

# Correcting Erroneous Teachings

## Erroneous Teachings concerning John 14

Certain teachings that are popular among and highly regarded by evangelical Christians are not merely erroneous—they are deleterious both in content and effect. This brief, rather informal article, is the first in a new section in *Affirmation & Critique* devoted to correcting erroneous teachings. The adjective *deleterious* means “harmful often in a subtle or unexpected way.” Countless numbers of genuine believers have been deceived, defrauded, and deprived by religious teachings passed on to them by pastors, Bible teachers, and theologians who inculcate their followers with concepts contrary to the revelation in the New Testament, a practice for which such leaders will give an account to the Lord Jesus when they stand before the judgment seat of God. It is an extremely serious matter to use the Word of God to mislead believers and misrepresent God by espousing and expounding deleterious teachings. Sermon after sermon based on John 14:2-3 conveys erroneous teachings concerning “My Father’s house,” “many abodes,” “prepare a place for you,” “I am coming again,” and “receive you to Myself.” In a direct and succinct way, these erroneous, deleterious teachings must be refuted, and the divine truth must be asserted, no matter how shocking it may be to those who learn for the first time that they have been led astray by teachings based upon an egregious misreading of John 14. Regarding the Father’s house, the many abodes, the prepared place, and the coming of the Lord, blind guides have been leading blind believers, and all have fallen into a pit of darkness and delusion.

### “My Father’s House”

In John 14:2 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “In My Father’s house are many abodes.” For strange reasons and with no scriptural basis whatsoever, vast numbers of evangelical Christians believe and teach that *My Father’s house* denotes heaven and that *many abodes* refers to mansions or some other kind of splendid, beautiful physical dwelling place presently under construction for every believer. One theologian says, “The Bible teaches us to think of heaven as...the house of our Father with many mansions” (Berkhof 361). F. F. Bruce claims that the Father’s house

is the believers’ heavenly home (297). D. James Kennedy claims that the Father’s house with many mansions is heaven (154). In writing concerning the truth about heaven, John F. MacArthur declares that the Father’s house, in which there are many mansions, is heaven (*Glory* 207). In her earnest speaking about heaven, Anne Graham Lotz says, “Regardless of our circumstances or condition, we can look forward with hope as we glimpse Heaven, My Father’s House, which is being prepared as an eternal house for God’s people. My Father’s House. That will be heaven for me” (16). That may be her dream, but it is not the truth. Every assertion that the Father’s house is heaven is an erroneous, deleterious teaching. Such a teaching is the result of relying upon religious traditions that inject ideas into the text of John 14 that are not supported by God’s Word, that are contrary to the divine revelation, and that violate the theological principle of the perspicuity of Scripture.

The Father’s house in John 14:2 is not heaven; on the contrary, the Father’s house in verse 2 signifies the church built by Christ Jesus Himself. We must emphatically declare that “My Father’s house” is not heaven—it is the church as the house of the living God, the temple of God, the dwelling place of God, the household of God, the dwelling place of God in spirit (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19, 21-22). This is proved by John 2:16; 14:1-6, 20, and 23; and other portions of the New Testament.

In John 2:16 the Lord Jesus said, “Take these things away from here [the temple]; do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” As the context makes clear, *My Father’s house* refers to the temple as God’s dwelling place on earth at that time. The temple in Jerusalem was a type, or figure, of the physical body of Jesus, which in His resurrection was enlarged to become the mystical Body of Christ. The verses following indicate this. When the religionists asked Jesus for a sign, He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19), speaking of the temple of His body (v. 21). After the Lord Jesus was resurrected, His disciples remembered what He had said and “believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus

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had spoken” (v. 22). The body of Jesus, the temple, that was destroyed on the cross was small, but the Body of Christ—the real temple, the Father’s house—is vast, “the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23). *My Father’s house* in John 14:2 refers not to heaven but to the Body of Christ, the church as the house of God, the dwelling place of God on earth with and in His redeemed, regenerated believers.

This assertion is confirmed by the whole of John 14. The basic thought is that through death and resurrection the Lord is the way not to a place—heaven—but to a person—God the Father. We must believe into God the Father and into His Son (v. 1) and thereby enter into God. In verses 2 through 6 we see that the Lord Jesus was going through death and then coming in resurrection to bring us, the believers, into the Father, where the Lord Himself was, as revealed in verse 10. The Lord was not going to a place but to a living person, the Father (vv. 12, 28). Jesus was going to the Father, and His intention was to bring His disciples into the divine person of the Father (vv. 5-6, 12, 20). The words *I go* in verse 2 mean that the Lord was going through death and resurrection to bring His believers into God the Father for the building up of God’s dwelling place, the Father’s house.

**I**n the Epistles the revelation of the church as the house of God and the Body of Christ is fully developed. First Timothy 3:15 speaks of “the house of God, which is the church of the living God.” To be sure, the Lord is not building two houses of God—one being a dwelling place in heaven and the other being the church as God’s dwelling place on earth. *My church* in Matthew 16:18 denotes the church as God’s house, the Body of Christ, not a home in heaven. The apostle Peter, who heard the Lord speak about building His church, wrote in his first Epistle that as living stones, the regenerated children of God “are being built up as a spiritual house” (2:5). Is Christ building a spiritual house on earth and a physical house in heaven? Certainly not. The “spiritual house” in 1 Peter 2:5 is “My Father’s house” in John 14:2. The temple that is the body of Christ is the church as God’s temple: “Do you [the church of God in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2)] not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you” (3:16-17). Paul’s teaching that the genuine church in its local expression is the temple of God is supported by Ephesians 2:21-22, where he says that in Christ “all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built

together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.” As the result of interpreting Scripture by Scripture, we must affirm that “My Father’s house” is the church, not heaven.

### “Many Abodes”

Regrettably, many believers persist in clinging to the notion that in the Father’s house regarded as heaven, every believer will have a mansion. According to Mary K. Baxter in *A Divine Revelation of Heaven*, when all the redeemed are gathered together in glory, “there will be sufficient room for all of them to have one of the many mansions, the many dwelling places, which Jesus said He was preparing for us in His Father’s house” (31). “Abodes,” not “mansions,” is the correct translation of *μοναὶ* in John 14:2. The same word is used in the singular in verse 23, where Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.” An abode is a dwelling place. In John 14:23 the abode is not a place or a material structure—the abode is a person, a believer, to whom the Father and the Son will come and with whom They will make a mutual dwelling where the believer abides in Christ and where Christ abides in the believer (15:4-5). The Father in the Son is the believers’ abode, and all the believers in Christ are abodes for the Father and the Son in God’s building, the Father’s house. On the one hand, in Christ we dwell in God (14:20)—He is our abode; on the other hand, in Christ God dwells in us—we are His abode. This means that the Father’s house with its many abodes is a mutual abode, a mutual dwelling place, where we dwell in God and God dwells in us. Eventually, all believers throughout the ages will learn that the Father’s house is not heaven but a wonderful, eternal, mutual dwelling place.

### “I Go to Prepare a Place for You”

In John 14:2-3 the Lord twice used the phrase *prepare a place for you*, a phrase that is precious to those who think that Christ is building them a mansion or a cosmic condominium or the dream home that they have always wanted. It is utterly astounding that some believers imagine that since the time of His ascension Christ has been laboring on constructing a heavenly house for every child of God. “My Father’s house,” says Lotz, “is a home prepared especially for you” (16). She goes on to say, “Somewhere in the universe, at this very moment, our heavenly home is being prepared for us,” and “one day our heavenly home will be ready” (16). This kind of teaching is utterly erroneous, and its effect is to turn God’s people away from the will of God, the eternal purpose of God, and the economy of God to a vain dream

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of having a house in heaven, a dwelling prepared especially for each one.

What did the Lord Jesus mean when He said that He would “go to prepare a place” for us so that where He is we also may be? When the Lord spoke these words, He was about to go to prepare, through His resurrection, a place for us in God the Father. The Lord Jesus was (and, of course, is) in the Father (v. 10), and He said to the disciples, “Where I am you also may be” (v. 3). He is in God the Father and the way to God the Father. His desire is that we would also be in the Father (17:21) and thus be where He Himself is. The Lord Jesus did not come from heaven and then go to heaven in order to build a house for us in heaven and then bring us to our mansion in heaven. The divine truth is that the Lord came from God the Father through incarnation and went back to God the Father through crucifixion and resurrection in order to bring us to the Father. We need to know this: “I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (14:20). The Son is in the Father, and we are in the Son; therefore, by being in the Son, we are in the Father. Now in Christ we have a standing in God the Father, and spontaneously, we have a standing in the Father’s house. We have a place prepared for us in the house of God, the church of God, the Body of Christ.

I hope that my readers are willing to be enlightened and have a proper understanding of “where I am you also may be.” The Lord’s word does not mean that He is in heaven and that we will be with Him in heaven where He is. We must emphasize the fact that the Lord is in the Father, and it is the Father’s desire expressed through the Son that we would be with the Son where He is—in the Father. All believers in Christ Jesus need to realize that the goal of God the Father is to, through the Son, bring us into Himself by our being in the Son so that we may become part of the Father’s house, His spiritual dwelling place. How long will it take for this marvelous truth to penetrate the believers and cause them to realize that being in the Father is much better than being in heaven? The day will come when all believers will know that being in a person—the Father—is immeasurably better than being in a place—heaven. We do not need a beautiful home in heaven—the Triune God is our home. Eventually, all believers will echo Psalm 90:1: “O Lord, You have been our dwelling place.”

## “I Am Coming Again and Will Receive You to Myself”

Ministers and Bible teachers commonly preach and teach that “I am coming again and will receive you to Myself” in John 14:3 refers to the rapture of the believers, whom the Lord Jesus will receive to Himself so that they may be with Him in heaven. Some say that this is the first mention of the rapture in the Bible. According to a note on verse 3 in *The MacArthur Study Bible*, the Lord’s departure “would be for their advantage since He was going away to prepare a heavenly home for them and will return to take them so that they may be with Him. This is one of the passages that refers to the rapture of the saints at the end of the age when Christ returns” (207). In an article entitled “The Rapture and John 14” Thomas D. Ice says, “I believe that John 14:1-3 speaks of Christ’s return at the Rapture for His church” (1). Then he goes on to claim that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is parallel to John 14:1-3 and asserts that “it appears obvious that Jesus’ teaching in John 14:1-3 and Paul’s revelation in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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THE CHURCH OF GOD, THE BODY OF CHRIST.

speak of the same event” (4)—the rapture of the believers. Evidently, we are assured that John 14:2-3 will literally be fulfilled “in the air” (1 Thes. 4:17). This teaching is erroneous because it is contrary to the divine truth, and it is deleterious because it causes damage in a subtle, unexpected way—misrepresenting God and misleading believers, turning them away from the profound revelation in John 14.

The Lord’s words *I am coming again* refer to His coming in His resurrection to indwell His disciples instead of merely being with them in an outward, physical, and tangible form. In verse 18 the Lord said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.” This was fulfilled on the day of His resurrection (20:19-22). He prepared His disciples for sorrow and affliction related to His departure (16:21) by comparing them to a woman laboring in childbirth, saying, “You also now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you” (v. 22). In the evening of the day of His resurrection, the Lord Jesus came to the disciples, and they rejoiced at His presence (20:20). The Lord’s promise in 14:3 about His “coming again” was fulfilled on the day of His resurrection. “In that day,” He said in verse 20, “you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in

you.” In that day—the day of the Lord’s resurrection—the disciples were begotten to be His brothers (20:17; 1 Pet. 1:3), and the Lord’s Father became their Father. Because the Lord’s disciples, His brothers, knew that He was in the Father and that they were in Him, they began to realize that, in the Son, they also were in the Father. By being where the Son is—in the Father—they also were in the place prepared for them in the Father’s house. They rejoiced not to be in heaven, a place, but to be in a person, the Father. The resurrected Christ came to them and brought them to where He is—in the Father.

**A**s Christ’s believers today, we also can know the three *ins* in John 14:20, that is, know that the Son is in the Father, that we are in the Son, and that the Son, in whom the Father is, is in us. Based on this marvelous divine and human reality, we can, and will, know that the Son has brought us into the Father and into the Father’s house, the church as the dwelling place of God. Furthermore, we will know that John 14 is not a revelation of our dwelling in a mansion or luxurious house in heaven; John 14 is a revelation of our dwelling in the Father’s house, the Body of Christ, the church of the living God. If we are enlightened by the Lord through His Word, we will forsake the erroneous and deleterious teaching concerning the Father’s house being heaven and will receive with appreciation and thanksgiving the profound truth in John 14, especially the wonderful words, “In My Father’s house are many abodes...

I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be.” Our home is not heaven—it is the Father’s house. Welcome home!

by Ron Kangas

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### God’s Dwelling Place Being a Mutual Abode

**W**e need to see the significance of the tabernacle and all the offerings. The tabernacle is God’s dwelling place on earth among His people. This is a great matter. The tabernacle as God’s dwelling place among His people on earth is actually the center and reality of the entire universe. We may say that the universe, which is composed of the heavens, the earth, and billions of items, is a huge container. What does the universe contain? Of course, the universe contains God. However, God wants His redeemed people to be His dwelling place in the universe. The universe contains God’s people, and God’s people are His dwelling place. Therefore, God’s dwelling place is the center and reality of the universe.

Suppose in this universe there was no such thing as a collective people, that is, there was no such thing as those who are God’s chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and transformed people. If this were the situation, there would be no dwelling place of God in the universe. Without God’s people as His dwelling place, the universe would be empty and vain, without a center and without reality. Therefore, we need to see that the center and reality of the universe is God’s dwelling place among His people.

The tabernacle as God’s dwelling place is actually a mutual dwelling place, a mutual abode. This abode is God’s dwelling and also the dwelling of God’s serving ones. Eventually, God dwells in His people, and His people dwell in Him. This means there is a mutual dwelling in a mutual dwelling place. Such a wonderful dwelling place is the center and reality of the entire universe.

This wonderful dwelling place is not only the center and reality of the universe; it is also the center and reality of the Bible. What is the center and reality of the Old Testament? It is the tabernacle, God’s dwelling place. What is the center and reality of the New Testament? It is God’s house, God’s habitation. The whole Bible is a history of God’s dwelling place. This matter is crucial.

From *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John* by Witness Lee, pp. 327-328