

# *The Church's Heavenly Character*

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*I*t is of the utmost importance that the Christian reader should understand the doctrine of the Church's heavenly character. It will be found to be the only preservative against the varied forms of evil and unsound doctrine which prevail around us. To be soundly instructed in the heavenly origin, heavenly position, and heavenly destiny of the Church is the most effectual safeguard against worldliness in the Christian's present path, and also against false teaching in reference to his future hopes.

Every system of doctrine or discipline which would connect the Church with the world, either in its present condition or its future prospects, must be wrong, and must exert an unhallowed influence. The Church is not of the world. Its life, its position, its hopes, are all heavenly in the very highest sense of that word. The calling and existence of the Church are, humanly speaking, consequent upon the present rejection of Israel and the world.

The garden of Eden and the land of Canaan were successively the scenes of divine operation; but sin, as we have often heard, marred them both, and now all who believe the gospel of the grace of God, preached to them in the name of a crucified, risen and ascended Saviour, are constituted living members of the Body of Christ, and are called upon to abandon every earthly hope. Being quickened by the voice of Him who has passed into the heavens, and not only so, but being united to Him by the Holy Spirit, they are called to occupy the place of strangers and pilgrims on earth.

To think of the Church as a worldly corporation, be it ever so sound and scriptural, is to sink far below the divine thought about it. The doctrine of the Church's heavenly character was developed in all its power and beauty by the Holy Spirit in the apostle Paul. Up to his time, and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel. There had been all along a chain of witnesses, the object of whose mission was exclusively the house of Israel.

The prophets bore witness to Israel, not only concerning their complete failure, but also the future establishment of the kingdom agreeably to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac,

Jacob, and David. They spoke not of the Church as the Body of Christ. How could they, when the thing was a profound mystery, “*not revealed to the sons of men?*”

The thought of a Church composed of Jew and Gentile, “*seated together in heavenly places,*” lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony. Isaiah, no doubt, speaks in very elevated strains of Jerusalem’s glory in the latter day; he speaks of Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; but he never rises higher than the kingdom, and as a consequence never brings out anything beyond the covenant made with Abraham, which secures everlasting blessedness to his seed, and through them to the Gentiles. We may range through the inspired pages of the law and the prophets, from one end to the other, and find nothing concerning “*the great mystery*” of the Church.

Then, again, in the ministry of John the Baptist we observe the same thing. We have the sum and substance of his testimony in these words: “*Repent, for the kingdom is at hand.*” He came as the great precursor of the Messiah, and sought to produce moral order amongst all ranks. He told the people what they were to do in that transition state into which his ministry was designed to conduct them, and pointed to Him that was to come. Have we anything of the Church in all this? Not a syllable. The kingdom is still the very highest thought. John led his disciples to the waters of Jordan – the place of confession in view of the kingdom; but it was not yet that character of repentance produced in them who are made members of the Body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself then took up the chain of testimony. The prophets had been stoned; John had been beheaded; and now “*the Faithful Witness*” entered the scene, and not only declared that the kingdom was at hand, but presented Himself to the daughter of Zion as her King. He too was rejected, and, like every previous witness, sealed His testimony with His blood. Israel would not have God’s King, and God would not give Israel the kingdom.

Next came the twelve apostles, and took up the chain of testimony. Immediately after the resurrection they inquired of the Lord, “*Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” Their minds were filled with the thought of the kingdom. “*We trusted,*” said the two disciples going to Emmaus, “*that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.*” And so it was. The question was, when? The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for entertaining the thought of the kingdom; He simply tells them,

*“It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:7–8).

Agreeably to this, the Apostle Peter, in his address to Israel, offers them the kingdom.

*“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence [apoproswpou] of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; Whom the heaven must*

*receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).*

Have we here the development of the Church? No. The time had not yet arrived for this. The revelation of the Church was yet to be, as it were, forced out as something quite extraordinary – something quite out of the regular course of things. The Church as seen in the opening of the Acts exhibits but a sample of lovely grace and order, exquisite indeed in its way, but not anything beyond what man could take cognizance of and value. In a word, it was still the kingdom, and not the great mystery of the Church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the Church in its essential aspect have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject.

Peter’s vision in Acts 10 is decidedly a step in advance of his preaching in chapter 3. Still, however, the grand truth of the heavenly mystery was not yet unfolded. In the council held at Jerusalem for the purpose of considering the question that had arisen in reference to the Gentiles, we find the apostles all agreeing with James in the following conclusion:

*“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things” (Acts 15:14-17).*

Here we are taught that the Gentiles, as such, are to have a place with the Jews in the kingdom.

Did the council at Jerusalem apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in “One Body” that they are no more Jew nor Gentile? I believe not. A few members might have heard it from Paul (see Galatians 2:12), but as a whole they do not seem to have understood it as yet.

We infer, therefore, that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of the great mystery of the Church, but simply the opening of the kingdom, agreeably to the words of the prophets, and also to Peter’s commission in Matthew 16:18-19,

*“And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Mark, it is “*the kingdom [of Heaven],*” and not the Church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile; but Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the Church. Even in

his Epistles we find nothing of it. He views believers on earth as strangers, no doubt – but yet on earth – having their hope in Heaven and being on their way thither, but never as the Body of Christ seated there in Him.

It was reserved for the great apostle of the Gentiles to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Spirit, the mystery of which we speak. He was raised up, however, as he himself tells us, before the time. *“Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”* Things were not sufficiently matured for the development of the new revelation, of which he was made the peculiar minister, and hence he styles himself one born before the time; for such is the real force of the original word. How was he before the time? Because Israel had not as yet been finally set aside. The Lord was still lingering over His beloved city, unwilling to enter into judgment; for as another has said, *“Whenever the Lord leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgment, He moves with a slow and measured pace.”*

This is most true; and hence, although the apostle of the Gentiles had been raised up and constituted the depository of a truth which was designed to carry all who should receive it far away beyond the bounds of Jewish things, yet did he make the house of Israel his primary object; and in so doing he worked in company with the twelve, although not a debtor to them in any one way. Says he to the Jews,

*“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46).

Why was it necessary? Because of God’s long-suffering and grace. Paul was not only the depository of the divine counsels, but also of divine affections. As the former, he should act upon his peculiar commission; as the latter, he would linger *over “his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh:”* as the former, he was called upon to lead the Church into the knowledge of a *“mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men;”* as the latter, he would, like his Master, with *“a slow and measured step,”* turn his back upon the devoted city and the infatuated nation.

In a word, as the gospel with which he was entrusted could only be proclaimed upon the ground of the total abandonment of earth, the earthly city, and the earthly nation, and as Paul’s heart yearned over that nation and city, therefore it was that he was so slow to make known publicly the gospel which he preached. He delayed for fourteen years, as he himself informs us,

*“Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain”* (Galatians 2:1-2).

This is a very important passage on the question now before us. Paul had been raised up quite out of the regular course of things; his ministry was totally divested of the earthly, human

and Jewish element; so much so indeed as to give rise to numerous questions as to its divine origin.<sup>1</sup>

To him was committed what he emphatically styles his gospel; but as has been remarked, it was a question whether things were ripe as regards the divine counsels respecting Israel for the public development of this gospel. The apostle felt this to be a momentous question, hence his caution in communicating it severally to a few.

He could not, even in the midst of the Church at Jerusalem, speak openly on this grand question, because he feared that the full time had not come, and that, should he develop it prematurely, few had sufficient spiritual intelligence or largeness of mind to understand or enter into it. His fears, as we know, were well grounded. There were few at Jerusalem who were at all prepared for Paul's gospel.

Even some years later we find James, who seems to have taken a very prominent place in the Church of Jerusalem, inducing Paul to purify himself and shave his head. What was this for? Just to prevent a break-up of the earthly thing.

*“Thou seest, brother,” said James, “how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law” (Acts 21:20–24).*

Here, then, we have abundant proof of the fact that the great mystery was not understood and would not be received by the Church at Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

Now, one can well understand how the spirit of James would have shrunk from the terrible break-up which must have resulted from the public declaration of Paul's gospel amongst those whose hearts still clung to the earthly thing.

True, it was the privilege of believing Jews to breathe a purer atmosphere than that of an earthly sanctuary, yet they were not prepared for the strong meat of Paul's gospel, and

1. There has not been the lack of modern teachers who have labored to deprive Paul's ministry of its peculiarly heavenly character by placing him among the regular college of apostles whose aspect and bearing were manifestly Jewish. This they do by calling in question the election of Matthias; but to all those who need more than the exercise of spiritual judgment to guide them in this matter it may be sufficient to say that the Holy Ghost raised no question as to the validity of Matthias's election, for He fell upon him in common with his fellow apostles. However, we can well understand why those who feel themselves called upon to uphold human systems should labor so diligently to reduce our apostle's ministry to a human, or earthly level.
2. The circumstance to which allusion is made in the above quotation occurred some years later than the visit to which Paul refers in Galatians 2. The latter would seem to have been occasioned by the controversy respecting the Gentiles. This fact gives additional force to the expression *“Severally to them which were of reputation.”* Paul could not communicate his gospel to them en masse.

moreover the heart would cling with peculiar fondness to the thought that Jerusalem was to be a great focus of Christian light and testimony from whence the rays of gospel truth should emanate to enlighten all around.

Nevertheless if the mystery which Paul had communicated to them privately were to be made known to the multitude, "*the many thousands of Jews*" would not receive it, and thus the great center of light would have become the center of division.

Moreover, the very same motive which had actuated Paul on the occasion of his former visit to Jerusalem, when he communicated his gospel only to a few, lest he should run in vain if things were not ripe for the revelation – the same motive, we say, might have led him at a later period to hold his gospel in abeyance, and accommodate himself to the thoughts and feelings of those who had not as yet got beyond the earthly order of things.

Every affection of Paul's heart as a man and a Jew would have led him to linger at Jerusalem, and also to hesitate in the development of a doctrine which would cast Jerusalem and all earthly things into the shade, and raise the thoughts and affections into a far higher and purer region than had yet been realized. Paul knew full well the vanity and emptiness of vows and purifications. He saw nothing in the temple and its splendid ceremonies save a vast system of shadows of which the substance was in Heaven.

Yet his affectionate heart yearned over his brethren who were still captivated by it all, and therefore he hesitated to let the full blaze of the light which had been communicated to him shine upon them, lest it should dazzle them, habituated as they were to the shadows of bygone days.

If this be a sound view of the conduct of our apostle in the matter of the vow, etc., it places him before us in a most truly interesting point of view, and also brings out very distinctly the two features of his character, namely, as the participator in the divine affections towards Israel, and also as the depository of the divine counsels respecting the Church. Both these are lovely in their way. His fervent affection for Israel and his faithfulness to his own peculiar commission are both exquisite. Some may think he allowed the former to interfere at times with the latter, as in the matter of the vow; but it was an interference which we can well understand and account for.

His heart, however, led him to tarry in Jerusalem; yea, to tarry until the Lord had to compel him to leave it. His commission was to the Gentiles, yet again and again he betakes himself to Jerusalem, and in his unwillingness to depart from it reminds us of the "slow and measured steps" with which the glory as seen by Ezekiel had departed from the temple.

Still the Lord would insist upon His servant's leaving Jerusalem. "*Make haste,*" said He, "*and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me*" (Acts 22:18). Paul's Jewish heart still lingers. He replies, "*They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was also standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him*" (:19-20).

What pleading is here! “Their unbelief is all my fault; my vileness acts as the great barrier to their reception of the testimony – only let me remain.” Impossible! “*Depart: for I will send thee far hence, to the Gentiles*” (:21). Yes; the truth must be brought out; the divine counsels must be fulfilled; the time was come, and it was in vain for James to seek to stem the mighty current of events, or for Paul to linger or hesitate any longer: the crisis had arrived, and if Paul will after all this return to Jerusalem again, he must be carried away from it in bonds! He does return again.

The passage we have just quoted is Paul’s own account of what the Lord had said to him on a former occasion, to which we have no allusion until now. Thus, although he had been expressly told to depart from Jerusalem because they would not receive his testimony, he goes thither again; and we know the result of this visit. It was his last.

The very thing that James dreaded and sought to avoid came upon them: an uproar was raised, and Paul was delivered over into the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was determined to send him to the Gentiles. If he would not go as a free man, he must go as “*an ambassador in bonds.*” He could say, however, that it was for “*the hope of Israel that he was bound with this chain.*” If his heart had not longed so after Israel, he might have escaped the bonds. He left Israel without excuse, but he himself became a prisoner and a martyr.

Thus then, at length, Paul took leave of Jerusalem. He had visited it again and again, and would have tarried there; but it was not his place. Jerusalem had been for ages the object of divine regard and the center of divine operation, but it was speedily about to be trodden down of the Gentiles; its temple was about to be laid in ruins, and the flock of Christ that had been gathered there was about to be scattered abroad; a few short years, and that spot which had stood so long connected with all God’s thoughts about earth would be laid low, even with the dust, beneath the rude foot of the Roman.

Now Paul’s departure may be looked upon as the immediate precursor to all this. The peculiar truth of which he was the depositary could only be brought out in all its fullness and power in connection with the abandonment of earth as the manifested scene of divine operation. Hence Paul’s journey from Jerusalem to Rome must be viewed with deepest interest by the intelligent and reflecting Christian.<sup>3</sup>

Still we may ask, did our apostle, when he turned his back upon Jerusalem, take leave also of

3. It is a thought full of interest, in connection with the subject before us, that Paul’s voyage to Rome gives us the history of the Church as regards its earthly destinies. The vessel sets out in due order, as a compact and well regulated thing, framed to endure the violence of the stormy ocean over which it had to pass. After a time the apostle offers a certain suggestion, which, upon being rejected, the ship is dashed to pieces by the waves. There was, however, an important distinction between the vessel and the individuals on board: the former was lost, the latter were all saved. Let us apply all this to the history of the Church in its earthly path. The testimony, as we know, emanated from Jerusalem, whence Paul started on his way to Rome. Apostolic testimony was designed to guide the Church in its earthly course, and preserve it from shipwreck; but this being rejected, failure and ruin were the consequences. Yet in the progress of the failure, we perceive the distinction between the preservation of the Church’s corporate testimony and individual faithfulness and salvation. “*He that hath ears to hear*” will always find a word of instruction and guidance for him in times of thickest darkness. The waves may dash in pieces the corporate thing – everything connected with earth may vanish away – “*but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*” The above picture might be traced far more minutely by those who feel they have intelligence and warrant to do so.

Israel? No, he did not yet despair. True they had not received his testimony at Jerusalem, but perhaps they might receive it at Rome; they had not given him a place in the East, perhaps they would in the West. At all events he would try. He would not abandon Israel, though Israel had rejected him.

Hence we read that,

*“after three days [from the time of his arrival at Rome] Paul called the chief of the Jews together; and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans ... For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain ... And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:17, 20, 23).*

Here, then, we have this blessed “ambassador in bonds” still seeking out “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and offering them, in the first place, “the salvation of God.” Still “they agreed not among themselves,” and at last Paul is constrained to say,

*“Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”*

There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and full development of Paul’s gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world – a prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel.

He had done his utmost to tarry among them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet’s verdict; but now all was over – every expectation was blasted – all human institutions and associations present to his view nothing but ruin and disappointment; he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations – the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Spirit.

Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, they ceased to come



within the range of testimony, wherefore the testimony ceased.

Now let us see what this “*mystery*,” this “*gospel*,” this “*salvation*” really was, and wherein its peculiarity consisted. To understand this is of the utmost importance. What, therefore, was Paul’s gospel?

The peculiarity of the gospel preached by Paul had not so much reference to God’s way of dealing with the sinner as with the saint; it was not so much how God justified a sinner as what He did with him when justified. Yes; it was the place into which Paul’s gospel conducted the saint that marked its peculiarity. As regards the justification of a sinner, there could be but one way, namely, through faith in the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There could be numerous degrees of elevation as regards the standing of the saint. For example, a saint in the opening of Acts had higher privileges than a saint under the law. Moses, the prophets, John, our Lord in His personal ministry, and the twelve, all brought out varied aspects of the believer’s position before God; but Paul’s gospel went far beyond them all. It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts 3 and 10; rather it was the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile in one body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes, and heavenly conflict. The apostle does not contemplate the Church as a pilgrim on earth, (which, we need not say, is most true,) but as sitting in Heaven: not as toiling here, but resting there.

*“He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:6).

It is not that He will do this, but “*He hath*” done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His Body were raised also; when He ascended into Heaven, they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the counsel of God, and to be actualized in process of time by the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven.

Such was the thought and purpose of the divine mind concerning them. Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on. So long as earth was the manifest scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the apostle of the Gentiles, from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the heavens with Christ.

When Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner, he had, as it were, arrived at the end of all human things. He no longer thought of the Church as exhibiting anything like a perfect testimony on earth. He knew how things would turn out as regards the Church’s earthly path; he knew that

it would fare with it even as it had fared with the vessel in which he had sailed from Jerusalem to Rome; but his spirit was buoyed up by the happy assurance that nothing could touch the unity of the Body of Christ, because it was a unity infallibly maintained by God Himself.

This was the spring of Paul's joy as he lay a despised and neglected prisoner in the dungeon of Nero. He was not ashamed, for he knew that the Church, though broken in pieces here, was nevertheless held in the everlasting grasp of the Son of God, and that He was able to keep it until the happy moment of its rapture to meet Him in the air.

It may be asked: How can believers be said to be seated in heavenly places when they are yet in the world, struggling with its difficulties, its sorrows and temptations? The same question may be asked in reference to the important doctrine of Romans 6: How can believers be represented as dead to sin when they find sin working in them continually? The answer to both is one and the same.

God sees the believer as dead with Christ, and He also sees the Church as raised with and seated in Christ; but it is the province of faith to lead the soul into the reality of both. "*Reckon yourselves to be*" what God says you are. The believer's power to subdue indwelling corruption consists in his reckoning himself to be dead to it; and his power of separation from the world consists in his reckoning himself to be raised with Christ and seated in Him. The Church, according to God's estimation, has as little to do with sin and the world as Christ has; but God's thoughts and our apprehensions are very different things.

We must never forget that every tendency of the human mind not only falls short of, but stands actually opposed to all this divine truth about the Church. We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it – how it was forced out, as it were, and pressed upon him; and we have only to glance at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth, and the thought of an earthly corporation is attractive to it.

Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority.

It is not to be supposed that the Protestant reformers exercised their thoughts on this momentous subject. They were made instrumental in bringing out the precious doctrine of justification by faith from amid the rubbish of Romish superstition, and also in letting in upon the human conscience the light of inspiration in opposition to the false and ensnaring dogmas of human tradition.

This was doing not a little; yet it must be admitted the position and hopes of the Church engaged not their attention. It would have been a bold step from the church of Rome to the Church of God; and yet it will be found in the end that there is not distinct neutral ground between the two; for every church, or to speak more accurately, every religious corporation, reared up and carried on by the wisdom and resources of man, be its principle ever so pure and ever so hostile to Catholicism, will be found, when judged by the Spirit, and in the light of

Heaven, to partake more or less of the element of the Romish system.

The heart clings to earth, and will with difficulty be led to believe that the only time wherein God ceases to be manifestly occupied about earth – that the only unnoticed interval in the history of time – is just the period wherein He, by the Holy Spirit, is gathering out the Church to form the Body of Christ; and moreover, that when God was dealing publicly with earth the Church, properly so called, was not contemplated; and that when He shall resume His public dealings with the earth and with Israel, the Church will be out of the scene.<sup>4</sup>

Sects are not the Church, nor religious parties the Body of Christ. Hence, to be attached to the sects is to find ourselves in some of those numerous tributary streams which are rapidly flowing onward into the terrible vortex of which we read in Revelation 17 and 18. Let us not be deceived – principles will work, and systems will find their proper level. Prejudice will operate, and hinder the carrying out of those heavenly principles of which we speak.

Those who will maintain Paul's gospel will find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid the splendid pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy will surely drown the feeble voices of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church.

Let the spiritual man who finds himself in the midst of all this sad and heart-sickening confusion remember the following simple principle: Every system of ecclesiastical discipline, and every system of prophetic interpretation which would connect the Church in any one way with the world, or things of the world, must be contrary to the spirit and principles of the great mystery developed by the Holy Spirit in the apostle of the Gentiles.

The Church stands in no need of the world's aid in the matter of order or discipline. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church, broken and scattered though it be, notwithstanding all man's unbelief about it; and if there be any introduction of the earthly or human element, it can only have the sad effect of grieving Him whose presence is the very light of believers and the spring and power of ministry.

I must now close. I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in my mind concerning the doctrine of the Church; but I have no doubt of its real importance, and feel assured that as the time draws near much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present, it is to be feared, few really enter into it.

If it were understood, there would be far less effort to attain a name and a place on earth. Paul, the great witness of the Church's heavenly calling, must have exhibited a poor spectacle in the view of the children of this world, and so will all who maintain his principles and walk in his steps; but he comforted his spirit with the thought that "*the foundation of God standeth*

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4. The reader will, I trust, understand the distinction between God's public actings and His secret operations by His providence. The former ceased when Israel was set aside, and will be resumed when Israel comes again into notice; the latter are going on now. God controls the wheels of government and the counsels of kings to bring about His own great designs.

sure, *having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His.*” He also knew that in the very darkest time there would be a few who would “*call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*” May our lot be cast among such, in the midst of this sorrowful scene, until we shall see Jesus as He is, and be made like Him forever!

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.

(Taken from the conclusion of Mackintosh’s work, *The Life and Times of Elijah the Prophet*)

(Minor changes to punctuation and grammar have been made for better reading.)

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