, doubting, guilty world around them. They were meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, in whom, in Christ, they had redemption. Sins were all forgiven. Ah, it was something worth while to be a Christian in those First Years. What completeness, was it not? As it is written, "And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."

In those years they had a very exalted conception of the glory of the Person of the Son of God, as giving infinite value to His atoning sacrifice. "Who being the brightness of His [God's] glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3).

That is the starting point in the Hebrews—the finished work. He has done the work on the cross that puts away our sins forever. The proof of this is clear. He SITS, His work being done, on the right hand of the Majesty on high. There is very little notice taken of this in these last years. It is very important to remember this, when we think of priesthood, or of worship. God has seen to it, God has provided His Lamb. The work that puts away our sins is done. God has accepted that work, and that Person who has done it, to His own right hand. What rest to the soul this gave in those First Years.

Another thing was then revealed—that while the offerings of the law could never rend the veil, and bring poor sinful man into the presence of God, Christ having come, by the one offering of Himself on the cross, the veil was rent, sins were purged. The way into the holiest was then opened, and all this was eternal—not for a year, but for eternity. This is all opened up to us in Hebrews 9. For this purpose He appeared "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

No person bearing the name of Christ ever thought of questioning the purpose of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the bearing the real judgment of God on sins. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:27-28). Thus the true doctrine of the First Years was this: that Christ came in the end of the world, or at the end of all the ages of the trial of man; that He undertook to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. This will be yet seen in the new heavens and the new earth, that He undertook and bore the judgment of divine wrath due to the sins of many—for this purpose He was offered, the sacrifice for sins. When He appears a second time, there will be no question of sins for those who wait for Him.

All this is abundantly confirmed and applied in the next chapter, Hebrews 10. God could never be satisfied with those many sacrifices of the law which could never purge the conscience from sins. The Son of God says, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." The Son of God came, He offered Himself once, the sacrifice for sins, and then in continuance sat down at the right hand of God. Now what was the effect of this one sacrifice to all believers as revealed in the First Years of Christianity? "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." This fact is of such immense importance, that we read further, "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us," etc. It was very blessed when men believed this witness of the Holy Spirit—that God in infinite love had sent His Son in the body prepared for Him that He might put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself—that the Son had done this, and that as to all charge of sins against the believer, the Holy Spirit was Himself a witness, that all believers separated to God by the death of His Son, were perfected forever, or in continuance. Ah, when men no longer believed the witness of the Holy Spirit, then they invented masses, penances, fresh sprinklings, etc., until the witness of the Holy Spirit as to the efficacy of that one sacrifice was forgotten.

Oh, the folly, with such scriptures before us, of again offering sacrifices for the living and the dead, that can never take away sins. If we would enjoy peace with God, we must turn away from all these inventions of men, and go back to that which was in the beginning. Then it was distinctly understood that God said, "And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." As many as were in the light had fellowship with one another. They knew the whole matter of sins was settled forever, that the blood of God's dear Son cleansed them from all sin.

It is manifest from the very opening chapters of the history of the sons of fallen Adam, that there could be no approach to God most holy but by the death of a Substitute. Thus Abel came before God through the death of the lamb. Thus did Noah worship God as he stepped out of the ark. Thus did Abraham also through the sacrifice on his altar. Thus only could Israel be redeemed from Egypt by the death of the lamb. It must be killed and its blood sprinkled. And thus for forty years was the lesson taught in the sacrifices in the wilderness—that without the shedding of blood was no remission. Yea, for fifteen hundred years this great truth was set forth in every sacrifice on the brazen altar, that death alone can put away sin. And yet all these sacrifices could not in themselves put away sins. All pointed forward to that one Sacrifice that puts away sins forever.

In the prophets they read of a Person who should be wounded for transgressions, bruised for iniquities; a Person on whom Jehovah would lay iniquities; One whom the Lord should bruise (see Isa. 53). That Person they distinctly taught was Jesus, the Son of God (Acts 8). In a word, the one only foundation of the Church of God then was that "we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14), and that this redemption was not for a time only, but was eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). This great foundation truth runs through the epistles. All believers then could say, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." Soon all the redeemed will be gathered around the Lamb in the midst of the throne; yea, and all angelic hosts will say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

Reader, are you quite sure you have that "redemption through His blood" here? Then you may be assured you will sing His everlasting praise there. But if not, to whom can you look for forgiveness of sins?

The C.S. Tracts: Volume 6, First Resurrection, The (15:22-24)

It is a mistake to suppose that the great truth of the first resurrection, or the resurrection from among the dead, rests on the interpretation of some difficult passage in the Book of Revelation. So far from this being the case, we shall find it to be the uniform teaching of the New Testament. Neither is it possible to find a single text to uphold the grave error of a general resurrection and judgment. And whilst the first resurrection is the full accomplishment of our salvation: a general judgment practically denies our redemption. The Scriptures declare there is none righteous, no, not one; all have sinned: it therefore follows that if we have to come into judgment for our sins we must all be condemned. As it is written, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified." Is it not evident if we have to look forward to judgment, there must be everlasting wrath before us? thus salvation is impossible. This is a very solemn question for

our souls. If you, and all the world, will rise together, and it is appointed unto you after death the judgment, tell me, how can you be saved? Is there a single promise of pardon at the judgment? Not one. Our subject then affects the very foundation truth of the gospel: yes, if the common error of a general resurrection, and judgment be true, there is no gospel: for none can be saved, all are guilty, and if judged, must be cast into the lake of fire. Is it not then a fearful thing to spend a whole life teaching such dreadful errors? How many do so, and refuse to hear the Word of God! If you profess to bow to Scripture, we ask your solemn attention to the following.

The Sadducees, or Rationalists of that day, brought a supposed difficulty to the Lord. A woman had had seven husbands: whose wife then would she be in the resurrection? Jesus answered, "But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36). Is not this a resurrection of great privilege? Will all be raised together equal to the angels, the children of God? How can there be a general resurrection, when Jesus speaks of those who shall be accounted worthy of the resurrection from the dead, or from among the dead? Rest not until you are assured that this is your privilege.

We will now notice how the Lord Jesus teaches there will be two distinct resurrections. The one of life, the other of judgment; and the blessed certainty that those who have eternal life shall not come into the judgment. He says that all judgment is committed to Him. That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father: and further, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." Do you notice that if you hear the words of Jesus, and believe God that sent Him, then even now, you have everlasting life. Surely you have not to wait until the judgment, to know if you shall have it. You both have everlasting life, and Jesus says you shall not come into judgment. The thing is settled now: you have passed from death unto life. Jesus, the very One who shall execute judgment, says these three things to every believer: you have everlasting life, you shall not come into judgment: you are passed from death unto life. Then He says, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (or judgment)" (John 5:21-29). The word hour is used by John to denote a period, as, "The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit" and so forth. (John 4:23; 5:25). Plainly "hour" here means the whole of this gospel period of more than eighteen hundred years. So there is a period coming in which there shall be two very distinct resurrections, of those who have everlasting life, the resurrection of life; those who have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment. Assuredly one of these must be yours and mine.

Now read John 6:37-40. Here a great privilege is made known for all whom the Father giveth to Christ. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." And to show the value of this special resurrection the Father's will, that Christ should raise them up, is repeated twice. Is it not evident that if there were a general resurrection there would be no meaning in these words? We shall further find that this first resurrection is at the coming of the Lord, to fetch His saints: and this accounts for the fact, that the resurrection of all given to Christ is so much on His, and on the Father's heart. What tenderness of infinite love in those words as He went to the cross to bear our sins: "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-2). Oh the heart of Jesus! oh the Father's will! what rest! what joy this gives.

As the Jews held the doctrine of a general resurrection, at least of themselves, this blessed truth we are examining was very offensive to them, as preached by the apostles. "Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead [or which is from among the dead]. "And they laid hands on them," and so forth. (Acts 4:1-3). Do you not see here, the truth of a resurrection from among the dead is the very opposite of the Jewish doctrine of a general resurrection?

Not only is it the joy of Christ to do the Father's will in thus raising us from among the dead, but also this must take place because of the Spirit that dwelleth in us. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [or because of] His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). What a fact is this, we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. Was He raised from among the dead? then we must be also, we must be like Him in all things. We are waiting for this the full effect of redemption. "Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." If the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, then you must be raised from the dead that He may dwell in you forever. If a Christian, this must be your destiny.

The resurrection of all that are in Christ, at His coming, is as certain as that all in Adam have died. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." But our question is when will those in Christ be raised? "Every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end," and so forth. (1 Cor. 15:22-24) Nothing could be more certain then, than that the resurrection of those that are Christ's will be at His coming. Then cometh the end: we shall see in another scripture when the rest of the dead are judged at the end. But carefully note, that is not the resurrection spoken of here, to the end of this chapter. It is the first resurrection; those that are Christ's. Will the resurrection of the wicked be in power—a spiritual body—in glory. Is it true of them, "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"? Is not this the exclusive resurrection of those who are Christ's? The resurrection unto life from among the dead, the redemption of their bodies? When they see Christ they are like Him, they forever bear the image of the heavenly. What a blessed event is their resurrection from among the dead! Equally blessed for "we who are alive and remain." "Behold I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," and so forth. The apostle could not have had, a thought of a general resurrection at the end of the world: when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption: for he says then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory," and so forth. If we turn to the prophet Isaiah 25:8, we find the Spirit is there describing not the end of the world, but the beginning of the millennium or kingdom of Christ on earth. Do not forget this; that 1 Corinthians 15 will not take place at the end of the world: but at the coming of Christ to take His saints, more than a thousand years before the judgment of the rest of the dead. For further proof of this further on.

This was no mere doctrine with the Apostle Paul. It was the prize at the end of his journey. For this he longed; he says, " If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of [or from among] the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:11). Yes, when this body shall be raised in glory, when we bear the image of the heavenly, then, not until then, shall we be perfected. For this we wait, "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour; who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious

body," and so forth. If there were a general resurrection, why should the apostle so earnestly long to arrive at the resurrection from the dead? Does not this imply that the saints will be raised first? Nay, had not this very fact been revealed by the Lord to His servant: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17) Thus the error of a general resurrection is in direct opposition to all Scripture. There is not a thought of any being raised when the Lord comes, except the dead in Christ: or, as we have seen, they that are Christ's at His coming. And this coming is clearly for His saints: for when He comes in judgment they come with Him.

We will now look at what God has been pleased to give us, as His final revelation, on this subject. We shall here see what will take place at the beginning of the thousand years reign of Christ. Evidently this cannot possibly be a spiritual millennium as is so erroneously taught—a time when the great mass of the world will be converted by the gospel, and form the church. The church, as the bride of Christ, has been completed before this; in Revelation 19 the multitudes of heaven had said, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." And more, the marriage of the Lamb having taken place, the saints come with the Lord under the symbol of the armies which were in heaven. The then imperial head of the Roman empire, is judged, with the confederate kings of the earth. The terrible reign of terror, under the dragon, has been brought to a close. Yea Satan, the dragon, the old serpent, the devil, is cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. The saints who have come with Christ, are now no longer in conflict, but "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, nor his image, and so forth.... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Thus we see after the church is completed, and comes with Christ and sits on thrones joint-heirs with Christ, to judge the nations, and to inherit all things: then the remnant also who have been faithful to Christ, during the great tribulation and slain: all these also are raised to partake of the blessedness of the first resurrection "Blessed, and holy, is he that hath part in the first resurrection." This completes the first resurrection. Now as to the rest of the dead, the wicked, we are distinctly told, they lived not again until the thousand years were finished. Then after the thousand years, "the dead small and great stand before God" to be judged. The dead were judged. "And they were judged every man according to their works." And as is evident, every man that shall be judged must be forever condemned.

Thus a thousand years separate the resurrection unto life, and the resurrection unto judgment.

We have thus gone over the teaching of Scripture as to the first resurrection. And we ask where is there a thought of either a general resurrection, or that the Christian should be brought into judgment for his sins?

There are two scriptures carelessly relied on. Some one may ask, does not the gathering the sheep and the goats, imply a general resurrection? (Matt. 25). But if we read that scripture carefully, we cannot find a word, or a thought, of any resurrection there. It is the judgment of the living nations, and they are dealt with according as they have treated the Jews, now owned as His brethren. At this judgment the Son of Man is seen coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory: and all the tribes of the earth mourn (Matt. 24:31). "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations," and so forth (Matt. 25:31). Read from Matthew 25:31 to end of the chapter. You observe this is the judgment of the quick at His coming: but not a word about the resurrection, of the judgment of the dead. Now let us compare this with the description of the last judgment after the thousand years, millennial rest, and blessing. "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead small and great stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:11-12) Thus at the morning of this millennial day, two things take place. The first resurrection is complete: and the judgment of the living nations takes place. The rest of the dead live not again until the evening of that thousand years: and then they are judged according to their works. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." At the one judgment the Son of Man is seen coming with the clouds of heaven: at the other judgment, He does not come at all, but the heavens and the earth fled away. Thus we have both the judgment of the quick and the dead: the one at His appearing, the other at His kingdom. "Who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing, and His kingdom."

The other scripture, so often misquoted to uphold the great traditional error of a general resurrection and judgment, is this. You often hear these words as though they were scripture. It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after death the judgment. If this were so, who then could be saved? No living man could have peace with God, if the question had yet to be settled at the future judgment after death. Do you not see that this error strikes at the very foundation of the gospel? How can there be present enjoyed peace with God, if we and all men have to be judged for our sins? How can we possibly be now made meet for the inheritance of the saints: if the question has to be settled yet, after death? How can we be said to be justified from all things; if we have yet to be judged? This serious error of a general resurrection and judgment, has thrown all Christendom into confusion. Both things cannot be true: the gospel of the grace of God, and the future judgment of all. Take a case: a criminal proved guilty, receives the glad tidings of her Majesty's free pardon, and that the crime shall never be laid to his charge again. Another official declares that he must go to judgment before the judge for his crime. Can both be true? The one is in flat contradiction to the other. So is the doctrine and all who preach it, of a general judgment, in flat contradiction of the gospel. Strange as this may appear to those who follow tradition, and pay little regard to scripture, yet it is true that no one who holds the error of a general judgment, either knows, or ever preaches, the gospel of God in its simplicity and fullness. Let us be candid, and come to close quarters. Do you hold that error, and thus you expect to die, and after death the judgment? "Error?" you say, "It is strange to me if that is not the truth: I shall be greatly mistaken if there is not such a scripture as that it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the judgment."

We will see as to that shortly. But first, what is the effect of the doctrine on your own soul? Is it not that you hope it will be all right at last? You are not quite sure you are good enough yet to die, and go to judgment? Sometimes, as you forget this fatal error, you feel a little brighter, and then dreadful doubts, and uncertainty; if a preacher, you may be trying to keep up a fair appearance before others. But the blessedness of sins forgiven to be remembered no more: perfected forever by the one offering of Christ: justified from all things: peace with God. All these you cannot enjoy if you have yet to be judged: for this very simple reason, that all have sinned, all are guilty, and therefore if all have to be judged, then all in righteousness must be condemned.

Now let us read that scripture, "And as it is appointed unto men [not all men] once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:27-28). Does not this prove the very opposite of a general judgment? Just as it is the common lot of men to die, and after death the judgment: so Christ has borne the sins of many: therefore there can be no question of sin to them when He appears. Read the whole context, the very subject is the perfect and eternal redemption believers have through the one sacrifice of Christ. All of which falls to the ground if we have yet to be judged for our sins. It will not do to say it is the doctrine of our creeds, prayer books, and hymn books; is it found in Scripture? That is the question, unless we are prepared to give up the Word of God and trust in tradition, however false. As another has said, think of the childish absurdity of this tradition. Paul and thousands more have been with the Lord eighteen hundred years: have they still to be judged for their sins? The Lord Jesus assures the believer that he shall not come into judgment. (John 5:24). And there is not and cannot be a single text to show that he will be judged in the proper sense of judgment for sins. That he will stand before, or be manifested before the beemah, or judgment-seat of Christ, and there be recompensed or rewarded according to his works, is a most blessed truth. And also that this will take place at the first resurrection is also plain. "And thou shalt be blessed.... for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). Sins are put away by His precious blood. Salvation is wholly of God. We shall be rewarded according to our works. What grace to find anything to reward!

This is the clear doctrine of Scripture. Two Christians may both build on Christ, the only foundation —one is rewarded for his works; all the works of the other be burned up, yet he himself saved so as by fire. Read 1 Corinthians 3, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward: if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

It is blessed to know also that we shall not be rewarded according to man's judgment, but the Lord's. "Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord come." On this very account we are not to judge or despise one another. "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the [beemah] judgment-seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). There is another striking scripture on this subject, and mark, it is in connection with the believer's certainty as to his being with the Lord. "For WE KNOW that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God," and so forth. "We have the earnest of the Spirit. We are always confident.... it is God who hath wrought us for this selfsame thing," and so forth., no portion breathes more divine certainty. Yet he says, "Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him. For we must all appear [or be manifested] before the [beemah] judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may RECEIVE the things done in his body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Thus whilst we have the utmost certainty that if we die, it is to be absent from the body, present with the Lord; and also that this is not all, but we shall be clothed upon with our glorified body of power, incorruptible, in the image of the heavenly, like Christ: yet this should not make us careless, but diligent that we may be accepted of Him. That is, our works approved, not burnt up, and thus be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. To confound this with being judged before the great white throne, is like not seeing the difference between giving rewards at the break up of school, and the boys having to be brought up as criminals at the Town Hall.

The apostle says, "But we are made manifest unto God." Yes we ARE made manifest unto God. Already we have taken our places as guilty, without a hope in ourselves. We are pardoned, justified, sanctified. Our sins have been judged and borne by our holy Substitute. Now pass on, first, our manifestation before that blessed One who has loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. Surely angels may wonder at the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Now if all from our birth, to that moment when we are manifested in His glory, be brought out before the assembled myriads, yet will it not show the grace to "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." Yes, every saint will be to the praise of His glory. All this is unspeakably glorious to us, and think of being rewarded, recompensed, in that scene of glory, at the resurrection of the just!

How terrible the contrast in that scene, when the dead are judged! Every thought, motive, and act, all written in the books: every secret sin unconfessed, unforgiven—all, all, brought out into light. Vain the hope of pardon then. The day of mercy is past. The future, God has said it, is the lake of fire.

If a single believer could come into that judgment, then Christ would have died in vain. Oh rest my soul on the words of Jesus. "Shall not come into judgment" (John 5:24). The sad error of a general resurrection, then, has taken away all the untold joy, and brightness of the first resurrection; yea, has robbed the Christian of the blessed hope altogether. So that many do not even know that there is a first resurrection. Is it possible that that for which the apostle so longed, and for which the church waited in the patience of Christ, has been lost and forgotten It is too true.

Had we space we should find, that the promise of God to Abraham could not be fulfilled, if there were no first resurrection. "And I will give unto thee the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (See Gen. 13:14-15; 17:8) Stephen tells us Abraham was a stranger, had no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on. It is plain if Abraham were not raised from among the dead until the heavens and the earth flee away, and he had to stand before the great white throne, then God would have broken His word to Abraham, which is impossible. By faith, they sojourned, and looked "that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb. 9). No; they shall be raised from among the dead, whether it be Israel for earthly, or the church for the heavenly glory. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, and they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." This must be the reader's portion, or the lake of fire. May the Lord deliver you from the fatal delusion of putting off your salvation to the judgment of the dead.

First Years of Christianity: And What Is the Church?, First Years of Christianity, The: What Is the Church? (10:32)

The word "church" is used in so many ways that it is difficult for many to understand what the Church of God really is, as spoken of in Scripture. "Feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28). "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). Thus in the New Testament there are three classes on this earth: the Jewish nation, the Gentile world, and the Church of God.

Do we ever find these three classes in the Old Testament? Never; neither in Moses, the Psalms, nor the prophets. Is that a fact? It is. Then what did Stephen refer to when he spoke of "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38)? If you read the context, you will see that it was the children of Israel, or the nation of Israel gathered out of Egypt in the wilderness. It was one of the two things then on earth, and not the third thing, called in the New Testament "the church of God." That is quite clear.

I should like to ask, When was it first named in Scripture? It was first named by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16, but as a future thing. He said, "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is generally supposed that all saved persons, all believers, from the very first, say from Abel downward, belong to the Church. Do we not read of the Jewish church? Yes, but not in Scripture—only in the books of men who are guided by custom, and who do not examine Scripture for what they say.

Then again we hear and read of the church of Rome, church of England, Wesleyan, and Presbyterian church, etc.

Is this a correct way of speaking? Well, men understand what they mean. But our Lord did not mean any of these when He said, "I will build My church." No, He did not say, I will build the church of Rome, or any of the churches that men have built. If any one of these was the Church, that would exclude all other believers in the other churches from being saved, as the Church is also the "one body," and also the bride of Christ. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13). "There is one body" (Eph. 4:4). Who are meant by those that are baptized by the one Spirit into this one body, the Church of God? "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). Is it not evident from these scriptures that all true Christians form the one body of Christ, the Church of God? So that if Christ meant any of those bodies of men which claim to be the one body, the Church of God—or, to put it very plainly—if Christ meant that He would build the church of Rome, and that therefore it is the Church of God, this would undoubtedly prove that all outside the church of Rome are not Christians at all.

These remarks would be equally applicable to any other church which assumed the position of being the Church of God. As the Church is the one body of Christ, you cannot be a saved Christian if you are outside that one body.

Would it not then be foolish work to spend our time in trying to prove which of the many churches of Christendom is the true Church, since to do so would also prove that all other true Christians were not members of the body of Christ? This is not our object, but simply to inquire what is the Church, the one body of Christ, who is the Head of the body in heaven.

What is God's thought of the Church? We have already said that the Church is not once named in the Old Testament; was it then an after-thought of God, on the rejection of the Messiah by Israel? Far from this; we shall find that it was the first great purpose of God in giving His Son to accomplish redemption. And though this His purpose was never revealed, but kept hid for ages, yet we have most striking types of the Church, the bride of Christ, in the Old Testament. We will take three of these types, or pictures, of the Church, the bride of Christ. No doubt the Holy Spirit will teach us by these pictures, and help us to understand the New Testament scriptures better.

The first will illustrate the work of our God and Father; the second, the work of the Holy Spirit in gathering this bride; and the third will bring before us the Bridegroom Himself, and very precious details as to how the bride is redeemed and brought to Himself. We refer to Eve, Rebecca, and Ruth. Bear in mind, that we do not seek to prove the doctrine of the Church by these types, but use them to help us to understand the doctrine as taught in the Acts and the epistles.

EVE

In Genesis 2 we have the first Adam as a figure of Him that was to come. God placed him in paradise, the garden of Eden. "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." How wonderfully this reveals the thought of God in eternity—His purpose that the last Adam, now in the paradise of God, should not be alone. We then see how God formed the creatures and brought them to Adam, and how Adam gave them their names. But there was not a help meet for him in paradise; not one suited to him; not one like him; not one of the same nature that corresponded to him. The animals were with him in paradise, companions we may say; but there was no real correspondence. No creature was of his nature meet for him—no creature meet to be ONE with Adam.

Mark, this was absolutely the case until "The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man." It is quite true, we could not have seen this hidden type of Christ and the Church if the Holy Spirit had not revealed it in Eph. 5:30. Now all is clear.

There was no Eve until Adam had been laid in the figure of death—the deep sleep. Until then he was alone, though in the midst of all creation. The Lord Jesus tells us the very same thing; speaking of Himself, He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). He was there with His disciples, or in heaven in the midst of angelic hosts; but as to His nature, He was and must be forever alone unless He die and be raised from the dead.

The moment Eve saw Adam, she was like him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. It will be so with the second Eve, the one bride of Christ; when she shall be presented to Him, she will be glorious; yea, the moment we see Him, we shall be like Him (Eph. 5:27; 1 John 3:2). There was no Eve until Adam in figure died and rose again. Then she corresponded perfectly to Adam—was part of Himself. There was only one meet to be so. And the New Testament carries all this out fully as to the Church, the bride of Christ. To faith, all is now sure; but the presentation in the perfect likeness of Christ has not yet come. Surely all this should prepare us to find something marvelously new and different when Christ, the last Adam, had died and had risen from the dead. And that something is new; that new creation is the Church of God, one with Christ, the Head in heaven. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh." Thus was Eve meet to be Adam's companion and a help meet in the paradise of Eden. And all this was the work of God, according to His own purpose.

And is it so, are all believers, according to the purpose of God, made meet for the paradise of God? Yes, we can all give "thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). As this is the first figure of the Church, it is well to note how all is of God. And this answers to Ephesians 1 and 2.

Just as Eve was one with Adam, blest in and with him with every blessing in the earthly paradise, it was God who thus blessed her, and thus placed her the one bride of Adam, who had been dead in figure and was alive again. All was of God—so now of all the saints of God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. But all, all is of God. Did God raise Adam from His deep sleep? Then "what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.... And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:19-23).

And then the same blessed God has raised us up from the dead: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:5-6).

Yes, the first thought of God in giving His Son, was that He might not remain alone, the Man in the glory of the heavenly paradise, but that He should have a bride, the Church, in His own perfect likeness. Sins and sin forever passed away, she should share in His glory forever with and like Him—having His own sinless perfection, His own very nature. Oh, what will it be to be the companion of the last Adam in eternal glory, in every way corresponding to Him, as Eve to Adam! No other creature in the universe is to have or can have this place. We will next go on in our meditations to the second figure or picture of the bride of Christ. Can you, reader, recognize the hand of God (as in the picture we have looked at for a moment) in your new creation? Then dwell on the purpose of God as to your eternal future.

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