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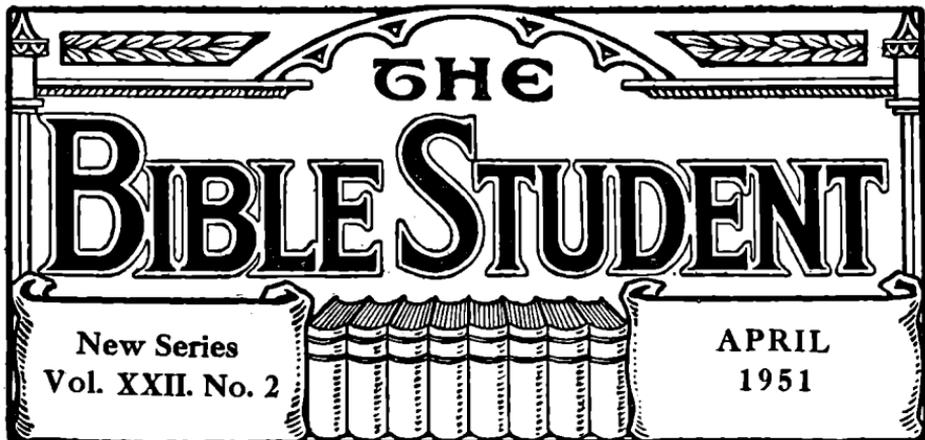
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*“The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light”*

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*Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD*

# The Bible Student

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

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## IN THE HEAVENLIES

BY THE EDITOR

The fourth occurrence of "the heavnlies" (Eph. 3:10. R.V.) marks it as the sphere from and in which angelic hosts behold in holy wonderment the manifold wisdom of God. But the strangest fact of all is that their gaze is not heavenward but earthward; not at the proud empires of man's building, but at the workmanship of God—at the church of the redeemed.

Here the aspect of "the heavnlies" is somewhat changed. It becomes a stage, a platform, or, we may say an amphitheatre, full of intense movement and episode. In the present reference the scenes are presented for the edification and enlightenment of heavenly spectators; in the next and last reference the clash of conflict and reality of spiritual antagonists are made perceptible. And considering the mysterious truths we have already learnt concerning this heavenly sphere, it is little wonder, as Candlish points out, that other intelligences, good and evil, should desire to behold what is going on amid the redeemed of earth—the one in order to learn, the other in order, if possible, to frustrate.

Behold, then, this sphere of manifestation! If in the individual believer there is revealed the superabounding riches of God's grace and love, in the aggregate Body of believers is manifested the manifold, the "much varied, many coloured", wisdom of God. Fix your gaze then on this church, which is His body, "*the fulness of Him that filleth all in all*"—no other description so fitly expresses the mystery of that body. Beyond the cavils of men, beyond the apparent failures, and the evidence of earth-stains on her fair garments—regal and glorious stands erect the church of our God, "looking forth as the morning, fair as the moon, pure as the sun, terrible as bannered hosts." So God views her, so is she.

How then, we may ask, does this church exhibit the manifold wisdom of God? In at least five ways:

(1) *In its conception* (Eph. 1:9, 10; 3:5, 6, 11, etc.). It is clearly indicated that the idea of an *ecclesia* of God was one of the "hidden subjects" in God's eternal counsels. It was not some great religious 'movement' of man's devising, but a divine plan born out of the eternal counsels of the Godhead. As Dr. H. G. C. Moule says on Eph. 3:11, "The redeemed church corresponds to this Plan; it is (in kind, in essence) the realization of the Divine Idea. No other and better thing in that kind is to succeed it. The past 'ages', angelic, paradisaic, patriarchal, Mosaic, prophetic, have led up to the Universal Church, in its spiritual reality, as their goal." What was hidden is now manifest. Here before us is the disclosure of the heart and mind and will of God—Calvary, the Tomb, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the waiting time, and then the "rushing mighty Wind", gathering into Itself and filling all the blood-bought company, henceforth called "His Body"!

(2) *In its constitution* (1 Cor. 12:12, 13, 14; Eph. 1:22, 23). It is a spiritual Body, constituted as such and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Something far greater and grander than what men call the church. It is a mystical Body, of which Christ is the Head. "As He without measure is the Fulfilment, or Ideal, of Divine Attributes, so she in measure is the Fulfilment, or Ideal, of Divine Graces; which are, we may venture to say, the Attributes in their reception and manifestation by the regenerate Church. She is the Body through which is realized the Will of the Head, the Fulfilment in which is realized the Grace of the Head" (Moule). Human language breaks down in seeking to compress God's thoughts concerning this Body into limits within our understanding.

(3) *In its comprehensiveness* (Acts 15:14, etc.). Lift your eyes, my soul, beyond paltry bricks and mortar, beyond party walls of exclusion and inclusion, beyond gaudy vestments and tinsel paraphernalia of little men and minds—lift them high and far towards the horizon of God's eternal vistas, view the boundaries of His "City Foursquare!" View therein a multitude that no man can number, out of every nation and people and tongue; for is not the promise of the Father to the Son: "I will give Thee the *nations* for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession"? The truth as to the *universality* of the church is one of its most glorious characteristics (cf. Rev. 5:9 ff.).

For

There's a vastness in God's mercy  
 Like the vastness of the sea.  
 For the love of God is broader  
 Than the measure of man's mind.

(4) *In its community.* If the wisdom of God is displayed in sending the Good News among all nations and in gathering out of them a people for His name, it is displayed to even greater degree, if possible, in the binding of those gathered into a marvelous *unity of organism and faith*. So that, in spite of all the innumerable points of difference between peoples of such varying origin nationally, socially, temperamentally, and intellectually, what reveals the church as God's handi-work is its mystical *unity of life*. In fact, in Christ's High Priestly prayer in John 17, where the unity of His flock is so emphasised, the crucial evidence of Christ's mission being Divine is this *organic oneness* of all believers—read John 17:20-23; and 1 Cor. 12:26, 27, etc.

On this point Dr. Griffith Thomas wrote some very pertinent remarks: "Herein lies the importance of the church to the individual. Individualistic Christianity is a contradiction and an impossibility . . . unattached Christians are not found in the New Testament. . . . It must constantly be borne in mind that the true, full, vigorous, mature Christian life is impossible to any Christian who tries to live a solitary life."

(5) *In its consummation.* The Apostle describes something of the glory of this consummation later on in this epistle: "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it; that He might sanctify it . . . that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). We need to visualise that picture in its most glowing colours, to fill every word with its fullest heavenly meaning, in order to catch the true import of the whole statement. And in this same connection we may not unfitly use the words of the same Apostle elsewhere recorded: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Do not fail to notice it is *in the present* that this church is unfolding to countless myriads in earth and heaven, the "variegated wisdom" of God. Herein is revealed one of the mysterious purposes

of the church—"which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:12).

"Is there anywhere, in some solitary chamber, or some dark and lone prison cell, a single sinner repenting? Is there a meek and humble saint of God breathing his last on lowly sick bed, or amid the din of battle, in a dying testimony for the Saviour who loved him? Angels are watching. And as they watch and minister, how do they desire to learn all the way by which the Lord led him through much tribulation unto glory, and to discover in it all new evidence and new illustration of the manifold wisdom of God!" (Candlish).

Such present revelation of God's wisdom is seemingly but the prelude to a certain wider and universal pageant in the succeeding ages, when will be displayed in scenes of unutterable glory to countless galaxies of heavenly principalities and powers the "*exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus*" (Eph. 2:7). Again in the words of the saintly Candlish, "as one soul after another is added to the church of such as shall be saved; as trophy after trophy is gained for the cross of Christ; as things go on manifestly ripening for the judgments of the latter day, as they see the axe laid to the root of every tree which our heavenly Father hath not planted, and the wrath of man made to praise God, and crooked things made straight, and rough places plain, and a way being prepared for the coming of the Lord; as thus they witness, amid many vicissitudes, the advance of Christ's kingdom and its final victory; Oh! whatever new and fresh emotions of grateful and adoring wonder must fill the minds of these pure and loving spirits, while in true and deepest sympathy with the Saviour and the saved alike, they discover through the church, in the heavenlies, ever new and fresh instances, each more marvellous than what went before, of the wisdom, the truly manifold wisdom of God!"