

God's Buildings

The Holy Scriptures bring God before us in many of His activities. He is represented as a husbandman who planted Eden's garden for the blessing of man, who planted Israel as a vine in the land of promise for His pleasure, and who will root up every plant that He has not planted. We read of God as the Shepherd of Israel. In one Scripture God is viewed as a refiner of silver, in another as a warrior who stands in defence of His people; and among His many other activities God is seen as a builder, and in this character we shall consider some of His works.

1. The universe

"He who built all things is God" (Heb. 3:4).

This Scripture presents God to us as the great architect and constructor of the vast universe in which His eternal power and divinity are set forth, and where the creature can see the display of His creatorial glory. The immensity and complexity of God's handiwork, with its wonders and beauty, whether viewed in the heavens or on the earth, declare the greatness of the mind and the skill of the hand that brought all into being and fashioned it in perfection.

When God desired to bring Job to the end of himself, He asked him a few questions regarding His handiwork. God asked Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? (...) To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its corner stone. (...) Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb?" (Job 38:4-8). In spite of all man's vaunted progress in science, he could not answer these questions, and the many others that God put to the patriarch.

How very solemn it is that the men who have learned most of God's wonders through searching the earth and the sky, should remain ignorant of God's creatorial glory, in spite of all the knowledge they have acquired. They see the wonders of creation, but have not learned what David learned so long ago, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). It is not by searching that man finds out God, but as we read in Hebrews 11:3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." The most ignorant regarding the natural sciences, if taught of God through His Word, has the secret of God concerning His handiwork, of which the most advanced, if ignorant of God as revealed in Christ, knows nothing.

2. The Woman, as a picture of the Church

"Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:22).

Having built the world, a small fragment materially of the vast universe, but which had such an important part to play in the working out of God's purpose, God formed man, and set him up as lord and head of the lower creation; but in all that was put under him, Adam found none that could be a helpmate to him. To provide a suitable companion for Adam, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him, and taking a rib from his side, God built a woman and brought her to Adam, who said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:21-23).

How blessedly does God's workmanship shine out in the wife He provided for Adam! Man's helpmate was his complement, an object for his heart's affections in which he could find delight and a response to his love. She was perfectly suited to enter into all his thoughts, and to share with him the place that God had given to him over the lower creation.

This relationship was the fruit of God's wisdom, goodness and providential care for His creature; and though man has fallen from the state of innocence in which the relationship was formed, the relationship with its privileges and responsibilities still remains to be observed, and to control men and women, in whatsoever conditions of life they may be found. Where the relationships of man and woman, husband and wife, are acknowledged according to the divine

institution and order, there will be blessing; but where these are set aside there will be disorder, confusion and trouble.

In Christianity the natural relationships are enhanced by the light of the new creation; for the husband is not told to love his wife as Adam loved Eve, but rather as "Christ loved the Church"; and the wives who are to be thus loved are to submit themselves unto their own husbands "as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22-25).

From Ephesians 5 we learn that Adam and Eve are a lovely picture of Christ and the Church. Adam, in his deep sleep, represented Christ entering into death that from Himself there might be formed a suitable companion, able to enter into His feelings, thoughts and desires; an object upon which His heart could rest with pleasure, and that could share with Him His place of glory that God has given to Him as Man, and as Head over all things.

3. The New Jerusalem

"A city (...) whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

The God who built the universe, and who built a wife for Adam, is going to build a city for the display of His glory, and where His saints will find rest and joy. Abraham, we are told in Hebrews 11:10, waited for this city. He made no attempt to build a city for himself, or to help men to build theirs; nor did he, as Lot did, seek the companionship of men in their cities. Waiting for God's city, he was content to be a pilgrim and a stranger in the land which God had promised to him for an inheritance; and in his path of separation from the world is an example for Christians, who have been called with a heavenly calling, to find their part in the city which God will build.

From Hebrews 12, we learn that Christians, in faith, have already come "unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"; a city that is described in the beautiful symbols of Revelation 21-22. Not a trace of human workmanship is there, all is of God. Its glory, light, wall, street, river, trees and fruit are all divine and heavenly, setting forth in wondrous display God's nature, and His provision for those He has chosen for His heavenly kingdom. Nothing that defiles can enter God's city; all is according to the purity of God's nature, and all pulsates with the divine life that He has given to His heavenly saints.

The overcomer of Philadelphia receives many wonderful promises, among which are, "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem" (Rev. 3:12). In the opening verses of Revelation 21, the eternal state is revealed, with its new heaven and new earth, the old order having passed away; and it is in this eternal scene, where all things are new, fresh from the hand of God, that the New Jerusalem is found. It comes out of heaven from God, a city for the display of His glory, a tabernacle in which He shall dwell with men, and a vessel that will delight the eye and heart of Christ for evermore.

4. The house of God

"(...) you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22).

Both the tabernacle, built by Moses, and the temple, built by Solomon, are figurative representations of the building that God has now in the Church, and that He will have in the world to come and the world without end. Moses and the craftsmen specially chosen of God, and endowed with skill and with His Spirit, built the tabernacle, but it was according to the pattern given to Moses on the mount. Solomon received wisdom from God, and is a type of Christ as builder, and as Son over God's house.

In Ephesians 2 the Church universally is seen to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and New Testament prophets, both as regards their persons and their writings; and in this divine structure Jesus Christ is the Chief Corner Stone, the One upon whom every line of the building converges, and upon whom is written every thought of God in relation to His work. When completed, this building will be a holy temple in the Lord, a shrine for the divine glory in which God can dwell.

Even now, while waiting the completion of the holy temple, the saints are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. God dwells in the Church now by the Holy Spirit, and this is an aspect of the Spirit's presence that is largely overlooked in Christendom, and to which all true saints of God should pay attention. The Holy Spirit not only indwells every true believer, but He dwells in God's house, to order and arrange all things according to the will of God. When

promising the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17).

The 14th chapter of First Corinthians is largely occupied with the presence of the Spirit in God's house, viewed in its local aspect. We ought to be aware of, and make room for, the presence of the Spirit in all the gatherings of the assembly; and ought also to realize that the presence of the Spirit in God's house is not confined to the local aspect. If there is not liberty for the Holy Spirit in the gatherings of the saints, the Spirit is being quenched as well as grieved.

"You are God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9).

Not only in the Scripture quoted from Ephesians 2, but also in 1 Timothy 3:15 and Hebrews 3:6, is the Church as God's house viewed in its widest aspect on earth. In 2 Timothy 2:20 it is likened unto a great house in which there are vessels of dishonour as well as vessels of honour.

The local assembly in 1 Corinthians 3:9 is viewed as God's building, the foundation being laid by the apostle Paul in his labour there. Christ was the foundation laid by the master builder, but those who laboured in the local assembly were to take heed as to what they brought into it. This exhortation remains for us today. Each in his measure labours in relation to the local assembly, though, it is evident, that teaching is specially in question.

The materials that are valuable and durable are represented by gold, silver and precious stones, materials that were found in the construction of the tabernacle and temple. These would seem to indicate ministry from God's Word that formed in the hearts of the saints the truths of divine righteousness and glory, God's grace in redemption, and the precious divine features that are found in their perfection in the Son of God. Wood, hay and stubble are destructible, and comparatively worthless, and doubtless refer to teachings that are not divine, but human in character. There are those that treat God's assembly as a human association for the welfare of man in present things, and are either ignorant or forgetful of its divine character. Then there are those who are agents of Satan, and who do not hesitate, as professed servants of God, to minister all kinds of doctrines that are destructive of Christianity. The day is coming when God will deal with all His servants, real and professed, and with their work.

"I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18).

If Satan is able to bring into the professing church that which defiles, he is unable to touch that which Christ builds. Simon Peter, by revelation from the Father, confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God; and this drew from the blessed Lord a further revelation, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16-18).

The Lord had come into the world to labour, saying in John 5:17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Great was the labour and toil of the Son in Manhood, and great the work accomplished on the cross for the glory of God and the blessing of men. But the building of His Church awaited His resurrection and ascension to God's right hand. It is from His place of exaltation that the Son is building His Church, a living structure that takes character from Himself, each stone built upon the foundation of who and what He is as a living Stone, having His own life and sharing His place of relationship, as Man, with the Father.

Peter was a stone who, like every other living stone, was built by the Son of God into this inviolable structure. All the power of Satan was brought to bear against the Son of God on the cross, but that power was broken, and Satan vanquished; and he is utterly powerless against the new creation work of the Lord.

"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5).

When Peter wrote these words in the second chapter of his First Epistle, he no doubt had in mind what the Lord said to him, as recorded in Matthew 16. In this view of the building, the Lord Jesus is not presented as the foundation, but the "chief corner stone, elect, precious"; the living Stone that Israel's builders refused. God has answered Israel's refusal of His Son, by showing that He has the chief place, the pre-eminent place, in all His schemes.

Every true Christian is a living stone in this structure, and every one a holy priest to offer the sacrifice of praise to God. There is no question of man building here: we are built into the spiritual house when we come, as living stones, to Christ, the living Stone. We are not viewed here coming to Christ as sinners, but coming to Him as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2). And as belonging to the spiritual house we are also "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

5. The resurrection body

"(...) we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

Already the Christian has part in the new creation, being in Christ, and in this way forms part of the Church built by the Son of God. Very soon we shall leave this world behind to have our part in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem; and for that scene we must have glorified bodies, like Christ's body of glory. The body in which we shall dwell with Christ in the Father's house, and in which we shall reign with Him in His coming Kingdom, is brought before us in 2 Corinthians 5 as "a building from God."

God has given to us the bodies that are suited for earth; He has prepared for us the bodies in which we shall be before Him eternally in heaven. As with every other building that belongs to God we can see in this that which is for His praise, and which brings glory to Him.

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