

The Public Ruin of the Church

Notes of a Meeting in London in September, 1847 - 1 Tim. 3:15, 16; 2 Tim. 2:19-22

John Nelson Darby

Ques. What is the church, and in what sense is it now in ruin?

J.N.D.-- There is, dear brethren, great importance in the subject we are about to enter upon, and I feel that the Lord is particularly gracious to us at this time. It is very certain He is always so, whether we apprehend it or not, but He manifests His power in working in the midst of His people. It is not that I am unconscious of the trials and difficulties of "brethren," but at the same time I do discern the Lord's hand at work, and it is ever cheering to see this, for when He takes anything in hand, the soul that trusts Him is sure to get blessing, because He is ever working for our good, though He may sift and humble us. I see that some of the saints are brought more than ever to value their position, and if asked as to this would say, Yes. In this I see positive blessing. I see there is flesh (and the sifting in many cases will manifest it) *but still blessing*, and this is a comfort to those who know how to trust God. Assuredly there is failure, great failure, but our failure does not close the eye to the fact that God is working. It is true the world has crept in among us; I admit it; but I do not dwell upon it now, but when God begins to work there must be blessing, although, of course, when the Lord stirs up the pool a little of the mud will appear, because it is there.

Many dear brethren have been troubled at the expression "the ruin of the church"; now I can quite understand this, and I make no complaint about their jealousy lest it should be thought that the church could fail, because in one sense it is impossible that the church can be ruined; but there is confusion in some minds between the purposes of God, and present dispensation in which man is placed under responsibility. In speaking of the ruin of the church, we speak of it as down here, set to manifest Christ's glory in unity on the earth, and we must remember that there we are placed, and as in this responsibility, there we must stay. If it could fail spiritually it would be disastrous indeed! There are two thoughts respecting the church in ruin which are full of mischief. The thought on some brethren's minds is, that we intend by this the interruption of God's purpose, which evidently cannot be. There is a jealousy, which I respect and for which I have no regret, lest the idea of the church in ruin should seem to affect the purpose of God. As regards the purpose of God the church cannot be ruined, but as regards its actual present condition as a testimony for God on earth it is in ruin. The other thought is: Well, suppose it is in ruin, so it must be; there we are and there we must stay; so that we are saved at last, never mind; we will take no thought about the present condition of the church, being satisfied that we are saved from the wrath to come. This listlessness and hanging down of the hands, causing cessation of all spiritual energy, is induced by a want of apprehension of what the church is in God's sight. But practically many saints think they are to remain content in the ruin. There is danger in taking up such a thought, because it would be the denial of the power of God. To unbelief discouragement may be the result of this idea of the church's ruin, but I do not look at it as discouragement, because I believe the grace and power of the Lord is suited to the need of the church *such as it is* at all times. I should feel it to be a very sad effect if the expression "ruin of the church" were to dishearten a soul about the operation of the Spirit in bringing blessing to the church. Neither of the suppositions I have alluded to can be proved, for it is impossible that the church can be in utter ruin in the sense of upsetting God's purpose, or that the *power of the Lord* is enfeebled when there is actual present ruin. His working will be according to *the state the church is in*, not to the state she is not in. We are all liable from the feebleness of our minds to say too much or too little, even

where truth is held. Man is in a sad state, and I should get disheartened unless I saw the power of Christ to meet that state. God's purpose, of course, is unailing, and therefore it is not true that the church can fail as it exists in God's purpose. What we want is not so much an abstract notion that the church will be saved, but real practical faith in the application of the resources of God to meet present circumstances. If a Christian is in a bad state, and I do not look beyond it to Christ I am troubled, but if I do I have confidence, and in that sense I am at rest, because I know the Lord can and will bring it right by His power working for him. I should feel sorry if seeing failure should enfeeble faith as to the Lord's care of the church, and I have felt the danger of this; still I say He introduces blessing according to the present condition of the church. We must not say, if we are looking for blessing in the path of faith, the church is sure to be brought through according to God's purpose of grace, it would produce listlessness; we have to look to the present working of His power in blessing to glorify Christ. God always takes an interest in the church's circumstances, and if we are looking for blessing, we shall find it even in times of the greatest failure, for God will have His church in glory, and living faith sees not only the need, but sees also the thoughts and mind of the Lord about that need, and counts on the present love of the Lord. It is as true of an individual as of the church. As having the Spirit of Christ I cannot rest in the thought that a Christian is secure in Christ, and therefore not endeavor to instruct and exhort him and lead him on. The church will be saved, and so will every member of it; but if I have the affections of Christ, I cannot be contented unless I see the power of the Spirit in any individual saint manifesting that saint's relationship to Christ, and just so is it with the church of God; if my faith is in exercise, I am not satisfied unless I see the carrying out of its relationship to Christ *as a present thing*. If I see in an individual saint that which is not consistent, I am not happy, and so of the church. I do believe in these latter days that the Lord has awakened the minds and souls of many of the saints who were walking in single-eyedness, to examine what the church of God is. Therefore it is not surprising that Satan should come in to resist the truth of the Lord's coming, and the church's relationship to that. Besides this, many have come into the position of blessing, without knowing in themselves what the church's blessing is, and therefore feebleness is the result, for when worldliness crept in they fell backward and were discouraged. They had fellowship in the blessing, but they had not intelligence and fellowship in the principle and grace that produced the blessing, and consequently when there is the want of blessing, restless apprehension and uncertainty will be the result, for when Satan comes in upon our souls, the shallowness of our faith appears.

Well, I see this, and bless the Lord that He is awakening in the souls of many saints everywhere the question-" What is the church of God? " I have no doubt that with many very dear saints we should find that they have no definite idea of what the church is beyond the thought, that there are certain persons who are saved and brought to glory. This is true, but then it is clear that the understanding of the relationship in which the church stands to Christ is the basis of all its affections to Christ. If the Lord is now awakening saints to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the relationship of the church of Christ, and it is not understood, we cannot be bearing a true and faithful testimony for God; and I add further that the truth which does not come up to any special testimony of God at a given time is used by Satan to hinder its reception. Satan will use a past testimony to hinder the reception of the testimony God has raised up for His saints. Thus, the unity of the Godhead is a truth we all hold, but it was held by the Jews for the upset of Christianity. They held " Jehovah our God is one Jehovah," but they did not hold the Father and the Son. Thus they strove to upset the special testimony by which God was then acting-the revelation of the Father and the Son. If God is presenting truth to set His saints in a place of testimony, Satan will also seek to perplex their minds about that very truth, so that they should not be able to give any testimony concerning it. If Satan succeeds in distracting their minds so that they become tired of it,

and go back to *past truth*, then Satan has gained his point by perplexing their minds. Now this is most important. Yet the Lord has always the upper hand of Satan. I doubt not there will be some Lots, who will get tired, but I believe the exercise of soul on the subject will be used by the Lord to bring the souls of those who are faithful on to more solid ground. Thus as to the Lord's second coming, and the presence of the Holy Ghost in the church, many may get hindered, but souls walking in simplicity will be more strengthened by these efforts of Satan.

As regards the salvation of any soul, it is by the blood and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I do not dwell now on the great truth of the work of Christ, and the quickening of the Spirit; neither do I dwell on the fact that the Old Testament saints were saved by the blood, and will be in resurrection glory with the Lord. I assume all this as acknowledged truth, taking it for granted that the soul may rest there, while I go on to other points. And first, Has God taught us anything about the church of God?

Now there are many very precious saints, sound in the faith, who are not prepared to accept what the church of God is as set forth in the word of God. If it is meant that all the saints ever saved will in the end be in company in glory, and surround the second Adam as His faithful, so to speak, in redemption and life through Him, and they call that the Assembly of God, I have no objection. I do not doubt that the second Adam will have all around Him in glory, as the first Adam had all around him in sin. But scripture speaks of another thing which greatly concerns us-of our *place*, our *privileges* and *responsibilities*. In Israel it was the same thing; it was true that there was salvation before Israel was a people, for Abraham was saved before Israel was brought in, and yet there was a distinct revelation concerning Israel, and relationship based on it; and if any neglected the revelation, they would not only have been unfaithful, but would have lost blessing. David was saved as Abraham was, but the manner of his relationship and responsibilities towards God on earth were not the same as Abraham's, because David formed part of a people placed in a position, the claims of which did not apply to Abraham. If Samuel and others had neglected this, they would have been unfaithful to God, because the ground on which God had set them as a *nation* was the measure of their special responsibility to Him. In the word of God I find that the church of the living God is a body brought into testimony by the Spirit of God definitely and distinctly, as set in a special relationship to God. And now, as the Lord may enable me, I will show you what the church is.

The church of the living God is the body of saints formed on earth in unity with Christ in heaven as the Head, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to form them into unity with Christ at the right hand of God. The church is not merely a number of saved persons, but a body formed into unity with Christ their Head, by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven consequent on the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God. There has been a habit of calling all the saints from first to last the church, and there is a fear lest tenderhearted saints who have done so should be alarmed by altering it. I greatly respect the jealousy of souls (who have the consciousness of the electing love of God, in saving every one whom He has called from Adam downward), in being alarmed lest this distinction should affect the foundation of salvation through the blood according to God's electing love; but still it is my duty as well as my privilege to understand the position in which God has set me, and to call by the right name what God has called by name in scripture.

The Lord said to Peter, " On this rock *I will build* my church." He had not been building from Adam downwards, but He says, " *I will build.*" What do I find people talking about? A visible and invisible church. Now this is Satan's lie. The so-called visible church is in fact the world, and cannot give any testimony at all for Christ. If I say it is an invisible body, the testimony is all gone. In Israel, what was the visible body then? A nation. God's unity then was the unity of a nation, ninety-nine out of a hundred of whom were not converted-the true saints were invisible for God had His hidden ones among them. When

Christ came Anna spake of Him *to all who waited for redemption in Israel*. But the church of God is very different, though so often confounded with this state of believers in Israel. The saints are now formed on earth into a body in unity with Christ risen by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven in consequence of the exaltation of Jesus. Our relations, our affections and our duty to Christ are all founded on this truth; and if it be not understood, there must be defect in the walk and in the consciences of the saints. When the Lord said to Peter, "I will build," of course it was a thing not yet done. The foundation stone was Christ.

We all know the way the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of this; indeed that epistle is founded on the truth that God has set Christ far above all principality and power in heavenly places consequent on His death and humiliation. Redemption work gave Him the title, although *as the Son* it was His already. The church is put into association with Him *there*; Eph. 1 and 2. Before Christ came they waited for righteousness, and God forbore, but now we are waiting for the *hope* of righteousness; not waiting for righteousness, but for the hope-what belongs to righteousness. The righteousness of God is perfect in its accomplishment, Christ the Righteous One being set down in glory. God has now set up a people in union with Christ their Head by the power of the Holy Ghost; hence I find that Jew and Gentile distinctions are done away. Before, the whole ground of God's dealings was the distinction of His people the Jews from the Gentiles, but now there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." Was that ever before? At that time they were Gentiles in the flesh, but now made nigh. He "hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition." God had Himself built up the wall between them which He has now broken down, to make of twain one new man. Now many a Jew had been saved, but had not been made one new man with Gentile sinners called by God, through Him who hung upon the cross and abolished the enmity, and having ascended on high formed both into one new man in Himself. Simeon and Anna and many godly Jews who looked for redemption in Israel were saved, and saved, of course, as alone any can be, as saints are now saved; and what did God do with them? left them Jews. But when Peter preached and three thousand souls believed, what did God do with them? He added them to the church. "In whom also ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The old habitation-a temple made with hands-is cast down, and a new one formed both of Jews and Gentiles. Eph. 3 opens out this mystery and adds, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly... according to the power that worketh *in us*"; not *for us*. Chapter 4 is practically speaking of *the vocation*. If we get away from what has previously been spoken of, we cannot walk worthily of the calling *by which we are called*, and God has called the saints to be His habitation. It is not enough to be merely saints, but they must listen to the vocation, and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It was not enough for Abraham to be a saint, but he must leave Ur of the Chaldees, because this was his calling, and if he had not obeyed, he would have acted most inconsistently as a man of God. When God had given him a sign to keep of His covenant relationship with Him, if his posterity had neglected to keep it, they would, have been cut off from God's people-outwardly manifested as such on the earth. So also we do not answer to God's calling unless we obey it. Of course, the church will form a glorious body in heaven, but the Spirit in addressing the church does so as on the earth. The Holy Ghost has come down and formed the church for a habitation of God here on the earth, not in heaven. In Eph. 4 we find certain gifts for the edifying of the body of Christ on the earth, not to edify it in heaven; "edifying itself in love" that is not in heaven; "making increase of the body" must be on earth.

In I Corinthians 12 I find the same testimony most distinctly.

The Spirit baptizes into one body on the earth, not in heaven. "Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body"; this was not done before. Israel was the body, as far as there was one in any sense, or God's assembly in the wilderness, and most of them unconverted. "Now ye are the body of

Christ, and members in particular." Nothing can be plainer than that the body is formed on earth (of course to be glorified in heaven) by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven after Jesus was glorified. This is what the church is as taught by the New Testament.

When I look at the church in glory, I look at it as a body securely and infallibly perfect in God. There will then be no question of glorifying God, for God will glorify Himself *in us*. I see that whenever man is put in a place of responsibility, in which he fails, God brings in a better accomplishment. Thus Adam fails, and the Lord Jesus becomes the fulfiller of his responsibilities for the glory of God as the second Adam. Israel failed; God gave them His law and thus brought them into a certain relationship with Himself which did not exist with any other people, and He required them to bear testimony to this, and for this they were responsible. Under God's new covenant the law will be written in their hearts, so that they will yet keep it. The priesthood itself failed, and I see the same thing in the church-at first set up, and then failing, but God will accomplish all in full purpose in glory; but there I see an important difference, for we ought to be by the Holy Ghost the manifestation of God's thoughts down here. What do I see in the church? The bride of Christ, engaging His affections as His bride, and her affections should be according to her relationship.

Now what do I mean by the ruin of the church? A simple question will answer this. Who will show me the manifestation of the unity of the body of Christ? I cannot find it; but I can find saints that will be saved; I can find the unfailing faithfulness of God in manifest tokens of His faithfulness, " for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst "-and therefore blessing, but the church as a manifested body on the earth is ruined. When Lo-ammi, not my people, was written upon Israel, still the Lord in Haggai comforts them with " according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." The power of God could not change, and hence the word, " fear ye not." When God said to Israel, " not my people," it was not that God gave them up. He did not change His mind; no, *never!* They shall be His people at last, because He did not mean in *purpose* when He said Lo-ammi but now they are Lo-ammi still.

I have been much struck of late with the fact that the Lord never addressed Israel as His people in the three prophets after the captivity (though He says they shall be hereafter) still the word was " fear ye not." It is not simply, then, the evil amongst " brethren "* that gives me sorrow, but a certain character of discouragement among them (because of circumstances) from the lack of simple faith to rise above the circumstances to Christ.. Does Christ love the church less? Is He less powerful? Faith has constant unfailing confidence in Christ. I know what sorrow is, but discouragement I do not know. If you are counting on your own strength, then I am not surprised at your discouragement, but " He that keepeth Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth." We ought to be humbled-ah! humbled in the dust, if you please, but never discouraged. A truly humble man is not discouraged; the discouraged man is not a humble man, for he has trusted, as man, to something beside God; *true nothingness* cannot. " While men slept, his enemy... sowed tares." Does this discourage? No. " Let both grow together until the harvest." Some years after the conversion of my soul I looked around to find where the church was, but I could not find it. I could find plenty of saints better than myself, but not the church as it was set up with power on the earth. Then I say the church as thus set up is *ruined*, and I cannot find a better word for it. The church is ruined as Israel never was, and will be cut off as though it had never been, for this reason: when Israel was God's witness on the earth, the veil was not rent, and therefore if Israel failed under the old covenant, they can be brought in under the new, but the church was founded on the earth in the spirit of the new covenant, and if it fails, there is no veil to be rent now. Judgment *has* been executed on Israel, and Israel has no place now as a nation, but on the church God has not executed judgment; we must not confound ruin with

cutting off.

(* The *Plymouth* breakdown had taken place.)

I feel the importance of definitely apprehending the relationship in which the Lord has set us; it will touch us in our consciences, not merely saying the church is secure-surely it is, but we ought to be touched with the sense of our relation to Christ, and the responsibility of that relationship. Hence would flow that rigid obedience, and obedience is the only thing in which a Christian should be rigid, it would keep us from latitudinarianism; and there should be nearness to Christ which would keep us from sectarianism, the most natural weed of the human heart (sectarianism is getting an interest in a little circle round ourselves), and would give us a feeling as to, and an interest in, the whole church of God, for Christ can love nothing less. Then I shall refuse to own anything that is not the bride of Christ, but be ready always to acknowledge and receive that which is the bride of Christ. Will Christ have an English bride-a Swiss bride-a French bride? No. The evangelical alliance, is that it? No. At home and abroad I find this question, What is the church of God? One says, The church is visible. What do you mean? -that the professing church is the visible church of God? What is its testimony? Is it to Christ its heavenly Head, separate from sinners? Another says, It is invisible. What? the church of the living God invisible! What then is its testimony? It is only invisible because in sin. There is a false church visible, a true one invisible.

But there is no enmity produced by such a conviction against those mixed up with the evil, or in ignorance of it, because the man who is certain, though he may be pained, can never feel enmity. When " brethren " came out, what were they? Nothing. What was their feeling? They took up the interest of the church of God, desiring to see all who loved God manifested in it. A large measure of blessing followed; numbers joined. Then came trouble and trial within, and that plentifully occupied their hearts, and practically that became their circle, and consequently not the church of the living God. People say, we have been *too narrow*, we must mix up a little. No, never, I cannot go back. " If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." I have nothing to go back from. The one desire of my heart is the beauty and blessing of the church-the bride of Christ. That will make me earnestly love all saints for they are of it. I desire its entire separation to Christ to whom she belongs-espoused as a chaste virgin. My feet in the narrow way--my heart as large as Christ's.

It occurs to me to add a thought as to difficulties in some minds. The church of God as distinguished from other things which are found in scripture. This is not only a question of interest to our minds, but one of extreme importance. First, the question as to Rom. 11. To many minds it has the appearance of grafting the church on to the previous system. This has the effect of keeping the mind in abeyance. If our souls are kept in hesitation there is no affection at work, and what I desire to see is active affection. Secondly, Eph. 2:19, " Fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Lastly, distinguishing between the church of God and the kingdom of heaven. There are two things (Matt. 16), " On this rock I will build my church "; there is no key there. Then it is further said to Peter, " I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

It is clear to me that Rom. 11, properly speaking, has nothing to do with the church as such, though it has to do with those who go to form the church. There is no thought here of the body in unity with the Head in heaven. The unbelieving Jews were broken off because of unbelief. Now in no possible sense could it be said that the Jews were broken off from the church, for they were never in it. The apostle speaks also of breaking off the Gentile branches. That cannot be the church, because in no possible sense can it be said that the church of the living God in its true sense is broken off. The whole wording of the chapter proves that the olive tree has reference to the line and channel of the administration of God's

promises on the earth. In *that* all this takes place. The children of Israel were heirs of promise according to the flesh; they were broken off *and the Gentiles* grafted in. The Gentiles will be broken off if they do not continue in God's goodness, and the Jews grafted in again. The church cannot be broken off nor grafted in again; the olive tree chews the successional administration of God's promises on the earth. It is connected with God's outward dealings, and the moment this is seen the difficulty of the chapter is removed. The Jews will be grafted into their own Olive Tree again, not into this new thing, the church of God.

The passage in Ephesians is in direct contrast with what is here spoken of as the olive tree; it owns neither Jew nor Gentile. It is the position of the church down here, " fellow citizens with the saints." It is a simple fact that the Gentiles are what they never were before, but so, too, are the Jews who believe. The Gentiles are not brought into the previous condition of the Jews. The passage does not speak of a previous Jewish state, the Jews themselves together with Gentiles are brought into a new condition where both are made *one new man*; they are " fellow citizens " together. It is not uniting the Gentiles to the previous Jewish constitution, but bringing Jews and Gentiles into a common new one.

Now one word as to the kingdom of heaven. It is in one point *connected with* the church, because it is the administration of the power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, though it is invisible or in mystery now. It is not the reign of Satan or of the four beasts, but the reign of heaven. It is the reign of righteousness and judgment, and the thought of its being the church will not do, as I do not find *grace* characterizing it. When the kingdom of heaven was preached by John, he said, " Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." " He will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend." Now this is judgment, and though the church will be associated with Christ in it as reigning with Him, yet the kingdom of heaven has not the same character as the church of the living God. Again, " Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." This has nothing to do with the church of God or the gospel. Still the church has a testimony to the kingdom of heaven, that it is to be set up. Again in Psa. 68:23, " That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same." Now this is vengeance, and not the characteristic work of the power of redemption. This greatly facilitates the understanding of the psalms, for in them we constantly find the Spirit of Christ crying for judgment on His enemies. The dreadful expressions of vengeance in the psalms apply to the judgment of enemies on the setting up of the kingdom. In Psa. 21:8 we find that in consequence of the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God there will be judgment upon His enemies, as it is said, " Thy right hand shall find out all thine enemies "; it speaks of Him as King. But in Psa. 22 there is not a word about enemies. When He cried out, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? " He was suffering for sin in the way of atonement. When it was that kind of suffering, His soul entered into it, as *He*, and *He alone*, could know it. Then I find nothing about *enemies*, but " I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." The principle is, that He takes His place among a happy people. The church is altogether above and beyond the kingdom; the church is a happy people associated *with Christ in the love God has for Him*. The church will reign with Christ over the kingdom, and she now owns Christ as King by right.

To return to Eph. 2 There is something entirely new. " We are his workmanship " (v. 10), " and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," (v. 20). They are not the prophets of the Old Testament, but of the New. This we see by comparison with chapter 3: 5, " it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." What is here spoken of as revealed is something entirely fresh. There is *one new man* made of two sets of people. Jew and Gentile are done away with, and " *He* is our peace, who hath made both one." Jew and Gentile are brought in as " fellow citizens." The Gentiles could

not be made Jews, but both are reconciled to God in one body by the cross. The apostle addresses those *near* and those *far off*, and of both one new man is made in Christ. They are " fellow heirs " in the new thing, the heavenly Jerusalem if you like it.

In Rom. 11 the point discussed is whether God has cast away His people. Whether Israel whom He foreknew should be cast off? " God forbid! " says Paul, " for I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew "; though He may have cast off the nation temporarily. Now this question applied to the church would have been utter nonsense, as He was then and ever since gathering the church of God in by the gospel. " But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Was this casting them off? In verses 4, 11, 26, the apostle gives three proofs that God had not cast off His people. God replied to Elijah when he said that he was left alone, It is not so at all, for " I have reserved unto myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." " Even so then at this present time also," says the apostle, " there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Again, God is caring for them in the very bringing in of the Gentiles " to provoke them to jealousy." And again, " So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." At the close of chapter 8 the apostle had finished the salvation question-" no condemnation." Then comes the difficulty that in planting the saints in Christ he threw down the special place of the Jews-" there is no difference." He then reconciles this with God's immutable purposes towards Israel, and in chapter 9 reasons thus: If you say that as a child of Abraham you have a right, then Ishmael and Esau come in. Your national claim is through God's sovereignty, your own title of descent from Abraham will not stand, for then Ishmael and Esau have a title to come in. God exercises this same sovereignty in letting in Gentiles. Then in chapter 10 he shows the Jews how they *stumbled*. This is not the principle of *sovereignty* as in chapter 9; it had happened according to the plain testimony of the Old Testament: " They stumbled at that stumbling stone." God has not ceased to care for Israel, He is still carrying out His plan as to them, and the Gentiles have been grafted in. If some of the branches are broken off it shows there must be some remaining, and He cares for them. " If God spared not the natural branches." Now who are the " *natural* branches " of *the church* of God? The natural branches are looked at as having been in the position of heirs of promise down here on the earth, and God is able to graft them in again (these Jews who were broken off) into the position on earth of heirs of promise. It is impossible to apply all this to the church, " Blindness in part has happened *to Israel* until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." How can this be the church? " The Jews beloved for the fathers' sakes." Is this the church of the living God?

Ques. Suppose a child of God recognizes what the church of God is, and its ruined condition, is he to labor and pray for its restoration • or what course is he to pursue?

J.N.D. Well, if it is so (ruined) the conscience cannot be satisfied with it. If the church of God is responsible in walk and affection and everything to God, the conscience acknowledging the ruin, what is it to do? It cannot be satisfied for it cannot rest in a sinful state. Now the Lord remembers the kind of relationship in which we know ourselves to be, as in Jer. 2, " Go, speak in the ears of Jerusalem, I remember thee, the love of thine espousals "-not God's love to Israel, un failing as this proved to be, but Israel's love to God, when they thought God worth following for Himself, when they had nothing else beside. Then Jehovah asks, " What iniquity have your fathers found in me? " Have *I* failed towards you in goodness? Their being in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, and being brought safe through, was the very proof that God was with them. They went on badly enough, they went back in heart to Egypt, and Dathan and Abiram despised Him; still, their being there in the wilderness proved that they

cared for the Lord so as to follow Him, and the Lord here complains that no one said, " Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt "? that no heart referred to that time? Now Gideon *did* plead in this manner; his faith was in the Lord that brought them out of Egypt, and herein was the secret of his strength, for God said to him, " Go, in this thy might." It is impossible, if the word has reached our ears, that we should be contented where we are, for there cannot be contentedness where there is a sense of failure. As regards what I look for, and it is the one sole object before my soul, it is Christ's coming. If I have the spirit of the bride I shall desire the Bridegroom, because He is the Bridegroom. " The Spirit and the bride say, Come." There may be much ignorance as to what to do, but let the relationship, the affection to Christ be seen.

I should feel disappointment at the thought of reconstruction; if I have the Spirit of Christ I shall be sensible of the loss of suitability in the bride to Him, and the sense of unfaithfulness will be accompanied with the wish to become fitted for Him. " He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." That is the principle; the bride that is looking for the Bridegroom will seek to be purified for Him; to be prepared and ready for him through " the washing of water by the word." Spiritual energy will seek that the church be ready for Christ. The Lord, spiritually, has brought us into a land of blessing, but we have lost the consciousness that we are *for Him*, and have become occupied with one thing and another, and are not sensible that we are *for Him and for Him alone*. It would be immeasurably happy for our souls if we knew nothing whatever of all that is passing around us, save as God Himself brings it before us, and had the light of that truth in full power on our souls, that *we are for Him*- the whole soul should be *His*, and *His alone*. Reconstruction is not the object of pursuit. Whenever a man from desire is in God's service, if he has not *entirely* God's object, he will *succeed* because he will be setting up *something* instead-some other object looking like it, but *quite another thing*. Paul did not succeed, for the end with him was " all seek their own." When a man has God's object, and is thoroughly working for God, he must be a man of sorrows. Paul never got the faith of his fellow laborers nor the church up to his own. The true notion as to the church now is-a people *made ready in spirit* for their Lord; not as *adorned*, because that is *resurrection glory*, but kept ready in spirit by the " washing of water by the word." I believe the sole object in all ministry, even in evangelizing, is to present the church to God as Christ's bride- wholly separated unto Him as *a bride ought to be*. Ministry, and reconstruction of the church, are quite different things. I am ministering to-night, but not *reconstructing*. Many may be confused in their minds on this point. Now I do not doubt that ministry comes in as " washing of water by the word " in order to " make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Now I must guard against any thought that I undervalue order. Subjection to the Spirit of God is shown in subjection to what the Spirit of God gives; but I am not pursuing *that* as an object, but looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Still I do not doubt but that all my service to the saints down here will come in as ministry.

Ques. Is there a church now on earth or not?

J.N.D. Is there an army or not? Suppose an army not destroyed but scattered to the four winds-why, there *is* an army, and there is *not* an army; it has lost its corporate character.