

# The Real Presence — What Is It?

By J. C. Ryle

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“If Your *Presence* does not go with us — do not send us up from here!” Exodus 33:15

There is a word in the text which heads this page which demands the attention of all English Christians in this day. That word is “presence.” There is a religious subject bound up with that word, on which it is most important to have clear, distinct, and scriptural views. That subject is the “presence of God,” and specially the “presence of our Lord Jesus Christ” with Christian people. What is that presence? Where is that presence? What is the nature of that presence? To these questions I propose to supply answers.

[I. I shall consider, firstly — the general doctrine of God’s presence in the world.](#)

[II. I shall consider, secondly — the special doctrine of Christ’s real \*spiritual\* presence.](#)

[III. I shall consider, thirdly — the special doctrine of Christ’s real \*bodily\* presence.](#)

The whole subject deserves serious thoughts. If we suppose that this is a mere question of controversy, which only concerns theological partisans, we have yet much to learn. It is a subject which lies at the very roots of saving religion. It is a subject which is inseparably tied up with one of the most precious articles of the Christian faith. It is a subject about which it is most dangerous to be wrong. An error here may first lead a man to the Church of *Rome*, and then land him finally in the gulf of *infidelity*. Surely it is worthwhile to examine carefully the doctrine of the “presence” of God and of His Christ.

## **I. The first subject we have to consider is the general doctrine of GOD’S presence in the world.**

The teaching of the Bible on this point is clear, plain, and unmistakable. *God is everywhere!* There is no place in heaven or earth, where He is not. There is no place in air or land or sea, no place above ground or underground, no place in town or country, no place in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America — where God is not always present. Enter into your closet and lock the door — God is there. Climb to the top of the highest mountain, where not even an insect moves — God is there. Sail to the most remote island in the Pacific Ocean, where the foot of man never trod — God is there. He is always near us — seeing, hearing, observing; knowing every action, and deed, and word, and whisper, and look, and thought, and motive, and secret of every one of us — wherever we are.

What says the Scripture? It is written in Job, “His eyes watch over a man’s ways, and He observes all his steps. There is no darkness, no deep darkness, where evildoers can hide themselves!” (Job 34:21, 22). It is written in Proverbs, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good!” (Proverbs 15:3). It is written in Jeremiah, “Great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve!” (Jer. 32:19).

It is written in the Psalms, “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I *rise*; you perceive my *thoughts* from afar. You discern my *going out* and my *lying down*; you are familiar with *all my ways*. Before a *word* is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain! Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens — you are there; if I make my bed in the depths — you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea — even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you!” (Psalm 139:1-12).

Such language as this, confounds and overwhelms us. The doctrine before us is one which we cannot fully understand. Precisely so. David said the same thing about it almost three thousand years ago. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain!” (Psalm 139:6). But it does not follow that the doctrine is not true — because we cannot understand it. It is the weakness of our poor minds and intellects which we must blame — and not the doctrine. There are scores of things in the world around us, which few can understand or explain — yet no sensible man refuses to believe. How this earth is ever rolling round the sun with enormous swiftness, while we feel no motion — how the moon affects the tides, and makes them rise and fall twice every twenty-four hours — how millions of perfectly organized living creatures exist in every drop of pond-water, which our naked eye cannot see — all these are things well known to men of science, while most of us could not explain them for our lives. And shall we, in the face of such facts, presume to doubt that God is everywhere present, for no better reason than this — that we cannot understand it? Let us never dare to say so again.

How many things there are about God Himself which we cannot possibly understand, and yet we must believe them, unless we are so senseless as to be atheists! Who can explain the *eternity* of God, the infinite *power* and *wisdom* of God, or the works of God in *creation* and *providence*? Who can comprehend a Being who is a *Spirit*, without body, parts, or passions? How can a material creature, who can only be in one place at one time, take in the idea of an *immaterial* Being, who existed before creation, who formed this world by His word out of nothing — and who can be everywhere and see everything at one and the same time! Where, in a word, is there a single attribute of God, which mortal man can thoroughly comprehend?

Where, then, is the common sense or wisdom of refusing to believe the doctrine of God being present everywhere, merely because our minds cannot take it in? Well says the Book of Job, “Can you fathom the *mysteries* of God? Can you probe the *limits* of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens--what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of hell--what can you know?” (Job 11:7, 8). Let us have high and honorable thoughts of the God with whom we have to do while we live, and before whose bar we must stand when we die. Let us seek to have just notions of His power, His wisdom, His eternity, His holiness, His perfect knowledge, His “presence” everywhere.

One half the sin committed by mankind, arises from wrong views of their Maker and Judge. Men are reckless and wicked, because they do not think that God sees them. They do things they would never do — if they really believed they were under the eyes of the Almighty God! It is written, “You thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself” (Psalm 1:21). It is written again, “They say, ‘The Lord doesn’t see it! The God of Jacob doesn’t pay attention!’ Is the one who made your ears deaf? Is the one who formed your eyes blind? He punishes the nations — won’t he also punish you? He knows everything — doesn’t he also know what you are doing?” (Psalm 94:7-10).

No wonder that holy Job said in his best moments, “When I consider, I am afraid of Him” (Job 23:15). “What is your God like?” said a sneering infidel one day to a poor Christian. “What is this God of yours like — this God about whom you make such ado? Is He great or is He small?” “My God,” was the wise reply, “is a great and a small God at the same time — so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him — and yet so small that He can dwell in the heart of a poor sinner like me.”

“Where is your God, my boy?” said an infidel to a child whom he saw coming out of a church. “Where is your God about whom you have been reading? Show Him to me, and I will give you a treat.” “Show me where He is not,” was the answer, “and I will give you two! My God is everywhere!” Well is it said that, “God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.” “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings You have perfected praise” (1 Cor.1:27; Matt. 21:16).

However hard it is to comprehend this doctrine — it is one which is most useful and wholesome for our souls. To keep continually in mind — that God is always present with us; to live always as in God’s sight; to act and speak and think as always under His eye — all this is eminently calculated to have a good effect upon our souls. Wide, and deep, and searching, and piercing is the influence of that one thought, “You are the God who sees me!” (Genesis 16:13)

**(a) The thought of God’s presence — is a loud call to humility.** How much which is evil and defective must the *all-seeing eye* — see in every one of us! How small a part of our character is really known by man! “Man looks on the outward appearance — but the Lord looks on the heart!” (1 Sam. 16:7). Man does not always see us — but the Lord is always looking at us — morning, noon, and night! Who has not need to say, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

**(b) The thought of God’s presence — is a crushing proof of our need of Jesus Christ.** What hope of salvation could we have if there was not a *Mediator* between God and man? Before the eye of the ever-present God — our best righteousness is filthy rags — and our best doings are full of imperfection! Where would we be — if there was not a fountain open for all sin — even the blood of Christ! Without Christ — the prospect of death, judgment, and eternity would drive us to despair!

**(c) The thought of God’s presence — teaches the folly of hypocrisy in religion.** What can be more silly and childish — than to wear a mere cloak of Christianity, while we inwardly cleave to sin, when God is ever looking at us and sees us through and through? It is easy to deceive ministers and fellow-Christians, because they often see us only upon Sundays. But God sees us morning, noon, and night, and cannot be deceived. Oh, whatever we are in religion — let us be real and true!

**(d) The thought of God’s presence — is a check and curb on the inclination to sin.** The recollection that there is One who is always near us and observing us, who will one day have a reckoning with all mankind — may well keep us back from evil! Happy are those sons and daughters who, when they leave the family home, and launch forth into the world, carry with them the abiding remembrance of God’s eye. “My father and mother do not see me — but God does!”

This was the feeling which preserved Joseph when tempted in a foreign land: “How can I do this great wickedness — and sin against God!” (Gen. 39:9).

**(e) The thought of God’s presence — is a spur to the pursuit of true holiness.** The highest standard of sanctification is to “*walk with God*” as Enoch did, and to “*walk before God*” as Abraham did. Where is the man who would not strive to live so as to please God — if he realized that God was always standing at his elbow! To get *away* from God — is the secret aim of the sinner. To get *nearer* to God — is the longing desire of the saint. The real servants of the Lord are “a people near unto Him” (Psalm 148:14).

**(f) The thought of God’s presence — is a comfort in time of public calamity.** When *war* and *famine* and *pestilence* break in upon a land, when the nations are torn by inward divisions, and all order seems in peril — it is cheering to reflect that God sees and knows and is close at hand — that the King of kings is near, and is not asleep. He who saw the Spanish Armada sail to invade England, and scattered it with the breath of His mouth! He who looked on when the schemers of the Gunpowder Plot were planning the destruction of Parliament; this God is not changed.

**(g) The thought of God’s presence — is a strong consolation in private trial.** We may be driven from home and native land — and placed at the other side of the world; we may be bereaved of wife and children and friends — and left alone in our family, like the last tree in a forest. But we can never go to any place where God is not; and under no circumstances can we be left entirely alone.

Such thoughts as these, are useful and profitable for us all. That man must be in a poor state of soul, who does not feel them to be so. Let it be a settled principle in our religion — never to forget that in every condition and place — that we are under the eye of God! It need not frighten us — if we are true believers. The *sins of all believers* are cast behind God’s back — and even the all-seeing God sees no spot in them! It ought to *cheer* us — if our Christianity is genuine and sincere. We can then appeal to God with confidence, like David, and say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life!” (Psalm 139:23, 24). Great is the mystery of *God’s presence everywhere*; but the true man of God can look at it without fear.

## **II. The second thing which I propose to consider — is the real SPIRITUAL presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

In considering this branch of our subject, we must carefully remember that we are speaking of One who is both God and man in one Person. We are speaking of One who in infinite love to our souls — took man’s nature, and was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, dead, and buried — to be a sacrifice for sins, and yet never ceased for a moment to be fully God. The peculiar “presence” of this blessed Person, our Lord Jesus Christ, with His Church, is the point which I want to unfold in this part of my paper. I want to show that He is really and truly present with His believing people, spiritually — and that His presence is one of the grand privileges of a true Christian. What then is the real spiritual “presence” of Christ, and wherein does it consist? Let us see!

**(a) There is a real spiritual presence of Christ with that CHURCH which is His mystical body — the blessed company of all faithful people.** This is the meaning of that parting saying of our Lord to His Apostles, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 27:20). To the *visible* Church of Christ — that saying did *not* strictly belong. Torn by divisions, defiled by heresies, disgraced by superstitions and corruptions, the visible Church has often given mournful proof that Christ does not always dwell in it! Many of its branches in the course of years, like the Churches of Asia, have decayed and passed away!

Christ’s special presence, is with the *universal, invisible* Church, composed of God’s elect — the Church of which every member is truly sanctified, the Church of believing and penitent men and women — this is the Church to which alone, strictly speaking, the promise belongs! This is the Church in which there is always a real spiritual “presence” of Christ.

There is not a *visible* Church on earth, however ancient and well ordered — which is secure against falling away. Scripture and history alike testify that, like the Jewish Church — it may become corrupt, and depart from the faith — and departing from the faith, it may die. And why is this? Simply because Christ has never promised to any *visible* Church that He will be with it always, even unto the end of the world. The word that He inspired Paul to write to the Roman Church — is the same word that He sends to every visible Church throughout the world, whether Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational: “Be not high-minded, but fear! Continue in God’s goodness, otherwise you also shall be cut off!” (Romans 9:20-22).

On the other hand, the perpetual presence of Christ with that *universal, invisible* Church, which is His body — is the great secret of its continuance and security! It lives on, and cannot die, because Jesus Christ is in the midst of it! It is a ship tossed with storm and tempest — but it cannot sink, because Christ is on board! Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, robbed, beaten, beheaded, or burned — but His true Church is never extinguished. It lives on through fire and flood! When crushed in one land — it springs up in another. The Pharaohs, the Herods, the Neros, the Julians, the *bloody Marys*, have labored in vain to destroy this Church. They slay their thousands — and then they go to their own eternal destiny! The true Church outlives them all. It is a bush which is often burning, and yet is never consumed. And what is the reason of all this? It is the perpetual “presence” of Jesus Christ with His people!

**(b) There is a real spiritual “presence” of Christ in the heart of every true believer.** This is what Paul meant, when he speaks of “Christ dwelling in the heart by faith” (Ephes. 3:17). This is what our Lord meant when He says of the man who loves Him and keeps His Word, that “We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). In every believer, whether high or low, or rich or poor, or young or old, or feeble or strong — the Lord Jesus dwells, and keeps up His work of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit. As He dwells in the whole Church, which is His *body* — keeping, guarding, preserving, and sanctifying it — so does He continually dwell in every *member* of that body — in the least as well as in the greatest.

This “presence” is the secret of all that peace, and hope, and joy, and comfort, which believers feel. All spring from their having a *Divine tenant* within their hearts. This “presence” is the secret of their continuance in the faith, and perseverance unto the end. In themselves, they are weak and unstable as water. But they have within them, One who is “able to save to the uttermost,” and will not allow His work to be overthrown. Not one bone of Christ’s mystical body shall ever be broken! Not one Lamb of Christ’s flock shall ever be plucked out of His hand! The heart in which Christ is pleased to dwell, though it is but very weak—is one which the devil shall never break into and make his own!

**(c) There is a real spiritual “presence” of Christ wherever His believing people meet together in His name.** This is the plain meaning of His famous saying, “Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name — there I am in the midst of them!” (Matt. 18:20). The *smallest* gathering of true Christians for the purposes of prayer or praise, or holy conference, or reading God’s Word — is sanctified by *the best of company!* The *great* or *rich* or *noble* may not be there — but the *King of kings Himself* is present — and angels look on with reverence!

The grandest buildings that men have reared for religious uses, are often no better than whitened sepulchers — destitute of any holy influence — because they are given up to superstitious ceremonies, and filled to no purpose with crowds of *formal* worshipers, who come unfeeling, and go unfeeling away. No worship is of any use to souls — at which *Christ* is not present! Incense, banners, pictures, flowers, crucifixes, and long processions of richly dressed ecclesiastics — are a poor substitute for the great High Priest Himself!

The poorest room where a few penitent believers assemble in the name of Jesus — is a consecrated and most holy place in the sight of God! Those who worship God in spirit and truth — never draw near to Him in vain. Often they go home from such meetings warmed, cheered, established, strengthened, comforted, and refreshed. And what is the *secret* of their feelings? They have had with them *the great Master of assemblies* — *Jesus Christ Himself!*

**(d) There is a real spiritual “presence” of Christ with the hearts of all true-hearted communicants in the Lord’s Supper.** Rejecting as I do, with all my heart, the baseless notion of any bodily presence of Christ in the Lord’s table, I can never doubt that the great ordinance appointed by Christ has a special and peculiar blessing attached to it. That blessing, I believe, consists in a *special* and *peculiar* presence of Christ, given to the heart of every believing communicant. That truth appears to me to lie under those wonderful words of institution, “Take and eat it — for this is My body.” “Drink from it, all of you — for this is My blood.” Those words were never meant to teach that the bread in the Lord’s Supper was literally Christ’s body, or the wine literally Christ’s blood. But our Lord did mean to teach that every right-hearted believer, who ate that bread and drank that wine in remembrance of Christ, would in so doing — find a special presence of Christ in his heart, and a special revelation of Christ’s sacrifice of His own body and blood to his soul.

In a word, there is a special spiritual “presence” of Christ in the Lord’s supper, which they only know — who are faithful communicants, and which those who are not communicants, miss altogether. After all, the experience of all the best servants of Christ is the best proof that there is a special blessing attached to the Lord’s Supper. You will rarely find a true believer, who will not say that he reckons this ordinance to be one of his greatest helps and highest privileges. He will tell you that if he was deprived of it, he would find the loss of it a great drawback to his soul. He will tell you that in eating that bread, and drinking that cup, he realizes something of *Christ dwelling in him*; and finds his repentance deepened, his faith increased, his knowledge enlarged, his graces strengthened.

Eating the bread with faith — he feels closer communion with the body of Christ. Drinking the wine with faith — he feels closer communion with the blood of Christ. *He sees more clearly what Christ is to him — and what he is to Christ.* He understands more thoroughly what it is — to be one with Christ and Christ in him. He feels the *roots of his spiritual life* insensibly watered, and the work of grace within him insensibly built up and carried forward. He cannot explain or define it. It is a matter of experience, which no one knows but he who feels it. And the true explanation of the whole matter is this — there is a special and spiritual “presence” of Christ in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus meets those who draw near to His table with a true heart — in a special and peculiar way!

**(e) Last — but not least, there is a real spiritual “presence” of Christ, given to believers in special times of trouble and difficulty.** This is the presence of which Paul received assurance on more than one occasion. At Corinth, for instance, it is written, “Then the Lord said to Paul in a night vision — Don’t be afraid, but keep on speaking and don’t be silent. For *I am with you*, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city!” (Acts 18:9, 10). At Jerusalem, again, when the Apostle was in danger of his life, it is written, “The following night, the Lord stood by him and said — Have courage! For as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome!” (Acts 23:11). Again, in the last epistle Paul wrote, we find him saying, “At my first defense, no one came to my assistance, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth!” (2 Tim. 4:16, 17).

This *special presence of Christ with His people* — is the reason for the singular and miraculous courage which many of God’s children have occasionally shown under circumstances of unusual trial, in every age of the Church. When the three Hebrew children were cast into the fiery furnace, and preferred to die, rather than commit idolatry, we are told that Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Look! I see *four* men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a Son of God!” (Dan. 3:25). When Stephen was beset by bloody-minded enemies on the very point of stoning him, we read that he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56).

Nor ought we to doubt that this *special presence* was the secret of the fearlessness with which many early Christian martyrs met their deaths, and of the marvelous courage which the Marian martyrs, such as Bradford, Latimer, and Rogers, displayed at the stake. A peculiar sense of Christ being with them, is the right explanation of all these cases. These men died as they did — because Christ was with them. Nor ought any believer to fear that the same helping presence will be with him — whenever his own time of *special need* arrives.

Many believers are *overly anxious* about what they shall do in their last sickness, and on the bed of death. Many disquiet themselves with anxious thoughts — as to what they would do if husband or wife died, or if they were suddenly turned out of house and home. Let us believe that *when the need comes — the help will come also*. Let us not carry our crosses — before they are laid upon us! He who said to Moses, “*Certainly I will be with you!*” will never fail any believer who cries to Him. When the hour of *special storm* comes, the Lord who walks upon the waters will come and say, “Peace! Be still.” There are thousands of doubting saints continually crossing the *river of death*, who go down to the water in fear and trembling, and yet are able at last to say with David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil — for *You are with me!*” (Psalm 23:4).

This branch of our subject deserves to be pondered well. This spiritual presence of Christ is a real and true thing, though a thing which the children of this world neither know — nor understand. It is precisely one of those matters of which Paul writes, “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God — for they are foolishness unto him” (1 Cor. 2:14). But for all that, I repeat emphatically, that the spiritual presence of Christ — His presence with the hearts and spirits of His own people — is a real and true thing. Let us not doubt it. Let us hold it fast. Let us seek to feel it more and more. The man who feels nothing whatever of it in his own heart’s experience, may depend on it that he is not yet in a right state of soul.

### **III. The last point which I propose to consider is the real BODILY presence of our Lord Jesus Christ**

Where is it? What ought we to think about it? What ought we to reject, and what ought we to hold fast? This is a branch of my subject on which it is most important to have clear and well-defined views. There are rocks around it on which many are making shipwreck. No doubt there are deep things and difficulties connected with it. But this must not prevent our examining it as far as possible by the light of Scripture. Whatever the Bible teaches plainly about Christ’s bodily presence — it is our duty to hold and believe. To shrink from holding it — because we cannot reconcile it with some human tradition, some minister’s teaching, or some early prejudice imbibed in youth — is presumption, and not humility. To the law and to the testimony! What do the Scriptures say about Christ’s bodily presence? Let us examine the matter step by step.

**(a) There was a bodily presence of our Lord Jesus Christ during the time when He was upon EARTH at His first advent.** For thirty-three years, between His birth and His ascension, He was present in a body in this world. In infinite mercy to our souls, the eternal Son of God was pleased to take our nature on Him, and to be miraculously born of a woman, with a body just like our own. He was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. Like us He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. Like us He ate, and drank, and slept, and hungered, and thirsted, and wept, and felt fatigue and pain. He had a body which was subject to all the conditions of a material body. While, as God, He was in heaven and earth at the same time; as man, His body was only in one place at one time. When He was in Galilee He was not in Judea, and when He was in Capernaum He was not in Jerusalem. In a real, true human body He lived; in a real, true human body He kept the law, and fulfilled all righteousness; and in a real, true human body He bore our sins on the cross, and made satisfaction for us by His atoning blood. He who died for us on Calvary was perfect man, while at the same time He was perfect God.

This was the first real bodily presence of Jesus Christ. The truth before us is full of unspeakable comfort to all who have an awakened conscience, and know the value of their souls. It is a heart-cheering thought that the “one Mediator between God and man is the man Jesus Christ.” He was *real man* — and so able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was *Almighty God* — and so able to save to the uttermost, all who come to the Father by Him. The Savior in whom the laboring and heavy-laden are invited to trust, is One who had a real body when He was working out our redemption on earth. It was no angel, nor spirit, that stood in our place and became our Substitute, that finished the work of redemption, and did what Adam failed to do. No! it was one who was real man! “By man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:21).

The battle was fought for us, and the victory was won by the eternal Word made flesh — by the real bodily presence among us of Jesus Christ. Forever let us praise God that Christ did not remain in heaven — but came into the world and was made flesh to save sinners; that in the body, He was born for us, lived for us, died for us, and rose again. Whether men know it or not, our whole hope of eternal life hinges on the simple fact, that nineteen hundred years ago there was a real bodily presence of the Son of God for us on the earth. Let us now go a step further.

**(b) There is a real bodily presence of Jesus Christ in HEAVEN at the right hand of God.** This is a deep and mysterious subject, beyond question. What God the Father is, and where He dwells, what the nature of His dwelling-place who is a Spirit — these are high things which we have no comprehension to take in. But where the Bible speaks plainly — it is our duty and our wisdom to believe. When our Lord rose again from the dead, He rose with a real human body — a body which could not be in two places at once — a body of which the angels said, “He is not here — but is risen” (Luke 24:6). In that body, having finished His redeeming work on earth, He ascended visibly into heaven. He took His body with Him, and did not leave it behind, like Elijah’s mantle. It was not laid in the grave at last, and did not become dust and ashes in some Syrian village, like the bodies of saints and martyrs. The same body which walked in the streets of Capernaum, and sat in the house of Mary and Martha, and was crucified on Golgotha, and was laid in Joseph’s tomb — that same body — after the resurrection glorified undoubtedly — but still real and material — was taken up into heaven, and is there at this very moment.

To use the inspired words of the Acts, “While they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). To use the words of Luke’s Gospel, “While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51). To use the words of Mark, “After the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). The fourth Article of the Church of England states the whole matter fully and accurately: “Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature wherewith He ascended into heaven, and there sits, until He return to judge all men at the last day.” And thus, to come round to the point with which we started — there is in heaven a real bodily presence of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine before us is singularly rich in comfort and consolation to all true Christians. That Divine Savior in heaven, on whom the Gospel tells us to cast the burden of our sinful souls, is not a Being who is *Spirit* only — but a Being who is *man* — as well as *God*. He is One who has taken up to heaven a body like our own; and in that body sits at the right hand of God, to be our Priest and our Advocate, our Representative and our Friend. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He has suffered Himself in the body being tempted. He knows by experience all that the body is liable to — from pain, and weariness, and hunger, and thirst, and work; and has taken to heaven that very body which endured the contradiction of sinners and was nailed to the tree!

Who can doubt that that body in heaven is a continual plea for believers, and renders them ever acceptable in the Father’s sight? It is a perpetual remembrance of the perfect atoning sacrifice made for us upon the cross. God will not forget that our debts are paid for, so long as the body which paid for them with life-blood is in heaven before His eyes.

Who can doubt that when we pour out our petitions and prayers before the throne of grace, we put them in the hand of One whose sympathy passes knowledge? None can feel for poor believers wrestling here in the body — like Him who in the body sits pleading for them in heaven. Forever let us bless God that there is a real bodily presence of Christ in heaven. Let us now go a step further.

**(c) There is NO real bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, or in the consecrated elements of bread and wine.** This is a point which it is peculiarly painful to discuss, because it has long divided Christians into two parties, and defiled a very solemn subject with sharp controversy. Nevertheless, it is one which cannot possibly be avoided in handling the question we are considering. Moreover, it is a point of vast importance, and demands very plain speaking.

Those amiable and well-meaning people who imagine that it signifies little, what opinion people hold about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper — that it is a matter of indifference, and that it all comes to the same thing at last — are totally and entirely mistaken. They have yet to learn that an unscriptural view of the subject may land them at length in a very dangerous heresy. Let us search and see.

My reason for saying that there is no bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, or in the consecrated bread and wine, is simply this: there is no such presence taught anywhere in Holy Scripture. It is a presence that can never be honestly and fairly gotten out of the Bible. Let the three accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the one given by Paul to the Corinthians, be weighed and examined impartially, and I have no doubt as to the result. They teach that the Lord Jesus, in the same night that He was betrayed, took bread, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat it; this is My body;" and also took the cup of wine, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood."

But there is nothing in the simple narrative, or in the verses which follow it, which shows that the disciples thought their Master's body and blood were really present in the bread and wine which they received. There is not a word in the epistles to show that after our Lord's ascension into heaven, that the Christians believed that His body and blood were present in an ordinance celebrated on earth; or that the bread in the Lord's Supper, after consecration, was not truly and literally bread, and the wine truly and literally wine.

Some people, I am aware, suppose that such texts as "This is My body," and "This is My blood," are proofs that Christ's body and blood, in some mysterious manner, are locally present in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, after their consecration. But a man must be easily satisfied if such texts content him. The quotation of a single isolated phrase is a mode of arguing which would establish Arianism or Socinianism.

The *context* of these famous expressions shows clearly, that those who heard the words used, and were accustomed to our Lord's mode of speaking, understood them to mean "This *represents* My body," and "This *represents* my blood." The comparison of other places proves that there is nothing unfair in this interpretation. It is certain that the words "is" and "are" frequently mean represent in Scripture. The disciples, no doubt, remembered their Master saying such things as "The *field* is the world, the *good seed* are the children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38). Paul, in writing on the Sacrament, confirms this interpretation by expressly calling the consecrated bread, "bread," and not the body of Christ, no less than three times (1 Cor. 11:26-28).

Some people, again, regard the sixth chapter of John, where our Lord speaks of "eating His flesh and drinking His blood," as a proof that there is a literal bodily presence of Christ in the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. But there is an utter absence of conclusive proof that this chapter refers to the Lord's Supper at all! The Lord's Supper had not been instituted, and did not exist, until at least a year after these words were spoken. Enough to say, that the great majority of Protestant commentators altogether deny that the chapter refers to the Lord's Supper, and that even some Romish commentators on this point agree with them. The eating and drinking here spoken of are the eating and drinking of *faith* — and not a *bodily* action.

Some people fancy that Paul's words to the Corinthians, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16), are enough to prove a bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. But unfortunately for their argument, Paul does not say, "The bread is the body," but the "communion of the body." And the obvious sense of the words is this: "The bread that a worthy communicant eats in the Lord's Supper is a means whereby his soul holds communion with the body of Christ." Nor do I believe that more than this can be got out of the words. Above all, there remains the unanswerable argument, that if our Lord was actually holding His own body in His hands, when He said of the bread, "This is My body," His body must have been a different body to that of ordinary men. Of course if His body was not a body like ours, His real and proper "humanity" is at an end. At this rate the blessed and comfortable doctrine of Christ's entire sympathy with His people, arising from the fact that He is really and truly man, would be completely overthrown and fall to the ground.

Finally, if the body with which our blessed Lord ascended up into heaven can be in heaven, and on earth, and on ten thousand communion-tables at one and the same time — it cannot be a real human body at all. Yet that He did ascend

with a real human body, although a glorified body, is one of the prime articles of the Christian faith, and one that we ought never to let go! Once admit that a body can be present in two places at once, and you cannot prove that it is a body at all. Once admit that Christ's body can be present at God's right hand and on the communion-table at the same moment, and it cannot be the body which was born of the Virgin Mary and crucified upon the cross. From such a conclusion we may well draw back with horror and dismay!

Well says the Prayer-book of the Church of England: "The sacramental bread and wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be *adored* (for that is idolatry, to be abhorred by all faithful Christians); and the natural body and blood of our Savior Christ are in heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one." This is sound speech that cannot be condemned. Well would it be for the Church of England if all Churchmen would read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what the Prayer-book teaches about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. If we love our souls and desire their prosperity, let us be very jealous over our doctrine about the Lord's Supper. Let us stand fast on the simple teaching of Scripture, and let no one drive us from it, under the pretense of increased reverence for the ordinance of Christ.

Let us take heed, lest under confused and mystical notions of some inexplicable presence of Christ's body and blood under the form of bread and wine, we find ourselves unawares heretics about Christ's human nature. Next to the doctrine that Christ is not God — but only man, there is nothing more dangerous than the doctrine that Christ is not man — but only God. If we would not fall into that pit, we must hold firmly that there can be no literal presence of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper; because His body is in heaven, and not on earth, though as God He is everywhere. Let us now go one step further, and bring our whole subject to a *conclusion*.

**(d) There will be a real bodily presence of Christ when He COMES AGAIN the second time to judge the world.** This is a point about which the Bible speaks so plainly, that there is no room left for dispute or doubt. When our Lord had ascended up before the eyes of His disciples, the angels said to them, "This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven — shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

There can be no mistake about the meaning of these words. Visibly and bodily our Lord left the world, and visibly and bodily He will return in the day which is emphatically called the day of "His appearing" (1 Peter 1:7). The world is not yet done with Christ. Myriads talk and think of Him as of One who did His work in the world and passed on to His own place, like some statesman or philosopher, leaving nothing but His memory behind Him. The world will be fearfully undeceived one day. That same Jesus who came nineteen centuries ago in lowliness and poverty, to be despised and crucified — shall come again one day in power and glory, to raise the dead and change the living, and to reward every man according to his works!

The **wicked** shall see that Savior whom they despised — but too late, and shall call on the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of the Lamb! Those solemn words which Jesus addressed to the High Priest the night before His crucifixion shall at length be fulfilled: "You shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64).

The **godly** shall see the Savior whom they have read of, heard of, and believed, and find, like the Queen of Sheba — that the half of His goodness had not been known! They shall find that *sight* is far better than *faith*, and that in Christ's actual presence is fullness of joy. This is the real bodily presence of Christ, for which every true-hearted Christian ought daily to long and pray.

Happy are those who make it an article of their faith, and live in the constant expectation of a second personal advent of Christ. Then, and then only — will the devil be bound, the curse be taken off the earth, the world be restored to its original purity, sickness and death be taken away, tears be wiped from all eyes, and the redemption of the saint, in body as well as soul, be completed. "It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is!" (1 John 3:2). The highest style of Christian is the man who desires the real presence of his Master, and "loves His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8).

I have now unfolded, as far as I can in a short paper, the truth about the presence of God and His Christ. I have shown:

- (1) the general doctrine of *God's* presence everywhere;
- (2) the Scriptural doctrine of Christ's real, *spiritual* presence;
- (3) the Scriptural doctrine of Christ's real, *bodily* presence.

## APPLICATION

I now leave the whole subject with a parting word of **APPLICATION**, and commend it to serious attention. In an age of hurry and bustle about secular things, in an age of wretched strife and controversy about religion — I entreat men not to neglect the great truths which these pages contain.



**(1) What do we know of Christ, for ourselves?** We have heard of Him thousands of times. We call ourselves Christians. But what do we know of Christ experimentally, as our own personal *Savior*, our own *Priest*, our own *Friend*, the *Healer* of our conscience, the *Comforter* of our heart, the *Pardoner* of our sins, the *Foundation* of our hope, the *confidence* of our souls? How is it?

**(2) Let us not rest until we feel Christ “present” in our own hearts, and know what it is to be one with Christ and Christ in us.** This is real religion. To live in the habit of looking *backward* to Christ on the cross, *upward* to Christ at God’s right hand, and *forward* to Christ coming again — this is the only Christianity which gives comfort in life, and good hope in death. Let us remember this.

**(3) Let us beware of holding erroneous views about the Lord’s Supper,** and especially about the real nature of Christ’s “presence” in it. Let us not so mistake that blessed ordinance, which was meant to be our soul’s food — as to turn it into our soul’s poison! There is no sacrifice in the Lord’s Supper, no sacrificing priest, no altar, no bodily “presence” of Christ in the bread and wine. These things are not in the Bible, and are dangerous inventions of man, leading on to superstition! Let us take care.

**(4) Let us keep continually before our minds, the second advent of Christ,** and that real “presence” which is yet to come. Let our loins be girded, and our lamps burning, and ourselves like men daily waiting for their Master’s return. Then, and then only, shall we have all the desires of our souls satisfied. Until then the less we expect from this world the better. Let our daily cry be, “*Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!*”