

***THE CHURCH AN HABITATION OF GOD, THROUGH THE  
SPIRIT.***

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A

**SERMON**

ON OCCASION OF

**THE SETTLEMENT OF A PEOPLE,**

LATELY UNITED IN

**THE ORDER OF THE GOSPEL:**

Preached at Mr. WALLIN'S Meeting-House, near the Maze-  
Pond, Southwark, Jan. 13, 1774.

WITH

**THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.**

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BY BENJAMIN WALLIN, A.M.

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The Lord is in his holy Temple. Psalm xi. 4.

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**1774**

## INTRODUCTION

*Sometime having been spent in prayer, Dr. Stennett addressed the Church to this effect—*

AS a separation has not long since taken place in the Church lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Gill, occasioned by a difference of opinion respecting the choice of the Rev. Mr. Rippon their present Pastor; and as, with their cordial approbation and consent, the persons so separating have agreed to form themselves into a distinct Christian Church; and as you, my Friends, thus formed by mutual content, have invited us to be witnesses of your incorporation it is our desire that one of you will be pleased to inform this Audience of the particulars of that solemn transaction.<sup>1</sup>

PERMIT me now, my Friends, *it was added*, to congratulate you upon this public recognition of that solemn transaction among yourselves, by which you have been formed into a distinct Christian Community. I say CONGRATULATE, because however the occasion of it is, in one view, unpleasing; yet, in another, it is happy. A SCHISM, and a SEPARATION are two very distinct things: the former is dishonourable, sinful, and pernicious; the latter lawful, and in some cases necessary. In this situation, not as angrily rending yourselves from the Church to which you belonged, but peaceably and with their consent separating; in this situation, I say, we consider you.

<sup>1</sup> *This was accordingly done, and the Members of the Church signified their concurrence by listing up their hands.*

Indeed it were to be wished, that there were no separations in any Churches, but such as are occasioned by their members becoming so numerous as to render it inconvenient, if not impossible, for them all to meet under one roof. But there are other occasions equally lawful, and which may be overruled by Providence to ends the most desirable and important.

THE rights of private judgment, and of every individual to choose for himself who shall be his instructor in the great concerns of religion, are very important rights. They are rights for which our pious Ancestors contended at the hazard of their lives: and it were well if we, as Dissenters from the established Church, were duly sensible of the privilege we in these respects enjoy. Now, occasions of that kind upon which we are at present assembled, afford an opportunity of decently and properly asserting these rights to the view of the whole world. This you now do; and the doing it in this truly Christian manner will, I hope, have a happy effect to serve and promote the cause of religious liberty. At the same time, give me leave to observe, that these rights, which you enjoy as men and as Christians, ought not to be abused to the gratification of mere fancy or imagination. For, an unhappy humour of this sort, were it to prevail, would in a course of time, by dividing the interest of Christ, greatly weaken and injure it. But, as I persuade myself you are not influenced by mere fancy or humour, I trust this consequence will not follow.

ANOTHER good purpose that, I flatter myself, will be answered by this separation in the manner it has taken place,

is the exhibiting on both sides such a mild, candid, charitable temper to the view of all around you, as will be exemplary to other Churches, and nobly ornamental to the Christian Profession. It is a great and singular happiness that, however you and our other worthy Friends have differed in opinion respecting the choice of a Pastor, yet you can cordially agree to acknowledge one another as Christian Churches, and to wish and pray for each other's welfare and prosperity. We feel real pleasure on the occasion: I speak not only my own sense, but that of my Brethren in the ministry, and of every truly pious person in this assembly.

AND then another and main advantage which will, I hope, accrue from this event, is the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom and interest among us. I am very sensible that this division, though not like that of Reuben, must have occasioned many searchings of heart. And it is fit that serious enquiry should be made by all concerned into the motives that have urged them to it, and the temper they have discovered in all the transactions leading to it. But, whatever pain the recollection of some unavoidable imperfections attending the management of this business may have occasioned; that pain will, it is hoped, be balanced by the pleasure arising from the desirable prospect before you all of the spread of real religion, and an addition to the number of the faithful disciples of Christ. If your prayers, my Friends, for the people from you whom are separated, theirs for you, and ours for you both, are

graciously heard; there will be happy cause, in time to come, to look back with joy and thankfulness on this providence.

I HAVE now only to add, that we cordially accept your invitation to offer our prayers to God this day on your behalf; that you may walk in the fear of the Lord and the comforts of the Spirit; that your hearts may be knit together in love; that you may abound in every good word and work; that you may in due time be directed to a Pastor after God's own heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding; that you may increase in numbers, gifts, and graces; and that at length, you and all other Christian Societies of every denomination, which compose the one universal Church, may be made perfect with Jesus Christ our great Head in the realms of light and glory above.

*Several Ministers prayed, the Reverend Mr. Wallin delivered the following discourse, and the Rev. Mr. Rippon closed the service with prayer.*

## SERMON

### EPHESIANS II. 22.

#### *FOR AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT.*

IN addressing you, my Friends, on this singular and important occasion, nothing seemed more pertinent or needful than to fix your thoughts on the design of that constitution in which

you are joined: A due sense of this will conduce to a spirit and conduct becoming the sacred character you bear, for want of which some communities have degenerated into a wilderness of confusion and discord, and at length have most shamefully dissolved.

MOST of you have many years enjoyed the like christian fellowship with others, under the direction of a Pastor, whose superior abilities are manifest in his many judicious publications, which will perpetuate his name to posterity: I therefore do not consider you as strangers to that criterion of a gospel church presented in the text; but, seeing you this day offer yourselves before God, angels and men, as newly incorporated in the name of Jesus, I hope it will not be unseasonable to remind you of a point in which your dignity, and happiness as a people are so nearly concerned. And this I the rather do, as but too many, now, by their behaviour seem to have lost sight of this glory of the Lord in his sanctuary.

THESE disciples at Ephesus are evidently considered in a social capacity: Thus runs the context; “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together;” i.e. say some in the church universal; q.d. “Ye a particular body, in like manner as the catholic church, are co-edified, or built together, a constituent part of the same divine building.” Thus they would make each gospel church an image and member of that which

is universal: but this forced construction of the passage seems adapted to favor an ecclesiastical system of police, for which there appears no foundation in the oracles of God. Indeed the church, mystically taken, is universal or catholic; it comprehends all the chosen and redeemed, out of every nation, who have, are, or shall be gathered to Jesus, who is the head of the body the church, Col i. 18. Also in this epistle, chap. i. 23. the church is said to be “his body:” and in the same sense we understand the word in chap. v. 25. “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.” The church, likewise, whom Saul and other blind zealots most cruelly persecuted, may be styled universal, since all who called on the name of Christ, in every place, were exposed to their rage. [Gal. i. 23. compared with Acts ix. 2.] But these christians, as already observed, are addressed as a particular body in Christ, united in the order of the gospel. Nor have we any idea of a visible catholic church, possessed of governing authority, in all the New Testament. If such a community existed, a visible catholic bishop would be needful: and on this arrogant, but groundless pretense of the Romish church, it is notorious, her bishop, the Pope, has proudly assumed a supreme jurisdiction over all Christendom. But the building described in the context, is no other than answers to every society of the faithful, who, united by a solemn covenant in the Lord, meet in one place under their proper officers, as appointed by him, who now, as a Son, superintendents his own house. At Ephesus, as in all other places, in the primitive times, the

disciples being thus joined together, are said to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself the chief corner stone, in whom, i.e. in Christ Jesus, the whole building fitly framed and disposed, as directed in the word, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; the same idea is conveyed in the clause immediately preceding the text, “in whom, i.e. in Christ Jesus, ye also are builded together;” which agrees with Col. ii. 7. “Rooted and built up in him;” a parallel passage with 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. where this spiritual house is represented, as resting on the authority and power of Jesus, whom the Father hath chosen, and laid a foundation in Zion.

Now this view of the faithful in a gospel church state first implies UNION. It is essential to a building that the parts are united; and, accordingly, the saints in this fellowship are externally joined to one another, by mutual consent, and they are, or ought to be, cordially united in judgment and love, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, it becomes them, as those at Jerusalem, to be of one heart, and of one soul. A mere external union is a deception which must be displeasing to the omniscient and holy Redeemer, and cannot answer the end of christian communion. This metaphor also carries, in it the idea of ORDER. Every house has its form, and is raised on some plan drawn or chosen by the master builder; in like manner a church, is not a casual irregular assembly, but a society of believers, fitly framed together, according to the wisdom and will of the divine Jesus, the great architect and proprietor of this spiritual house. It was this order among the disciples at



Colosse that afforded the apostle such unspeakable pleasure, Col. ii. 5. a joy highly rational in those who love Zion, for hence results BEAUTY, which is another thing imported by this view of the saints; thus harmoniously cemented, they are comely as Jerusalem, like a company of horses in Pharoah's chariots, Cant. i. 9. not only strong and bold, as becomes the warfare of faith, being strong in the grace, which is in Christ Jesus, but exceeding beautiful, well matched, drawing together in their traces, as it were step by step, in the chariot of a gospel profession; these are the footsteps of the flock, unto which enquiring souls are directed, ver. 8. which are amiable in themselves, and precious in the sight of the Lord. Some may ignorantly boast in an irregular and confused manner of social religion; they may despise order, and censure their brethren, who conscientiously keep the ordinances as they were delivered from the beginning, but every deviation from the pattern is a deformity in the building: order is the source of beauty in the natural and in the moral world, and the beauty of the saints is in proportion to their order in Christ; and further, we have conveyed by this draught an idea of CAPACITY FOR USEFULNESS. A well contrived house is adapted to the convenience and comfort of its inhabitants; and glorious are the accommodations for a humble and gracious soul among the saints in communion, who walk together uprightly in all the commandments of the Lord.

BUT the subject before us is the *principal end* of this divine house: a practical sense of this will have an important

influence on all who compose it, for the want of which some presume in a loose careless manner, under this sacred profession to their own great disadvantage and the grief of their brethren, by which also the Holy Ghost is offended, whose operations and gifts are needful to the growth or existence of a church. Our attention is required to the *design* of this incorporation of the faithful in gospel order, or, in other words, for what *end* these Ephesians, and all saints in the like fellowship, are united? And behold the noble design of this divine institution! “In whom, says the apostle, ye are builded together, FOR AN HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT.” Be astonished at the grace! The end of this building is nothing short of a dwelling for the Most High!

IN handling this wonderful sentence, I shall humbly attempt to explain it, ascertain the residence of God in his church, and then, to our further improvement, point to some things suggested by the declaration that merit our notice; and, may the Lord incline us, to embrace and apply what may be exhibited from the scripture, on a subject so sublime and mysterious, and render it subservient to our more perfect knowledge of Christ!

THREE things are presented in the passage; namely, the general use of this spiritual house, “*for an habitation;*” its glorious inhabitant, which is *God*; and the *medium* or *mode* by which Jehovah is graciously pleased to take up, and continue his abode with his people.

I. A GOSPEL church is for an *habitation* or *dwelling*. An idea essential to the metaphor. Saints united in this order are a spiritual house, which supposes inhabitants: This divine constitution or building, however beautiful and grand, when viewed in a just point of light, is not erected for a mere show, much less intended to be solitary; nor is it possible that it should stand alone. Earthly fabrics are often forsaken. Men build large and fair houses, but after all their trouble and expense, through some occasion, either cannot, or will not dwell in them; hence we sometimes see the seats of the great, yea and the palaces of princes, falling to decay, and in a manner entirely demolished; but the house of God cannot exist in a state of total desolation; its materials are its inhabitants, for everyone who belongs to a church of Christ has a mansion therein. The faithful may be distinguished in these different capacities and relations, but there is no separating this building from the saints who dwell in it, they are one and the same; not only builded together for an habitation, but, if I may so express it, they are inhabited by themselves, each one dwelling in that house, whereof he is a member; a mystery this, in no degree absurd, but perfectly rational, yea, essential to a body framed of intelligent beings, as the church; in which every worshipper claims a place where he has a name; and accordingly to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, was the ardent desire and joyful hope of Old Testament saints, Psalm xxiii. 6. and xxvii. 4. which cannot be decently confined to the material building of Solomon's

temple, though that was ceremonially sacred, for literally speaking, no one could desire to dwell in that house for ever; but his place in the assemblies of Zion, where the Lord put his name, and communed with his people, is what the pious Israelite preferred to any enjoyment in life.

BUT the subject before us is not the inhabitation of the faithful in the church they compose; much less is it that of an angel: Holy angels, it should seem, are round about Zion, and many of them, though invisible, present in her assemblies, which some have thought evident from 1 Cor. xi. 10. but Paul's charge to Timothy before the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, to observe the instructions he had given him, seems a strong intimation that they are to be considered as attending the church on earth, which is the more credible from that famous appeal concerning them in Heb. i. 4. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Some have thought that the paintings and carvings of cherubs in the tabernacle and temple, and more especially those prying over the mercy-seat, were typical of angels in the church; be that as it may, from the above we are led to consider them as beholding our order in Christ; nevertheless these holy spirits are not of the redeemed unto God by the blood of his Son, nor have they, properly speaking, a name or a place in the house of this building; indeed in Jerusalem above, they join those of the just made perfect, Heb. xii. 22, 23. and accordingly we read in Rev. v. 11. that John heard the voice of many angels round

about the throne, with the beasts and elders, giving honor to the Lamb that was slain; and we have reason from scripture to conclude, that they will be our everlasting companions in glory, but the church militant is not the dwelling place of angels. But,

II. THE great ONE for whose residence this house is erected, is no other or less than *God himself*: “For an habitation OF GOD.” This may be applied to each divine person. The Son no doubt has a dwelling in his house over which he presides: of this we are insured, Matt, xviii. 20. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, says the Lord, there am I in the midst of them;” and again, chap, xxviii. 20. “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” He is likewise presented, Rev. ii. 1. walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks. And that the Holy Ghost has an abode with the saints, is not to be questioned, for he dwells in each of them, Rom. viii. 11. “By his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” He it was against whom the church rebelled in the wilderness, Isaiah lxiii. 10. And that the same divine person is with the saints now, is evident from Acts xiii. 2. where we find the Holy Ghost directing the disciples to separate Saul and Barnabas whom he had called to a particular service; but, accurately speaking, the Father is intended, seeing the person referred to stands distinguished from Jesus, in whom the church is built, and also from the Spirit, through whom this habitation of God is maintained: It is God in Christ, who hath reconciled us to himself by his Son, in whose face the light of his glory shines

forth in the gospel. Nevertheless in this fellowship we have communion with each divine person, no doubt with the Father and the Son. John xiv. 23. saith our Lord, with respect to the man who loves him and keepeth his words, “My Father will love him and we will come unto, and make our abode with him.” And again, 1 John i. 3. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” And it scarce will be denied that the saints, in this order, are given to expect communion with the Holy Ghost. Thus the ultimate and grand design of this spiritual building is to be an habitation of the most High; that the Lord God might reside in the midst of his people: but will God indeed dwell on the earth! how is this, or after what manner? which leads,

III. To *the medium* or *mode* of this gracious residence of God with his people: and the text declares it is, “through the Spirit.” This may be applied to the habitation itself; and then it intimates the dependance of the saints on the Holy Ghost for their existence, in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. In this spiritual house each one is formed by the Spirit, and made a lively stone for the building; on the same divine Agent also, every one depends for his increase in grace, with which stands connected their prosperity and continuance in a social capacity, for this house is supported by its members: and further, the church being in a mutable state, requires frequent additions, otherwise, from mortality alone, a dissolution would ensue: now there is not a grace exercised, nor a good work performed, nor a single saint joined, or anything

essential to the being of a church, without the Holy Ghost; so then, the faithful are dependent on his operations and grace for their capacity as a spiritual house. But it is more natural and proper to apply this to the inhabitation of God, and then it either denotes, in general, that his residence in the church is spiritual and wonderful; so indeed is all communion of the infinitely perfect and blessed Jehovah with his creatures; on earth or in heaven; it is adorable condescension and astonishing grace! Or, rather, this is to be understood of the Lord's dwelling in Zion, in and by the Holy Ghost, which agrees with the scripture account. We have already seen that of old God was present with his people by the Spirit, against whom they rebelled: and in Jer. vi. 8. he saith, "Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul, or *Spirit* depart from thee." This is the economy of divine manifestation revealed in the word; the abode and communion of the Father and the Son, is by the Holy Ghost, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from both; [compare John xiv. 16. with chap, xv. 26.] And that this is the mode of the divine presence in the church seems evident from 1 Cor. iii. 16. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" and again, chap. vi. 19. it is said, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you?"

THIS, Beloved, is the end of your constitution, as a church of the living God; a character truly sublime and sacred: you are joined together in the Lord, "for an habitation of God through the Spirit;" the divine Father, in his own Son, through

the Spirit, and consequently each divine person resides in you. How awful and glorious this place! It is none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven. Who is worthy of constituting a part of this divine building! and what reverence and purity becomes those who are admitted to dwell with the Lord in his sanctuary! Let us now proceed,

SECONDLY, TO prove the *residence* of Jehovah in his church. How does it appear that the saints in communion are indeed an habitation of God through the Spirit? I apprehend that the following things sufficiently ascertain this important fact.

1. THE *names* which christians bear in their social capacity. In this gospel union they are styled the *house of God*, 1 Tim. iii. 15. The estates of the rich may contain many houses, but the house of a great man or prince, to which there is an allusion, is not barely his property, but his mansion. We are told, 1 Kings vii. 1. that Solomon finished “his house,” that is, as appears from ver. 8. his house “where he dwelt.” And that this idea belongs to the house of God is evident from 2 Sam. vii. 5. “Go, and tell my servant David, thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house, for me to dwell in?” As also from Psalm xxvi. 8. “Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth.” Now this agrees with the word *habitation*, in the text, used only once more in the Testament<sup>2</sup>, where it signifies a dwelling-place. This character therefore implies the inhabitation of Jehovah in

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xviii. 2.



His church. But there is a still more expressive character of believers in communion: they are styled the TEMPLE of God, 1 Cor. iii. 16. It is the residence of Deity that constitutes a temple. And thus the Holy Ghost explains it, 2 Cor. vi. 16. “Ye are the temple of the living God:” How does it appear? It follows, “as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them.” The holy place, to which there seems an allusion in the vision of John, Rev. xv. 5. even the tabernacle of the testimony, is styled the temple, on account of the glory of the Lord, who dwelt between the cherubims, Psalm lxxx. 1. that is, on the covering of the ark or chest which contained the testimony of the covenant, called the mercy-seat; Heb. ix. 5. For the same reason, I apprehend, the body of Jesus, who is the Son of God, is styled a Temple, John ii. 19. and in Heb. ix. 11. A greater and more perfect tabernacle, than that which was of old, “for in him dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” Col. ii. 9. Now, if this spiritual building of the saints in communion, is the *house of God*, yea, and *the temple of the living God*; then it is certain that they are an habitation of the most High, and that the Lord dwells in them. Again,

2. THE *service* to be performed in this house answers to these appellations, and further proves that the Lord is there, 1 Pet. ii. 8. “Ye are built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices:” and accordingly they are styled, ver. 9; “a royal priesthood.” In all church assemblies the saints come to present themselves to the Lord, Job i. 6. they come round about him, Psalm lxxxix. 7. to offer the sacrifices of

confession and give thanks to his name; to offer up their prayers and gifts, even the sacrifices of joy on his altar, Psalm xxvii. 6. In a word, having obtained mercy, they “present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to the Father, which is their reasonable service,” Rom. xii. 1. Now, all this supposes that God is really, truly, and properly, though in an invisible spiritual manner, present in his sanctuary. It would be absurd to imagine that the object of divine service is in all respects absent, or that he is not certainly present to receive homage and worship from those who wait on him. But we know that our God is with us.

3. *BY express and repeated assurance of his presence, from the lips of his faithfulness and grace.* Exod. xxv. 8. saith the Lord to Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell amongst them.” What less this than a promise of his presence in the sanctuary they made, according to his appointment? And is he not the same God still, to accomplish his promise in regard of his ordinances under the present dispensation? Again, he saith, Levit. xxvi. 11. “I will set my tabernacle among you, and will walk among you.” And remarkable is the declaration, Exod. xx. 24. “In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” This promise is not confined to any one place, no not even to the temple, which was at Jerusalem, where the Lord set his name under the former dispensation: it is doubtless a gracious engagement to be present with his saints in whatever assembly they meet, agreeable to his will. The

same is ratified or confirmed to the christian church by our Lord himself, Matt. xviii. 20. and in many places in the New Testament. Unworthy, therefore, as we are of so great a privilege, conscientiously united in the order of the gospel, and gathering ourselves together in the name of the Lord, we may humbly claim this dignified character of “an habitation of God through the Spirit,” being fully persuaded that he dwells in the midst of his people. Once more,

4. THE *testimony of universal experience confirms it*. Of old they had sensible and undeniable tokens of God’s presence with them; We read, 1 Kings x. 11. that “the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.” Many passages show that in the former house, the Lord was to be seen; and though it may be his manifestations were not always alike conspicuous and joyful; yet the wonted discoveries of himself to his people were sufficient to engage their earnest expectation. Hence David, Psalm xxvii. 4. desires, above all things, “to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, to behold the beauty of the Lord.” And again, when in the wilderness of Judah, he thirsts after God, Psalm lxiii. 2. “To see, says he, thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in thy sanctuary.” Whence, or to what purpose, these longings of soul, unless the faithful then had been used to behold the Lord in his temple? And are there none to bear testimony to the like enjoyment in these times of the gospel! Truly, says the apostle, 1 John i. 3. “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” And have not many of us tasted this grace, and experienced

the joy of communion with God, in this way of his appointment? How often has he satisfied us with the goodness of his house, and made us to drink of the river of his pleasure, insomuch that we could truly say, “A Day in thy courts is better than a thousand!” Psalm lxxxiv.10.

IT appears then, from the church being styled the *house* and *temple of God*, from the *service* to be performed therein, from *repeated engagements by promise*, and from the *experience of the faithful*, more or less, under each dispensation, that the Lord dwells in Zion. So that you, my brethren, now joined in him, and all saints in like manner incorporated, are evidently builded together, an habitation of God through the Spirit. It remains,

THIRDLY, THAT I remark some particulars worthy of notice, which may be gathered from this sublime and sacred declaration. This criterion then of a gospel church points out,

1. THE *singular delight* the Lord takes in his people, when walking in his ordinances before him. Indeed, the Lord hath pleasure in his saints individually considered, or in a private capacity. Such is the condescension and grace of the most High, that he saith, Isaiah lvii. 15. “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Each humble gracious soul, who sanctifies the Lord in his heart, is the temple of the Holy Ghost. His ejaculatory prayers, devout meditations, holy affections, and every exertion of grace within himself, are unto God a sweet savor. His articulate supplications, likewise, thanksgivings, and

other exercises of devotion, in the closet and in the family, are highly acceptable. But still more pleasing to God are the solemn assemblies of such persons in his house, as in them there is a more public display of his glory in receiving their homage. “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,” Psalm lxxxvii. 2. His peculiar delight in the sanctuary of his church is most emphatically expressed in Psalm cxxxii. 13,14. “For the Lord hath chosen Zion, he hath desired it for his habitation; this is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” The most ardent desire and longing of heart is the idea conveyed, the same with Job xxiii. 13. “Whatsoever *his soul desireth* that he doth.” This desire of soul, and holy resolution of the Lord to rest his presence in his church, is abiding, and shows his pleasure in his saints in orderly communion; for, who will choose and determine to dwell where he finds no delight? Again,

2. IT intimates *the honor and happiness* of a place in this house. Church order stands highly recommended by this criterion to all who love God and seek communion with him. Indeed, a mere formal connection with a visible church is no honor to any man, in the sight of him who searcheth the reins; nor will it terminate in his happiness: for, what is the hope of the hypocrite? But there is no greater honor in the apprehension of a penitent sinner, who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, than to be called into a fellowship so divine, and admitted to a place in that building which is an habitation of God through the Spirit. Nor is his happiness less than his

honor; for, although these precious sons of Zion are not always alike joyous in the sanctuary, yet they who wait on the Lord shall upon the whole, and in the end, be abundantly satisfied with the goodness of his house, Psalm xxxvi. 8. for it is said, Psalm lxxxiv. 4. “Blessed are they who dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee!” And further,

3. IT shows the very *great importance* of a gospel church state to the nation or country where it is. The special and gracious presence of the Almighty stands connected with his church, which is his habitation; and with the gospel comes liberty and peace. On the contrary, many sad instances prove, that where the long impiety and wickedness of a degenerate people have provoked the most High to take the candlestick out of his place, with it have departed the honor, and felicity of the inhabitants of such countries. Antichristian powers have spread darkness and slavery through the land; insomuch that on reflection the unhappy people might justly assume the lamentation made by the daughter-in-law of Eli, on the news of the ark being taken, 1 Sam. iv. 21. and say, “ICHABOD,” the glory is departed! O may Great Britain and her offspring abroad never draw down this sore displeasure of the Lord upon them! rather, may there be a people among us to the latest posterity, who fear him; that glory may ever dwell in our land! Psalm lxxxv. 9. That man is the truest patriot, the best citizen, who is concerned to build up the temple of the Lord in his native country. Once more,

4. By this note of the church the faithful are taught—that as the residence of Jehovah among them, is the distinguishing glory of their house; so to be duly mindful of this is highly necessary and useful, in order to their fellowship one with another. The Shekinah, or miraculous light, which was the visible token of the divine presence, and for substance the same with that which conducted the fathers in the wilderness, was the glory of Solomon’s temple; but this glory was wanting in the temple built after the captivity; on which account, among other things, the ancients that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this last was laid before their eyes, wept bitterly. This glory rested on the mercy-seat within the vail, the Holy Ghost signifying, says the apostle, Heb. ix. 3. that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, but now the believer has boldness by the blood of Jesus to draw near to God, chap. x. 19. “And we all with open face behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord,” 2 Cor. iii. 18. This is that which distinguishes the communion of saints in the order of the gospel, from any other society in which they may be joined, either as men or christians; namely, that they are “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Drop this idea, lose sight of your God in the midst of you, my brethren, and the sacredness of your character disappears; you are then, no other than a *common* building, and every motive to reverence, humility, holiness, gratitude, and joy, being in a good manner lost, no wonder a threatening luke-warmness and dissipation ensues. If some, under a formal relation to the church, among

whom real christians may be found, who are yet become wanton and disorderly, had a practical sense of this certain and glorious truth; if they looked on the society to which they belong as the dwelling place of the most High, and indeed believed that He resides among them; is it to be imagined they would trifle in the manner they do? Would they not esteem their place in his house? Is it possible that they should through froth, love of pleasure, or for the sake of a little worldly advantage, on every occasion, absent from the assemblies of the church, as though they despised her? Could the nominal inhabitants of this house of God accustom themselves to absent one part of the day, as some do, on the stated seasons of appearing before him? Surely this divine truth is not in their hearts, nor in theirs, who, by their shameful late coming, continually disturb their brethren in the time of worship; or whose indecent external deportment in the congregation is such as they would, or ought to be ashamed of in the presence of a superior fellow creature. No doubt a realizing prospect of the glorious Lord on his throne in his temple, will fill the worshipper with reverence, excite him to constancy and faithfulness, yea and animate him to universal holiness. The christian who thus walks before God in his sanctuary, will have no unnecessary converse with the world, he will abstain from all appearance of evil, and even hate the garment spotted with the flesh; much less will he make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts, thereof: Far be it from the man of this character that he should despise the temple of God, or provoke



him to jealousy! A libertine professor has no pretense to the knowledge of God in his house, but will hereafter find that he has affronted him to his face, and that the holy Lord will be sanctified by those who approach him. So then, the Lord's dwelling in his church, as described, is a token of his singular complacency in the communion of saints, and suggests the honor and felicity of being admitted into this divine order; it shows the importance of a gospel church state in a nation; and likewise that this inhabitation of God is the glory of his people, by which they are distinguished and preferred above all other societies whatever; a due attention to which is adapted to promote reverence, fidelity, and universal holiness among them who partake in this fellowship.

AND does the Lord indeed dwell in Zion? it must surely be for want of a good understanding, or love to his name, if a man sees no comeliness in christian communion, has no desire after it; and much more if he can despise it. But I presume, there are none of this cast in an assembly chiefly computed of the elders, messengers, and other members of the several churches. If, however, there are any present who hope in the Lord, and yet can content themselves out of this order, their folly is not to be jollified. Alas! this is a case now too frequent: but let it be remembered, the real believer who lives out of this communion, is deficient in the evidence of his faith, and deprives himself of the highest: honor and advantage to be obtained, short of that glory and joy the saints possess at the right hand of God in the heavenly state.

As for us who are of this building, shall not the consideration of this criterion of our body, Sirs, animate us to a strict holy discipline? Are we the dwelling place of Jehovah, and is the Lord himself in our temple? What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness! How should we avoid the appearance of vanity? Be serious, humble, spiritual, and charitable, at all times, and in every place, as in the sight of God before all men! This also should put us on our guard and make us careful to whom we give the right hand of fellowship. Not that we are to refuse the least of all saints, or despise the day of small things, which would be unbecoming the disciples of the condescending and compassionate Jesus, who would not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax Many babes in Christ can scarce lisp out their confidence; nevertheless their confession, joined to other external tokens of their faith in the Redeemer, entitle them to the communion of saints no less than the more free and edifying account some other regenerate persons may give of themselves. But, seeing the Lord is among us, and that such is the nature of our constitution, that true fellowship with us is communion with him, far be it to admit those whom we cannot, in the judgment of charity, conclude are vitally united to Christ, and experienced in his grace! What can be more odious or displeasing to the *living* God, whose temple we are, than to bring *dead* sinners into his presence? They who are alienated from the life of God, and strangers to his love as a motive to their profession, however amiable in other respects,

are totally unfit for his service, and cannot be acceptable to him: so that neither the love of God or man, pleads for their admission into the sanctuary.

NEED I more than say, with what holy blushing should we reflect on the stupendous condescension and grace of the most High, that he will dwell with man upon earth! .How infinite also are our obligations to the love of the Spirit, through whom we are become an habitation of God! May his *effectual* operation in our heart produce gratitude and love to each divine person, that we may live to their glory!

PERMIT me now to conclude with a free and candid address to our dear christian friends, whose late union in gospel order is the occasion of our present assembly.

You see, Beloved, that the brotherly covenant you have this day solemnly avouched before the Lord and us, is no Ordinary engagement; it is a fellowship most sacred on many accounts, but especially as you are an habitation of God. Fix your eyes on the Lord whom you serve; may his awful and gracious presence possess you with reverence, and animate your zeal in his house! Remember that Judah is his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion, Psalm cxiv. 2. Jesus reigns where he dwells; thus saith Jeremiah who prophesied of these gospel times, chap. iii. 17. “Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord.” Consider, you are not a civil, but a religious community; yea, and not merely a religious society at your own discretion; for such there may be subservient to the edification of the saints; but you are a company of believers

incorporated under Christ, the governing Head of his church. He is your King, and you are sworn, as it were, at his altar, to his laws. Some pretend, in excuse of their neglects and disorders in this sacred connection, that a church is a voluntary society, and therefore they may do as they list; but they are deceived. True, a christian church is so far a voluntary society, as that free and mutual consent is at the foundation of their union: no man is compelled into her bosom, nor is any man to be forced upon her. But, being thus freely joined in the Lord, you are not at liberty to act according to your own will and pleasure, but are, everyone, subject to his institutions, who is a jealous God, and, as already observed, will be sanctified by them who come round him.

IF therefore any of you should hereafter be tempted to make light of this sacred contract, let him remember that his compliance with the temptation would be trifling with God and man, and with his own soul also.

DEARLY Beloved, the sloth, negligence, and disorders, too justly complained of in a day of religious vanity and dissipation, are utterly unworthy our holy profession, and bear a threatening aspect upon us; for, by a loose conduct in church fellowship the ends of that grand institution of infinite wisdom and love, are shamefully, and in a manner totally defeated.

REMEMBER, Sirs, that a leading and essential means of answering the design of orderly communion in Christ, is that of frequent solemn assemblies. By the apostle's argument, Heb. x. 25. the forsaking of these is the highway to apostacy

and ruin, both of individual professors and particular societies, of which there are many awful instances. They who give themselves to scatter, little think of their crime and their danger.

IT may be disagreeable to the popular taste and practice, but I would hope not to any here present (however, I think myself bound to it on this occasion) to remind you, that a willful habitual omission of any known gatherings of the church to which a man, belongs, whether stated or occasional, is not only unbecoming his relation in the Lord, and a violation of his sacred engagements in his name, but it also strikes at her existence. Nor do I think it easy to conceive of an evil more destructive to society, or more deserving of censure, however connived at in these undisciplined times. If a church is invested by Christ with a means of self-preservation, to doubt which is absurd; she certainly has a power to clear herself of those whose conduct, if the like universally prevailed, must issue in her dissolution. And, though she may not exert this power, can it be supposed that the delinquents will escape the notice of her Lord, whose crown and dignity are trampled underfoot, by so egregious a neglect of his precepts?

I BESEECH you, therefore, Brethren, by the mercies of the living God, whose habitation you are, that you cleave to one another in the Lord, with purpose of heart; submit yourselves to each other in him, with patience, self-denial, and diligence, as those who look not at their own, but at the things which are Christ's. Seek to multiply, but not by drawing persons from

other congregations and churches, which is indecent and carnal; and no other than an abuse of that liberty all christians have of embodying themselves, when required. No people or minister can aim at this without just offence, and endangering that communion of churches, which is no less essential to the glory of Christ and the advancement of his visible kingdom on earth, than the incorporation of individuals in particular society; an attempt to increase your numbers by any such unlawful means, is inconsistent with the great design of this meeting, namely, that you may be henceforward numbered with the sister churches. Shun then the appearance of a thing so unworthy this privilege. The communion of churches is for their mutual benefit, but it is possible for one congregation or minister, under a mistaken notion of building up themselves, to enter on measures that tend to the lessening of others, and thereby unhappily alienate those from one another, whose cordial union is of the utmost consequence to the public Tranquility.

AVOIDING, therefore, a selfish and unsocial disposition, be ready to fall in with every undertaking for the general good. They do not understand the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, nor their own constitution, who imagine that the independence of a gospel church lies in a power of refusing to join her sister communities, in what may conduce to the love of God, and the order of that gospel. The primitive churches, though being distinct, they interfered not with each other's government, yet were all united on every occasion in whatever

might promote the comfort and edification of the faithful in common. And permit me to observe, that not only in the new world of Americas but in Old England also, frequent unreserved associations of gospel ministers and churches, have of late been remarkably owned; and would it not be grievous to see them discouraged in these populous cities, where opportunities and gifts abound, and where the harmony of the disciples is of so great importance not only to themselves, but also to the brethren throughout the whole nation? Satan gets no small advantage by any occasional distance; therefore, let us not be ignorant of his devices, but, as those who wish well to Zion, rejoice in an opportunity to unite with other churches, in their endeavors after the general prosperity.

AND, above all, it being needful, you will permit me, my Friends, most earnestly to intreat you to avoid a shadow of discord or shyness towards the dear church, or any of its members, from whom you have separated. May you cordially embrace each other on every future occasion: This, I am persuaded, will fulfil our joy, who now behold your going forth in the order of Christ, with earnest supplications for your success in his name.

FINALLY, Brethren, let no man among you be wanting in his duty. Pray ardently, watch diligently; not slothful in this great business in which you have engaged, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

AND may our beloved young brother, whom you have called to preach to you a season, be highly acceptable; and even come in the fulness of the Blessing of the gospel of peace. And take it in good part, that I heartily wish you, as soon as may be, to meet in a convenient place by yourselves, that you may see what encouragement you have to settle with a Pastor, and not continue long as sheep without a shepherd, or out of the way of increase as a church. In the meantime, may you, Beloved, and may we all in our several communities, be sensible of the gracious presence of the chief and great Bishop of souls, who will feed the flock of his heritage, which he has loved so as to purchase it with his own blood, and who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

THE END.

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