

# DISCIPLINE AND POSITION

OF THE

## CHURCHES OF GOD;

CONSIDERED IN CONNECTION WITH WHAT IS COMMONLY  
KNOWN AS THE

EXCLUSIVE SYSTEM.

BY

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"Prove all things, hold fast that which is 'good.'"

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# CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

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## PREFACE.

DEAR BRETHREN IN CHRIST,—

Having felt it right to publish the following pamphlet on Church Discipline, in compiling which I have sought to learn how God would have us deal with evil in the church, and in which I have also shewn why I think that a system of discipline, which has been established amongst those called "Brethren," commonly known as the "Exclusive System," is contrary to the Word; I think it well to state briefly what has led me to undertake this work.

More than twenty years ago certain evil doctrines, taught by Mr. B. W. Newton, concerning the person and sufferings of the Lord Jesus were brought to light; doctrines which demanded faithful dealing towards such as taught or held them. Mr. J. N. Darby had previously separated on other grounds from Mr. Newton, and from the church at Plymouth, in which he was acknowledged as a teacher; but he now called upon the church generally, to take a similar stand against Mr. Newton, because of his doctrine. At this time the church of Bethesda, taking an individual (or as it was termed a "neutral") position, towards Mr. Newton and the assembly at Plymouth, was earnestly condemned by Mr. Darby and those acting with him; and the exclusive system arose from the discipline instituted towards Bethesda, because of the position she had assumed, as set forth in what is known as "The letter of the Ten." By this discipline Bethesda was separated from, as being associated with Mr. Newton and his party; and the same discipline was likewise extended *ad infinitum* towards all christians and churches who refused to join in separation from Bethesda.

In 1850 I went to London to study medicine, and was sorely exercised by the strifes and divisions which arose through this controversy between saints who had long been knit together in christian fellowship and labour. Finding it difficult to see my way clearly, I abstained for about six months from having communion anywhere, but then associated myself with the exclusive gatherings, considering, (as I still do), that in taking this stand they were mainly actuated by a real desire for Christ's glory, and the purity of His church. Though I read most of the tracts which appeared on the controversy, and had the privilege of conversing with some of the leading brethren in London about it, I had but little leisure at that time for the careful study of the Word

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which such questions demand. It seemed to me that, painful as it was, our position was (at all events theoretically) a right and necessary one; still, when I thought of the many dear saints, and devoted and honoured servants of Christ, from whom we were compelled to separate, my heart was very sorrowful, and I could not resist a sort of indefinite fear, or rather consciousness, that something must be radically wrong in our position.

In 1852 our family emigrated to New Zealand, settling at Motueka, in the Province of Nelson. Through my father's labours a church was gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus. Outbreaks of evil having after a while occurred, church meetings were held to deal with them; and through these meetings I was first led to study the Word concerning discipline.

On a visit to Christchurch, my father found meeting with the gathering there a brother and his wife, who had recently arrived from England. He was aware that they had been previously meeting with those outside the exclusive fellowship (not, however, with Newton's party), but felt unable *in their case* to extend the Exclusive Discipline *to this country*, and accordingly met with them at the Lord's Table. For acting thus he has been excommunicated by brethren in England; but is to the present time quite ignorant as to who passed judgment upon him, seeing they took no steps, direct or indirect, to inform him or the churches at Nelson and Wellington, that he had been excluded from fellowship; indeed he only heard of it casually, some time afterwards, through a sister in Christchurch. My father had long labored at Nelson and Wellington, and many in those churches were his children in the faith, and he was owned and esteemed in them as a servant of the Lord Jesus. No course, therefore, remained to them but either to accept blindly the sentence of an unknown tribunal in England upon an aged and beloved servant of Christ, or to be content to be themselves placed without the Exclusive Communion. Having confidence in my father as the Lord's servant, they tacitly accepted the latter alternative. Thus have the churches at Nelson and Wellington, and many other Christians in this country, been placed, *de facto* (though not by their own deed), outside the Exclusive Assemblies.

In June, 1870, I also visited Christchurch with my wife, and being denied communion by the gathering there (which had recently definitely taken an exclusive stand), I enquired the ground of their refusal. I knew, indeed, that we were refused as remaining in communion with my father after he had been excluded in England, and I might have rightly protested against the *manner* in which discipline had been exercised towards him and us; but I desired rather to enquire afresh concerning the scriptural basis of the system itself—the other point might have followed.

As I had not considered the subject since I left England, the brethren there kindly gave me some tracts about it, and invited me also to attend a church meeting held especially to search the Word on the matter, and a dear brother drew up the subject for consideration in a paper; of which the following is a copy:—

## "SUBJECT.

"How should the children of God who wish to obey the word that they are 'not to forsake the assembling of themselves together,' and the commandment 'to remember the Lord's death till he come,' to act, according to Scripture, towards communicants from gatherings which 'have them' that hold doctrines which Christ hates?—(For illustration, as Rev. ii. 15, 'So *hast thou them* also which hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate,' and verse 20, 'I have *against thee that thou sufferest* that woman Jezebel to teach, and to seduce my servants.') And how to act towards communicants who, although professing not to be themselves, (nor any at their gatherings), holders of any evil doctrine, are in open communion with those who do 'have them that hold' the doctrines that Christ hates?"

Having commenced with prayer, the brother who drew up the above paper, introduced the subject by reading extracts from several tracts, and then adduced many passages of Scripture in support.

Three other meetings followed, in which we examined such portions of the Word as seemed most to bear upon it. As I left Christchurch immediately after the last meeting, I do not know whether there was much result from these meetings, though I feel very thankful for the spirit of christian forbearance which marked them. Personally, I am especially thankful for them, as they led me to search the Word concerning these things, in a manner I might not otherwise have done. I also feel very thankful that the "subject," as drawn up, referred, by way of illustration, to the messages to the churches in Revelations; for I at once felt that we had in them Christ's answer to the question, and in fact, the key to the whole matter. I therefore turned immediately to the study of those deeply instructive portions of Scripture.

In commencing, and afterwards in carrying on this search, I had not the remotest idea of publishing. I began it simply from an earnest desire to understand more clearly what Scripture taught on the subject; but, as I examined the Word, and gained more and more light thereon, I began to feel that it was my duty (as far as in me lay), to use this light for the glory of God. I decided at length on publishing; but I do so in much fear and trembling, for it is a subject which has long occupied the hearts and minds of many of the Lord's eminent servants, with whom I am unworthy to be named. The Lord often deigns to use very feeble instruments; and as such I place this effort in His hands.

There have doubtless been in the carrying on of this controversy, as in all controversies, misunderstandings and mistakes made by both sides; and at this distance it would be as utterly impossible for me to collect evidence, weigh testimony, and ascertain facts, as it would little become me to pronounce on or censure, the *deeds* of brethren and churches. I have therefore sedulously abstained from doing so; seeking only to learn, and set forth, those principles and instructions of the Word which regard church discipline *generally*, leaving their application to past or to present circumstances, to the consciences of those to

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whom they may commend themselves. I have been the more encouraged to publish this work because I have been unable to hear of any work on the question yet issued, which treats it in the same manner. It may be that I have been removed from the immediate scenes of controversy, to this distant land, that I might have peculiar advantage for so doing.

I would now commend this pamphlet to the patient, prayerful consideration of my brethren in Christ. Whilst I would ask them kindly to bear with its imperfections, I trust I can say I do not desire that if I have handled any truth onesidedly, (as we are so apt to do), or have erred in anything, it should be passed over, but rather manifested; and richly shall I be rewarded if it at all contribute, even suggestively, to the elucidation of *truth* in these matters. The Lord graciously pardon our past failure and sin in these things, and grant us increasingly to apprehend and walk in the power of those blessed, and yet solemn truths, unfolded to us in the Word concerning our position and responsibilities in the Church of the living God.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

SAMUEL J. DECK.

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Discipline is a solemn thing, since it is exercised amongst those who are the subjects of grace. It belongs to the family and household of faith, having to do with those who are "within," not with those who are "without."—1 Cor. v. 12, 13, and Heb. xii. 5 to 8. It is instituted in the way of chastisement (1 Cor. xi. 32, 2 Cor. ii. 6), not of wrath; and having in view the well-being of even those upon whom it is to be exercised, its character is ever corrective and restorative—1 Co. v. 5, and Gal. vi. 1. In approaching this deeply humbling subject, let us remember those gracious words concerning our Heavenly Father's chastisement of us His foolish wandering children: "He for our *profit*, that we may be partakers of His holiness." The subject is a solemn one; for it bids us remember that "our God is a consuming fire," and that to serve Him acceptably it must be "with reverence and godly fear." It is also an humbling one; for were there no outbreaks of sin, no defilement of the white raiment, no shame, or cause of grief to our Emmanuel, there would be no necessity for the exercise of discipline.

Those who believe in Jesus are not only justified from all things, but are also adopted into the family and household of faith; they belong of necessity to that body which is the house, the church of the living God. God would ever have us walk in the power of the wonderful blessed truth, that "*now* are we the people of God," called out of darkness, into His marvellous light. It is on this ground we are exhorted to "abstain from fleshly lusts;" and again, to "come out, and be separate, and touch not the unclean"—1 Pet. iii. 10, and 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17. It is on this ground, even what God has done for us, that Christians are to gather together, and receive one another. Hence the commandment with regard to Christian fellowship in Romans xv. 7, is: "Receive ye *one another* (*i.e.*, the blood-washed ones, the members of Christ alone) *to the glory of God.*" "God is light," and "we are light in the Lord;" we are therefore to "walk as the children of

"light." This at once separates us from a world that lieth in darkness. Care for the glory of God not only separates us from the evil without, but much more raises up in us a holy indignation and zeal against evil within; whether in ourselves individually, or the church collectively, as we read: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh" and the spirit;" and again, "Purge out therefore the old leaven"—2 Cor. vii. 1, and 1 Cor. v. 7.

It is, however, with *corporate* (or *church*) action that we have now to do; hence, should evil break out in a church, if *moral*, the command is, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. v. 13)—if *doctrinal*, "If any man preach any other gospel to you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"—Gal. i. 9.

This is plain and simple; but the question has arisen, how are we to act towards communicants from churches who neglect to purge out evil, but have amongst them those who hold doctrines which Christ hates; for example, the church of Pergamos in Rev. ii. 16: "So *hast thou them that hold the doctrines of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate; and also the church of Thyatira;*" v. 20, "*I have against thee that thou sufferest that woman Jezebel to teach,*" &c. How also towards a church which professing not to have amongst it those holding evil doctrines, yet holds *open communion* with a church in the first condition.

The exclusive system replies, "Separate\* from them, and also from all who will hold communion with them, "*ad infinitum.*" See "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda," by W. Trotter, p. 62, from which we quote as follows (the italicising is my own, with the exception of the phrase "*ad infinitum*") :—"Did the beloved disciple set up a new term of communion in warning the elect Lady not to receive the false teachers of that day? *Suppose* some one who had received these deniers of the faith had come to the elect lady and her children expecting to be received as before; and *suppose* she, feeble sister as she was, had meekly but firmly said: No; the Holy Ghost says that he who biddeth them God speed is partaker of their evil deeds. You have received those enemies of the faith, and have thus become partakers of their evil deeds. *You now stand in the same place as they do,* and I dare not receive you lest I become partaker with you

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\* Though some may object, I shall use the terms "separating from," and "excommunicating" synonymously in this pamphlet, when speaking of the Exclusive System; because the character of the separation it enforces consists, not merely in a withdrawal from the wrong ecclesiastical position of others, but in a refusal to admit them to the Lord's table. If it were our own assembly and table, we should be free to make our own regulations; to receive, or to separate from our brethren, according to our own pleasure. If, however, we acknowledge it as the Lord's assembly and table, every believer has his place there as a child, and as a member of the household of faith. We may "put away" (*i.e.*, excommunicate) an evil doer by holy discipline, according to the commandment of Christ, but we cannot *separate* from any one except by withdrawing ourselves from the communion of saints—*i.e.*, by excommunicating ourselves. For, say that we retire from the church in which we have been assembling, and set up a fresh assembly, still if we own it as the Lord's assembly, and not, as I said, our own, every child of God has his place there also, unless "put away" by just discipline—since Christ's church is *cæc* wherever gathered.

your and their evil deeds. Would such testimony have been setting up some new term of communion? Multiply the receptions "*ad infinitum*," the principle is the same. . . . But rejecting heretics, and the receivers of them is not setting up any new term of communion." I would only remark at present concerning this quotation 1. That in warning the elect lady against receiving heretics into *her house* the Apostle gave no rule for *church action*. 2. At this point the quotation slips from revelation to mere supposition and inference, "suppose" and "suppose." 3. Whilst Scripture says "A man that is an heretic . . . reject," it never adds "and those who receive him." We shall notice these points more fully as we proceed.

When scriptural authority is required for this discipline, no plain commandment can be shown for it, like that in 1 Cor. v. 11; but it is endeavoured to argue it from such general principles as "Separation from evil," "Holiness to the Lord," and so forth; or else from passages (like the one in John's second epistle, referred to in the above quotation), which have nothing to do with the point under consideration, viz., the *church* (or *collective*) action of believers.

The exercised heart says—Surely an assembly is defiled by suffering evil in its midst; and if so, is it not to be dealt with concerning it? Is it right to connive at the sin in it? Assuredly not. There never can be a question in the presence of God, whether we should excuse and connive at evil, or deal with it; but the question is whether the Lord has not instructed us *how* to deal with it, and if so what is His will in the matter.

I believe that most of the difficulties which have beset this question have mainly arisen from forgetting that God has not only given a revelation of those all important principles which regulate his dealings with man, but that he has also given complete and sufficient precepts therein, to instruct us in practically carrying out these principles.

The principles of God group themselves under the two great heads of Holiness and Grace. They spring from the very being and nature of God: for "God is light," and "God is love." God's ways must ever be in harmony with himself: for "He cannot deny himself." "God is light," and "God is love;" but love never works outside of light. Fallen man is darkness; therefore the light of God is contrary to him, and condemns him; but, blessed be God, love has found out a way, through the cross of Jesus, wherein "grace may reign through righteousness," and God may manifest himself to the utmost in man's salvation and blessing. To these principles the gospel of the grace of God bears witness; and it is to their apprehension and confession, that the Holy Ghost leads us, when it brings us to Jesus, speaking peace through his atoning blood. Thus to know Him is eternal life. The principles of God are revealed to, and act upon, the hearts of his people. Because He is light, we abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good, and separate from an evil world which lieth in darkness, testifying against and hating its ungodliness and sin; but because God is love, we mourn over the poor sinner, bear with longsuffering his opposition and hatred, and ever seek his salvation and peace. We "walk in the light as He is in the light," and dwelling in love, we dwell in God, for God is love. (1 John, i. 7; and iv. 16).



These principles of holiness and grace should ever characterise the christian and the church ; but as I previously remarked, God has also given us in His word, his commandments and statutes to direct our feet, when with willing hearts we desire to walk in paths of light and love. God's principles, being the reflection of His nature, act on our affections ; but His precepts convey to us the wisdom of God, enlightening our understandings, and guiding our steps. We need prayerfully to study, and implicitly to obey these statutes, if our service is to be accepted of God. The precepts of God are in perfect harmony with his attributes, and guide us into that narrow path of grace and righteousness, in which we are called to have fellowship with Himself, and glorify Him. If we add to them, or neglect them, we are sure to err to the right hand or to the left ; and come short of either the grace or the holiness of God. This is strikingly exemplified in David's history ; see 1 Chron. xiii. and xv. In chapter xiii., David and all Israel desire a right thing, even to "bring again the ark of God ;" but instead of enquiring of the precepts of the Lord, they set about it according to their own thoughts. A new cart was procured, and the ark was carried thereon, "and David and all Israel played before God with all their might." But what was the result of neglecting the commandments of the Lord ? "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him . . . and there he died before God . . . and David was much displeased, . . . and David was "afraid' of God." So will it ever be when God's people neglect in their service to enquire of the commandments of the Lord. Instead of prosperity and blessing, they will experience fresh Perez-uzzas ; and all their labours will end in failure, confusion, and sorrow.

In chapter xv, David has learnt his lesson (sometimes a very hard one to learn), he has been to the Word, and enquired of the commandments of the Lord, and says, ver. 2 : "None ought to carry the ark of "God but the Levites, for them hath the Lord chosen ;" and ver. 13 : "For because we did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a "breach upon us, *for that we sought Him not after the due order.*" David obeys the divine precepts, his service is accepted, and the ark is brought home with music and the voice of joy.

Is it not thus with the church now ? Whilst valuing God's precious word, and meditating continually upon it, in order that our hearts may have fellowship with Him in his nature, as light and love ; is it not also our duty, and truest wisdom to search out and obey implicitly its precepts, so that "our love may abound, more and more, in knowledge "and all judgment ?" Knowledge without love, puffeth up ; yet a loving heart needs to be led and disciplined by an instructed understanding. Have we not had our Perez-uzza in these sad strifes and divisions ; and has it not been because we have neglected to seek the Lord therein *according to the due order* ? Let us turn then to those opening chapters of Revelations, which have previously been alluded to, as furnishing examples of churches in the condition under consideration, that in Christ's messages to those churches we may also learn the *Lord's thoughts* concerning them. This is what we need ; may He give us understanding therein.

In considering these very instructive portions of Scripture, to the keeping of which an especial blessing is appended, let us notice first the character in which the Lord Jesus is revealed. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus, his personal name; Christ, his official name, as God's anointed. We have to do with Jesus, not in the way of relationship, but of responsibility in service. It is the revelation which God (not the Father) gave unto him, and he appears as the *servant* of God, the son of man (ver. 13), the girded one; and the revelation is sent unto us as unto the *servants* of Christ—chap. i. 1, and ii. 20. We have, therefore, to do with Jesus in these chapters, not in the way of relationship, as the bridegroom; but we have to do with Him as the servant of God, dealing on God's behalf with His churches (plural), concerning their responsibilities in a dark and evil world. Hence, when we behold Him: "His hairs are white as wool, white as snow;" emblematical of divine purity in judgment (Daniel vii. 9); "His eyes are as a flame of fire," divine, searching light; and "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword;" "the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." We have also to do with Him in the way of "tribulation," and "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," as "the faithful witness, the first-begotten from the dead," the one "who liveth, and was dead, and is alive for ever more." Precious truth for a suffering, tempted, witnessing church to hold fast!

The revelation is given to Christ's churches; not to the church as in unity, but to the church as represented by seven churches, as to so many distinct witnesses for God. Christ seems to select these seven particular churches in Asia for the following reasons:—1. As seven is the perfect number, these seven churches would represent the entire Church of God on earth. 2. As the seven churches mentioned were severally in the seven spiritual conditions indicated in the addresses to them, at the time when the revelation was given to the Apostle John, the Lord Jesus took occasion to figure forth through them, the seven spiritual conditions into which churches might fall, sending the fitting word accordingly. 3. The order in which these churches are addressed may give a prophetic sketch of the seven spiritual conditions which would successively characterize the church upon earth before Christ's coming.

I cannot for a moment consider these addresses as merely allegorical; for as the churches mentioned in them were in *actual existence*, at the time when John received this revelation, I think we may rightly conclude that each church was really in the condition implied in the message to it, and that, therefore, these chapters were intended for a *practical*, as well as a prophetic word to them, and to the churches of God throughout the whole of the church's history, and in this light I desire especially to consider them in this pamphlet.

And now a few words concerning the figures of the vision—"the *mystery* of the seven stars and of the seven golden candlesticks." The *mystery* is double, representing the church in a twofold aspect. I. By "*Seven stars*, which are the angels of the seven churches." Various views have been taken as to what the angels of the seven

churches mean. I would suggest that, as we nowhere find any mention in other portions of the New Testament of any such personage or office in connection with the churches, the word angel refers not to any chief ruler in the churches, but is used concerning the churches in a sense similar to the one in which Christ uses it in Matt. xviii. 10: "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father." These little ones, though on earth, were represented by their angels in heaven before the face of God; so the churches, though on earth, are represented before God in heaven by their angels. A star is an heavenly object. Its light is from above. Though it shines on the earth, it is not of it. So also is the church essentially from above, shining on the earth, yet not of it. The stars are represented as together held in His right hand who is "the Alpha and Omega, the Almighty." Here we have the Ephesian view of the church—"seated together in heavenly places in Christ." Far above earth's strifes and confusions it is viewed (not actually, but in the purposes of God, and also practically, as in its head) as upheld and united in Christ's almighty hand. This blessed position of security nothing can touch (John x. 28); therefore, whilst the candlesticks may be removed, the stars remain. We have to notice, however, that as this mystery regards the church whilst actually on earth, it is represented, even in this aspect, not by one but seven stars, each star shining with the same heavenly effulgence, but bearing its own distinct light. We learn here that the church is essentially a heavenly thing. It is no voluntary association or institution of man, but the church of the living God. Begotten at Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, it is sustained and perpetuated by the same divine energy—the Lord adding to the church continually such as shall be saved. Such is the origin, character, and responsibility of the Church of God, whether viewed as a whole in the seven stars, or looked at in each local assembly or individual star. Seen in its earthly aspect, we behold failure and perverseness, confusion and ruin; but, viewed by the eye of faith, as it is represented before God, we behold only glory, beauty, and power. The light of the star never dims. God beholds not iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel (Numbers xxiii. 21). It is important to remember this, not alone for comfort, but also because the walk of God's people is ever to be according to their standing—that for which they are apprehended of Christ Jesus. Phil. iii. 13.

II. By "*Seven golden candlesticks, which are the seven churches.*"

The figure carries us back to those "figures of the true," spoken of in Heb. ix., which typified Christ and the Church. (Turn to Ex. xxv. 31-40.) The candlestick was made of pure gold, i.e., it was wholly divine in its nature. It consisted of a candlestick and its six branches, whereon were seven lamps, "made to give light;" and it was the High Priest's office, as a type of Christ, to go into the tabernacle "to dress and set up" the lamps thereof. Such was the golden candlestick, which stood within the tabernacle, "figures," as we read, "of the true."

We note, however, a remarkable departure from these "figures" in the vision given to John; for, instead of seeing seven lamps united in one golden candlestick, we behold seven distinct golden candlesticks—

each candlestick standing apart, on its own base, and Christ walking in the midst of them.

Why this departure from the figures of old? If we remember that the golden candlestick of old stood within the tabernacle, inside the Holy Place, where it was entirely surrounded by the emblems of the beauty and glory of heaven, and that therefore its light availed nothing for the world without, we shall understand that it represented the church in its Ephesian aspect—as “seated together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus,” continually rejoicing before God in the light of priestly service and praise. Here, however, we have to do with the church as on earth, in a position of light-bearing—God’s witness in the world for holiness and grace. In this office of light-bearing, the seven lamps are not united into one golden candlestick, but each candlestick has a distinct place of responsibility. Each golden candlestick is “for to give light” They are all formed of the same precious material, consume the same holy oil, and are watched over and tended by the same faithful gracious eye and hand; yet are there seven candlesticks, each candlestick having its individual lamp to uphold, and standing in *this responsibility on its own base.*

We learn here that the church is placed in the world to be God’s light therein, and that, in this responsibility of light-bearing, each church holds a distinct position before God. Unlike Israel in the flesh, the church is not seen in the world as a gathered, but a scattered people—“strangers scattered” here and there in little companies or churches. These churches possess no earthly country, city, or king. Their citizenship and king are in heaven. This heavenly link unites them, and by faith suffices. No Sanhedrim, Synod, or representative constitution is bequeathed them, to confederate and legislate for the whole. No: each candlestick stands on its own base, and each church is praised, rebuked, and exhorted according to its own condition before God; and this as entirely in its individual character, and without reference to other churches, as if it were the alone witness for God upon earth.

Thus, in writing to the church of Ephesus, whilst Christ reveals himself as the one “who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand,” blessedly reminding it of its common standing and union in Himself with all the churches of God, He says: “I know *thy* works, and *thy* labors, and *thy* patience,” &c., and, verse 4: “I have against *thee*, because *thou* hast left *thy* first love.” Christ does not occupy Ephesus with the state of Pergamos, Thyatira, or Laodicea, but with its own condition and responsibility to himself. His message is personal, between himself and itself—“*I* know *thy* works,” “*I* have against *thee*,” and “repent or else *I* will come unto *thee* quickly, and will “remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” True, Christ commends Ephesus because it “hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes,” and therefore dealt with any holding that evil doctrine whether they came from any other church, say from Pergamos (where alas! the evil was allowed), or were manifested within. Still, I say, Christ never enquires of Ephesus concerning Pergamos or Thyatira, but his message is personal; bringing it into his own immediate

presence, as to its own responsibilities and condition—and so with the messages to all the other churches.

This apparent isolation of the churches seems to be a position of weakness and danger to the natural understanding. Ever since man joined to rear the tower of Babel, confederacy has been his pillar of strength, and he shrinks from nothing so much as dependency on God. This spirit of confederacy—this trusting to an arm of flesh—has constantly leavened the church; for it is so hard to be content with God's arrangements, and occupy a position, which compels us to lean *only* on Him. This is the happy, invincible position of faith; and it is the position which the church is to occupy on earth, as is typified in the *mystery* of the seven stars, and the seven golden candlesticks.

To man's thoughts, each candlestick (or church) occupies a contemptible position of isolation and weakness; but faith sees the seven stars (*i.e.*, all the churches) upheld and federated in the almighty hand of Christ, and knows that amidst the seven golden candlesticks the Son of man is ever walking in the faithful love of priestly service. It knows that He is watching over, and ordering them, and it is content; desiring no other bond, no safer supervision.

Past church history shews how necessary it is that the church should understand, and keep this mystery. Forgetting it, the church has sought to remedy the seeming defect by setting up a church organization beyond the Word, which has ended at last in the visible unity of the churches under the metropolitan see and popedom of Rome; the Pope and the church (as in council of bishops assembled) usurping the offices of Christ and the Holy Ghost. What the church gained in outward, it lost in spiritual power, and we see the result in the superstition, evil, and ruin of the middle ages, and the present time. Christ, however, has not failed. He has been walking amongst the candlesticks, removing some indeed, but continually raising up fresh ones by the power of the Holy Ghost, and keeping the light burning amidst the darkness. I fear that the same spirit which culminated in Popery, with its pretensions to infallibility and universal submission, is at work in the character of Church unity, which the exclusive system seeks to enforce; for it takes off the consciences of saints and churches, from direct responsibility to Christ, to occupy them with what the *church* has done; claiming for its actions and judgments the authority and guidance of the Holy Ghost.

We would notice in conclusion regarding this mystery, that it takes up, not the future position and glory of the Bride; but the Church's present position, as God's witness in the world. It is a position of conflict, and yet rest; weakness, and yet strength; isolation, and yet union. A position of faith—faith's position of contraries; "as dying, and behold we live;" "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." It is unscriptural, to speak of a christian or of a church, as representing the unity of the body; for the body on earth is called to represent not itself, or anything about itself, but its absent Head; and thus each church is to be an epistle (article wanting in the Greek) of Christ, known and read of all men, 2 Cor. iii. 13. As Christ is "the light of the world," and is "the bright and morning

"stand as lights in the world, Phil. ii. 15.

Christ's oversight of his churches is as truly a present, practical reality, as is that unseen, mysterious, vital power which gives direction, and unison, to the members of our natural bodies. Does it then become Ephesus, or Smyrna, or Rome, or any assembled church delegates to assume Christ's prerogatives? Dare any say that there is a necessity that they do so; or are they wiser than He? Nay: let us remember that Christ has to do with his churches, and they have individually to do with him, and take care that we hear and keep "what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Looking at the messages, we first learn that Christ values *fervent love* in His people before all things else; whether works, labors, soundness in doctrine, or faith, &c. What a happy aspect the Ephesian church presented before others! Works, labors, patience, abhorrence of evil, soundness in doctrine, patience (seemingly under persecution), and not fainting, all for His name's sake. But, alas! His eyes "which are as a flame of fire" detected an unjudged evil, and that no light one—*there was declension in love*—love to Jesus first; but as a necessary consequence, in love also towards the brethren, and towards that poor perishing world Jesus died to redeem. "I have against thee," says Christ, "because *thou hast left thy first love.*" Christ forgets not the sufferings, labors, and faithfulness of His people; but, oh! he prizes most highly their affections. This evil must be repented of, for Christ cannot allow sin in His church. If we judge not ourselves, He must judge us; if the church repent not, He will remove its candlestick. I would notice, in connection with the removal of the candlestick, that the churches are dealt with concerning what *they have* (*i.e.*, the light they are giving), and not what they *are*. Thus all the candlesticks are golden (not gilt) candlesticks, made of pure gold, *i.e.*, they are essentially heavenly, divine in their nature. This is as much true concerning Laodicea, as concerning Ephesus or Smyrna; though of Smyrna, Christ says, "but thou art rich;" whilst of Laodicea he testifies, "thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, &c." Alas! this is also true concerning many saints, individually, for instead of possessing gold, and silver, and precious stones, their works will be burnt up, and they will suffer loss, though saved themselves, "yet so as by fire." 1 Cor. iii. 12-15.

The removal of the candlestick signifies, not the disowning of the church vitally, but of its *testimony*; *i.e.*, its removal from a position of light-bearing on the earth.

To the church of Pergamos, Christ reveals himself as "He which hath the sharp sword with the two edges." Though it is with the power of the Holy Ghost, Christ ever deals with his people *through the Word*. Isaiah viii. 20. We need to remember this. Does he comfort, admonish, rebuke, or instruct us, it is ever through the Word. The Word is here likened to a two-edged sword, quick and powerful, cutting both ways. It is the sword of the Spirit, the rightful weapon of the church. Has the church to combat Satan's infidel persecuting power? It overcomes him by the Word. At other times Satan

transforms himself into an angel of light, and seeks to corrupt the church; working within it by those who come in the guise of the Lord's servants (such as Balaam doctrine), and it may even be, sometimes by some who, like Peter in Matt. xvi. 23, are really his honoured, devoted servants. This is the most dangerous form of evil; but still our weapon is the Word—"to the Law and to the Testimony." Every thing is false to which we cannot add, "thus saith the Lord;" however plausible it may appear, or in whatever good and holy motives arrayed. Oh for grace to bring everything to the keen edge of the Word; even though, as here, it has to do with us in the discernment and judgment of everything contrary to God.

Satan had been using the sword of man's persecution against the church from without, they were faithful, "holding fast Christ's name, and not denying his faith;" but Satan was also working within, and precious as is the martyr faithfulness of his people to Christ, yet had he against them, because they had amongst them those who held the doctrine of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitanes. It became them to repent, and to use the sword of the Spirit against the evil within; "else," says Christ, "I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them (not thee) with the sword of my mouth."

In Thyatira, Christ has again to do with unjudged doctrinal evil. Revealing Himself as "the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass;" marking and delighting to own each precious fruit of the Spirit, its works, love, service, faith, patience, and taking note of increased energy, He adds: "I have a few things (does this imply this Church's corporate rejection as utterly bad?) against thee, that thou *sufferest* that woman Jezebel to *teach* and to "seduce my servants," &c. Whereas Pergamos was guilty of retaining those who held the doctrines of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitanes, the evil occupied a far more serious position in Thyatira, being *taught* and *actively promulgated* by "that woman Jezebel," who, calling herself a prophetess, was seducing Christ's servants "to commit fornication and "to eat things sacrificed to idols." This was the sin of Thyatira—it *suffered* that woman Jezebel to *teach*, &c.; a far more dangerous, culpable neglect of duty than that of Pergamos, by as much as the evil was more active and prominent. Now, how does Christ regard and deal with the Church of Thyatira whilst in this sad and evil condition? This is the object of our enquiry. The Lord grant us eyes to see and ears to hear.

We have to notice first a *corporate* dealing with the Church as a whole. In this corporate dealing, Christ begins by *owning all that was of God in it*. "I know," says Christ, "thy works, and charity, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works, and the last to be more than the first." Oh, what a heart-searching, yet encouraging word is this! "I know thy works," &c. The Lord never forgets his people's "works of faith and labors of love." He will not lose the good in the evil, nor indiscriminately condemn the precious with the vile. No; this is far from the Lord. Yet, whilst the Lord so graciously delights to make much of the grace in his people, we have next to mark and remember that he cannot pass by their sin. Christ must also notice and

repentance that which was evil in the church. "Notwithstanding," says Christ, "I have a few things against thee." Having commended the good in Thyatira, his eyes of fire must search out, make manifest, and condemn the evil, that the church may repent thereof and put it away. As the Church of Thyatira had not embraced the doctrine, the doctrine was in it, though not of it. The church was not, therefore, charged with receiving the doctrine, but with suffering its teacher and her disciples. This was its guilt, and the measure of its defilement. Hence it was not called upon to repent of the doctrine (concerning which Christ could never say "I have a few things against thee,") but of its sin in neglecting to obey Christ's commandment to put it away; for had ~~not~~ Christ called upon the church to repent of the doctrine, he could not have said to saints in it, "to you, I say . . . as many as *have not this doctrine.*" On the one hand, care for the purity of the church, and for their own souls required, that the leaven be purged out, lest it leaven the whole lump; and on the other hand, loyalty to Christ, and divine love to the fallen ones, demanded that there should be no toleration of that which He hated.

Surely we learn here that it is a church's duty not to suffer evil doers, but to purge itself from evil, whether moral or doctrinal; for in the instance before us the doctrinal evil also implied moral evil, idolatry and fornication being sins named in 1 Cor. v. 11. We also learn that in dealing with a church which dishonors Christ, by suffering that which He hates, it is our clearest duty to *deal faithfully* with it concerning those things wherein it has dishonored Him and forgotten His authority, remembering, however, like Christ, *first to make much of and own what is of God in it.*

We have next to notice that whilst there is a *corporate dealing* with *as a whole*, there is also an *individual dealing with its members*, according to their individual condition before God. Thus, dealing no longer with the church corporate, but with the members thereof, Christ says: "I gave her (Jezebel) space to repent of her fornication (how long-suffering and gracious, and how instructive to us!), and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds;" and then, turning from Jezebel and those who were committing adultery with her to those who had not embraced the doctrine, Christ continues: "Unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as *have not this doctrine*, and which *have not known the depths of Satan as they speak*, I will put upon you none other burden. "But that which ye have hold fast till I come." The Lord recognizes two classes in the church, such as *had*, and such as *had not* the evil doctrine, and sends special messages to them accordingly. Christ exhorts the first class, even those *who had* the evil doctrine to *repentance*; reminding them that though the church may fail in its responsibility to judge its members, and though we may refuse to judge ourselves, we have all to do with Him who "searcheth the reins and heart," and will give unto every one "according to his works." To the latter class, even to those who *had not* the doctrine, Christ's simple message is, "I will put upon you none other burden."



But that which ye have *hold fast* till I come." The burden which Christ puts upon them is the obligation which rests upon all his people to keep his commandments; referring, it may be, more especially here to the commandment in 1 Cor. v. to "put away" the evil doer, or it may be to the commandment enjoined upon the gentile churches in Acts xv. 28, which burden, Jezebel was teaching them to throw aside. Can Christ remove the obligation of obedience from his people? Is not his yoke easy, and his burden light? Are not his ways ways of pleasantness, and all his paths peace? Let us "hold fast," then, the words of Jesus; remembering that "a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

We find that in dealing with a church in a similar condition to that of Thyatira (*i.e.*, which suffered in it a teacher and school of evil doctrine), whilst we dare not ignore its great sin in tolerating that which Christ hates, we ought not to disown the church corporately, but learn of Him how to recognise *what is of God in it*, putting a difference between such of its members as *have*, and such as *have not*, the evil doctrine.

Confidence in such a church would cease, and its letters of commendation be regarded as untrustworthy, until it had repented and put away the evil. We must not, however, reject it, as though it stood in the same place which the holders of evil doctrine occupy, with whom we are commanded to "keep no company;" but, turning from *corporate dealing*, or *open communion* by letters of commendation, we must fall back in our reception upon *individual dealing* with the members of the church, faithfully examining *all* who come from it, that we may put a difference between such as *have*, and such as *have not*, the evil doctrine, and act accordingly. If any church neglected to exercise such godly care when dealing with a church which suffered evil doctrine, it would leave its portals open for the entrance of evil doctrine and teachers. It would not be receiving to the glory of God; it would therefore, I judge, become other churches to deal with it as they would with a church in which they knew were those holding evil doctrines, *viz.*, to receive from it *only on personal examination*. Were such action faithfully maintained by every church, Christ's glory would be cared for, and evil doers detected and excluded; whilst "the rest," even those to whom Christ writes: "that which ye have hold fast till I come," would be received, and the unity of the body, and the fellowship of the faith maintained.

In this personal examination as to the *doctrine*, rebuke and admonition must always be conjoined concerning the share which every member has had in the church's guilt in corporately "suffering" the evil. We must, however, remember that teachers, fathers, &c., in Christ incur a greater responsibility and guilt therein than attaches to those who are weak ones—babes in Christ—those who are, as it were, learning their a, b, c, and, therefore incompetent to understand matters which belong to those of maturer years and understanding.

What! it will be said, are we to leave the door open for the reception of those who, though not professing themselves to hold the evil doctrine, are yet in avowed fellowship with its teacher? Might we

not to admit persons into the heart of an assembly who were so far under the immoral deceitful influence of the system as to conceal the fact that they sympathised with the evil teacher? We will not deny the danger, nor forget how Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that "grievous wolves" would "enter in, not sparing the flock;" yea, and that of themselves men should arise "speaking perverse things." It was a subtle, seducing doctrine in Thyatira—the very depths of Satan; but its workings could not escape Him "whose eyes are as a flame of fire." He knew exactly the condition of all in the church, discerning those who had, and those who had not the evil. And is not He willing and able, even now, to grant unto His servants who wait on Him discernment concerning the spiritual condition of those with whom they have to do on His behalf? Let us only watch, and seek humbly to walk with faith in the path of obedience, and we need not fear either the power or the craft of the enemy; for "greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world." I would also remark, that it does not follow that because a Christian is in communion with a church which suffers an evil teacher, or school of doctrine, that therefore he is necessarily in avowed fellowship with that teacher, except it be in the *general* sense in which *all* the members of a church are in professed fellowship and responsibility with one another; otherwise those designated "the rest in Thyatira" were in avowed fellowship with Jezebel. No: Christ is the professed centre of fellowship in the churches, and not any teacher, however gifted or influential.

Having dwelt especially on the messages to those churches which suffered evil doctrine, we would notice how the personal responsibility of the individual members is brought out in the word of exhortation which closes each message. It is, "*he* that hath an ear to hear, let *him* hear;" and again, "to *him* that overcometh," "*he* that overcometh," &c.—the corporate failure of the church never lessening the individual responsibility of each member to the Lord Jesus. He never fails, though all of man may be in ruin. It is, nevertheless, the voice of the Spirit to the churches; therefore, what is especially addressed to one particular church is also intended for the profit of churches and saints generally.

These chapters likewise present the seven spiritual conditions into which Christians, or churches, may fall; beginning with an Ephesian, and, alas! often ending with a Laodicean condition; and Christ's exhortation accordingly. Well would it be if churches and believers remembered to examine themselves by the light of these chapters, concerning their own condition, that they might obtain the needed word of encouragement, or rebuke from the Lord. Do we desire also to admonish and edify one another? It becomes us carefully and prayerfully to ponder their important lessons; that, having the mind of Christ, we may be able to discern the spiritual condition of our brethren, and obtain the word in season.

Let us briefly sum up the truths we have been learning.

1. The church is the *light of the world*: it is therefore under responsibility to let its light shine.
2. When viewed in this aspect, as the light of the world, the church

is regarded as consisting of *many locally distinct assemblies* (or churches); and in this sense Paul writes concerning "the churches of God," in 1 Cor. xi. 16.

3. Each of these churches, in this responsibility of light-bearing, *stands on its own base*, its responsibility being due *directly to Christ alone*. It becomes it therefore to be occupied with its own condition before Christ, rather than with judging that of other churches.

4. Though each church has its own distinct local responsibility to Christ in service, yet do all these locally separate churches upon earth, constitute but *one church in the Lord*. The secret of their *union* is however a *mystery*, which is found in the person and offices of the Lord Jesus Christ, acting in the church by the Holy Ghost. The visible union of churches should therefore spring from, and be manifested by, each church hearing the voice of the Spirit, and obeying the commandments of our common Lord. A practical, living unity, would thus be maintained before the world, without attempting to federate the churches under ecclesiastical systems of rule, not ordained in Scripture.

5. Each church should chiefly cultivate *ardent love*, both towards the Lord Jesus, his people, and the world; provoking one another to love and good works.

6. Obedience to Christ likewise demands that it *judge, and put away evil*, whether moral or doctrinal.

7. In dealing with another church, which dishonors Christ by *suffering evil*, it must withdraw from *open communion with it*; and receive, until repentance, only by the *personal examination of all coming from it*, that it may put a difference between *such as have*, and *such as have not*, the evil; and act accordingly.

8. The same character of action must be taken towards a church which, although it professes not to have any evil doctrine in it, yet maintains open communion with a church in which are those who have evil doctrine.

The more I examine and meditate upon these deeply-instructive, precious portions of Scripture, so especially the church's present legacy—even "the voice of the Spirit to the churches," the clearer the light seems to shine upon this question; and I have abundant reason to bless God for that Word which is a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our paths, and in *keeping* of which there is great reward. Some, however, object to them, as being "dark sayings of prophesy, and hard to be understood, and appeal to the Old Testament and the Epistles. It is true that many portions of the Book of Revelations are of difficult interpretation, and I freely acknowledge that I but dimly comprehend the meaning of many of its prophetic figures and visions; nevertheless, it is a book pregnant with comfort, instruction, and warning to the people of God. An especial blessing, moreover, appends to the hearing and keeping its words; and if in the Apostles' day the Holy Ghost would impress the vital importance of its truths, adding "for the *time is at hand*," much more does it behove us in these last days to listen with attentive and obedient heart unto what "the Spirit saith unto the churches." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable;" therefore these Scriptures are given by inspira-

tion, for our profit. I would, therefore, solemnly ask my brethren in Christ who may read this pamphlet to weigh it carefully and prayerfully before God, and enquire whether these Scriptures do, or do not, teach the things I have been endeavouring so set forth, and, if they do, to hear and *keep* what "the Spirit saith unto the churches."

I wish to take no position of neutrality, but one of simple implicit *obedience* to the Lord Jesus. We would desire to be perfectly joined in the same mind with our brethren; but, whilst we feel deeply grieved to take a position which seems to force many, with whom we have formerly been associated, to separate from us, it is far better to stand alone, in obedience to Christ, than to follow a multitude to do evil; and self-will in the things of God is nothing but evil (John x. 11). One portion of Scripture never contradicts or weakens another; or, if it appear to do so, the fault lies in our own thoughts about one or both of such portions. We will therefore turn to the Old Testament and the Epistles, and I think that we shall find that they only confirm and enforce the evident teaching of these chapters.

#### CHAPTER II.

The guilty sinner, fleeing to Jesus is not only reconciled and pardoned, but receives the spirit of adoption, crying "Abba, Father." He is no more a servant; but a son. (Gal. iv. 7.) Thus does God's grace meet the legality of man's heart. But having been made free from sin, we have become the servants of Christ, and He who stooped so low to wash our feet, says: "Ye call me master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am." There are thus two aspects in which the believer is regarded; viz., that of sonship or *relationship*, and that of *service* according to *office*.

The same is true regarding the church. She is the bride, according to *relationship*; but seen in the place of *service* upon earth, she is the light of the world, God's house, His witness for truth and grace. These aspects must not be confounded. Some of the epistles regard the church in the former, and some in the latter aspect. This is indicated by their opening addresses. In those epistles which have to do with believers as the servants of Christ, they are regarded as corporately associated together in this responsibility, and the address runs as follows: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth," and again: "Unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God," and these epistles alone contain rules for the government, ministry, and discipline of the Church of God. In those epistles, however, which regard believers in the way of relationship, they are addressed as individually responsible directly to the Lord Jesus, and the address runs thus: "To the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi;" "To the saints at Ephesus," &c.; and in these epistles we find no trace of corporate (or church) action and responsibility.

The Epistle to Ephesians presents the church in the former aspect; even as that glorious body which will be the bride, the Lamb's wife. Here we have *relationship* to Christ, and of this body every believer, whether sleeping in Jesus or now living, is a member, whatever his walk, or apprehension of truth. Hence it has not a local, but a general character; and

when the believer is exhorted in it as to his walk, whether amongst his fellow saints, or in the ordinary spheres and duties of life, his conscience is brought individually and directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus. There is no thought of any responsibility to a church, or of joint-responsibility with other saints in a church; his responsibility flows from relationship, not office, and therefore we get no rules for *church* organization or discipline. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of the Lord" (Eph. v. 21), refers not to that rule which God has ordained for the oversight of the churches, to which Paul alludes in Heb. xiii. 17, but is qualified by the verses following: "Wives *submit* yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord;" "Children *obey* your parents;" "Servants be *obedient* to them that are your masters." Believers are, indeed, exhorted, as members of Christ's church, as upon earth, but it is in connection with the *general membership* of "the *whole family* in heaven and in earth," chap. iii. 15, and the unity they are to endeavour to keep is, "the unity of the Spirit." "Christ is the *head* of the church," even as "the husband is the head of the wife," and "he is the *Saviour* of the body." We do not see Christ, as in Revelations, in the place of judgment, calling His servants to account concerning their works; but we behold Him exercising an husband's authority and love, "nourishing and cherishing" His church as His own flesh. As the risen Head in heaven, He gives "unto every one of us grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ." "Some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Though those gifts are in the church, as upon earth, they come to it as united in relationship with its living head. Christ's place is, therefore, entirely one of giving, nourishing, cherishing (not at all of requiring or receiving), and the gifts are for "the *perfecting* of the saints, for the work of the *minister*, for the *edifying* of the body of Christ, till we *all* come unto a *perfect man*." As no thought of official responsibility, or of local churches, enters into this Epistle; those gifts are only mentioned which tend to the spiritual *nourishment* of the body, and, therefore, in addition to the apostles, prophets and teachers, we get the evangelists and pastors; "the Lord adding to the church such as shall be saved," through the evangelist; the pastor leading the flock into green pastures, and beside the still waters.

In the Epistle to the Corinthians, on the contrary, where the church is dealt with in the position of *testimony* in an evil world, the *government* of God's house, and *official responsibility* come in; and, therefore, in addition to the apostles, prophets and teachers, we get the gifts of miracles, healings, helps, governments and tongues—these latter gifts being either for the rule of God's house or for signs to the world, as it says of tongues (1 Cor. xiv. 22): "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." The Epistles to the Corinthians deal with believers as the *servants* of Christ, *associated together* in this responsibility in various local churches, or assemblies of saints. (I am not speaking of denominations, a thing unknown to Scripture). Believers are addressed in them, not so much as members of the general assembly, but as mem-

*in particular* of that local assembly in which the will of God has placed them. The general membership is not set aside, but it is not the prominent thought. We therefore get in them the earthy organisation, government, and ministry of God's house. Whilst the church is responsible to the Lord Jesus, each member has a joint responsibility in and to the assembly; hence, in matters of discipline the church has to judge and punish, and it is the church which has to forgive and receive back again. As every believer has a personal, as well as a corporate responsibility, so each local assembly (though forming part of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn,") possesses its own local standing and personal responsibility to the Lord Jesus. We shall find this to be abundantly clear if we examine these epistles. Thus, although Paul, in writing in the First Epistle (chap. 1, v. 2) "to the Church of God which is at Corinth," reminds the Christians in it of their common calling as saints, "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord," yet, when he addresses it, whether in praise, rebuke, or in matters of discipline, &c., he exhorts it as though it were entirely unconnected with all other churches on earth. If in chapter i. he thanks God that they were enriched with all utterance and knowledge, and came behind in no gift, it is concerning the church at Corinth *alone* he is writing. If, too, in chapter iv. 8, he says "Now ye are full, now ye are rich," and, chapter v. "ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned," and again, verse 8, "put away from amongst yourselves that wicked person," surely he is not speaking about the Church of God generally, but only of the individual assembly at Corinth? As in Revelations it was "thee," "thee," "thee," so here it is "ye," "ye," "ye." Mark, too, how the Spirit of God delights to commend what was of God in the church, before ever it deals with its failure and sin. As a golden candlestick, the church at Corinth stood on its own base. Paul does not occupy it, therefore, with the leaven which was working amongst the Galatian churches (he deals with that in the epistle to the Galatians), but he occupies it with its own condition and responsibilities. It was not the church of God generally, the saints at Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, &c., who were called upon to mourn on account of the sin at Corinth, or to take cognizance of and deal with it, but only the Christians in that particular church wherein the evil was manifested and allowed, even the Corinthian church.

God holds each church responsible within itself to deal with evil, and maintain his authority. Each church possesses, in its locality, the standing and responsibility of the Israel of God; and even as God said to Joshua in Achan's case, "*Israel hath sinned* . . . neither will I be with you any more *except ye destroy the accursed from among you*," so Paul wrote to Corinth: "*ye have not rather mourned, that he which hath done this deed might be taken away from among you*;" the rebuke and responsibility of acting *extending only to the Corinthian church*.

The evil condition of Corinth would indeed have caused deep grief to other churches, if made known to them; for the closer we live to Jesus, the more deeply do we feel and mourn over the sin and shame of our brethren: still, I say, it would not have become other churches to mourn

*in the sense* in which it became the church at Corinth ; nor would God require it of them, nor is there a hint that a joint-responsibility lay upon other churches to note, and deal with the sin at Corinth. No ; Christ desires that each church be occupied with Himself, His commandments, and His claims ; and to that spirit which turns from our own personal responsibility, to occupy ourselves with the responsibilities of others, Christ's short and decisive rebuke is, "What is that to thee, follow thou me ?"

The exclusive system denies this local standing and responsibility of churches. It views only one assembly, and affirms that "the idea of the members of an assembly is wholly unknown to Scripture." (See Tract entitled "Discipline and unity of the Assembly," p. 16.) This view is supposed to be enforced by the manner in which Paul addresses the saints at Corinth, in 1 Cor. xii., in connection with "the one body ;" especially in the 27th verse, where he says, "Now ye are the body of Christ," &c., showing that the church at Corinth was so intrinsically one with the general Church of God upon earth, as to preclude its having an independent local responsibility of its own.

In order to support this interpretation of the passage, it is necessary to lay emphasis on the word "the," "Ye are *the* body of Christ ;" but turning to the original Greek, we find that it has been inexactly rendered in our authorised version, there being no article in the Greek before the word "body," and that, therefore, the correct rendering is, "Now ye are a body of Christ, and members in particular." The following extracts from standard Grammars clearly establish this.

In Valpy's Greek grammar, page 2, he says, "The Greek language has only one article, which usually answers to the definite article 'the' in English ; thus, *ἄνθρωπος* means a man, or man in general, *ὁ ἄνθρωπος* means, the man, &c." Again, T. S. Green's New Testament Grammar, page 40, says, treating of the omission of the article before substantives : "Omissions of the article, in places where its use is legitimate, constitute an important part of the general subject of its use." Stating then those cases in which the article is "legitimately associated with words, but is at the same time often omitted as not necessary to perspicuity," which are as follows : 1. "Abstracts," 2. "Proper Names," 3. "Superlative Expressions," 4. "Certain accusatives and datives used in a kind of adverbial sense," 5. "Two or more nouns conjoined by conjunctions," 6. "Words which on account of the familiarity of the idea, or in consequence of constant recurrence in speech of ordinary life — become, as it were, proper names ;" he adds, page 46, "Such omissions of the article are mere matters of license ; but an absence of the article where it might have been used in some sense or other is frequently no matter of license, but is possessed of a *distinct and even forcible significance*. Heb. i. 3. *ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν νῆφ*. Had the words been *ἐν τῷ νῆφ*, they would merely have called to mind the person already known under the title of the Son of God, without pointing attention to the inherent meaning of the title, namely, his divine Sonship. It may perhaps sound strange, but the rendering should be 'by a Son,' implying that God no longer addressed them by a prophet, a mere *δούλος*, but by one who had the nature and dignity of a Son."

1 Cor. xiv. 4, "ἐκκλησίαν οἰκοδομεῖ," edifies a congregation, "as opposed to himself only."

It is clear from these quotations that the omission of the article before the Greek word *σῶμα* (body) in verse 27, is no mere matter of license, but possesses a *distinct and even forcible significance*; for whilst it does not come under any of the seven classes above quoted, in which the use of the article would not have been necessary for perspicuity, it is *invariably associated with the article throughout this chapter with the single exception of this verse*. Thus, whilst in verses 12, 14, 16, 18, 22, 24, 25, and 28, the article is invariably used before it, in this 27th verse it is omitted, the Apostle writing Ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐστέ σῶμα Χριστοῦ καὶ μέλη ἐκ μέρους. "Ye are Christ's body, and members of a part,"\*

I believe the omission of the article in this particular verse is intentional; and that it possesses a forcible significance; corroborating the view I have been endeavouring to set forth concerning the church, when regarded in its position of *testimony* in the world. Having enlarged on important truths concerning the church of God generally—the "general assembly"—as he says, v. 12, "so also is the Christ." Paul desired to make a special application of them to the saints assembled at Corinth; he therefore forces home these truths, particularly, upon them, saying, "Now ye are a body of Christ, and members in "particular," or more literally, "members of (according to) a part, or portion."\* (2 Cor. ii. 5.) The corporate standing and responsibility of the saints at Corinth was that of Christ's body; but their responsibility of membership, was directly in connection with the assembly at Corinth, of which they were "members in particular." Indeed had Paul said: "Now ye are the body of Christ," he would thereby have excluded all saints, not belonging to the church at Corinth, from that blessed position; since the personal pronoun "ye" refers, not to people generally, but to certain persons particularly.

This omission of the article would have possessed forcible significance had this been the only passage in which it occurred; but it becomes the more significant when we find the Spirit exhibiting the same care throughout these Epistles, when treating of church matters, organization, government, &c., clearly exemplifying the position of separate local responsibility which pertains to churches, when regarded in, what I may call, their Corinthian, or official standing. Thus, when Paul is dealing, in 1 Cor. iii., with the factions which had obtained amongst the church at Corinth, whilst he likens himself and Apollos to fellow laborers, &c., compares the Corinthian church to a field, a building, he does not speak of them as *the* tillage and building of God, but he says "θεοῦ γαργυρον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστὶν"—"ye are a husbandry, a building of God,"\* and again in ver. 16, he continues, "Know ye not that ye are a temple (article omitted) of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" the Corinthian church being one amongst the many

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\* There would be no objection to rendering this in the abstract; "Ye are Christ's body,"—like our authorised version in 1 Cor. iii. 9: "Ye are God's husbandry, God's building."



husbandries, buildings and temples of God then being redeemed to God by the power of the Holy Ghost throughout the world.

Though contrary to Jewish prejudices concerning the temple of God at Jerusalem, this was only the fulfilment of Christ's words: "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit, and in truth"—John iv. 23. Jehovah's presence constituted the earthly building at Jerusalem the temple of God. Now, by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, God is inhabiting living temples (John xiv. 17); each believer's body being a temple (article omitted) of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. vi. 19), and each assembly, a temple—an habitation of God through the spirit.

Chapter vii. 14, is another very significant passage. Having commanded the church at Corinth concerning marriage, Paul enforces the universal application of the commandment to all Christians, saying: "And so ordain I in all the churches." According to the exclusive theory, he ought to have said: "And so ordain I in *the assembly* (or church); but not so, for regarding each church as a golden candlestick *standing on its own base*," he writes: "And so ordain I in all the churches." This is again very marked in chapter xi. 16, where, instead of saying, as exclusive doctrine would lead us to expect, "We have no such custom, neither *the assembly* (or church) of God;" he writes: "We have no such custom, neither the churches of God."

It is also very instructive to note the use, and the omission of the article in chap. xiv., thus v. 4 (quoted by Green) "He that prophesieth edifies a church" (or assembly), article omitted, *i.e.*, not the general church of God, but that particular one in which he exercises his gift, in contradistinction to himself. Verse 19: "Yet in a church I had rather speak five words with my understanding," &c.—the same thought. Verse 23: "If, therefore, the whole church (article present) be come together," alluding to the assembling, not of all the saints in the world, but of all Christians in any particular locality. Verse 28: Let him keep silence in a church (article omitted), *i.e.*, in the church in which he is gathered. Verse 34: Let your women keep silence in the churches (article present), for it is a shame for women to speak in a church" (article omitted). The first clause gives a commandment binding upon all assemblies of saints, the last clause its reason: "for it is a shame for women to speak in a church (or assembly). The commandment is binding upon the church of God generally; but it is not enjoined upon it as a unity, but upon each of God's churches severally.

We must also notice two more passages in 2 Corinthians. First of all, chapter iii. 2, 3. Paul saying to the church of Corinth, "need we letters of commendation to you, or of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle," qualifies it by adding, "manifestly declared to be an epistle (article omitted) of Christ, ministered by us," &c. All Christian churches are epistles of Christ, but Paul regards the Corinthian church as his "letter of commendation," for, though its authorship was of Christ (it was "an epistle of Christ"), it was in an especial sense Paul's workmanship, "ministered" by him. Lastly,

chapter vi. 16. Paul is dwelling here on the responsibility of believers, like Israel of old, to come out and be separate from the heathen, and to touch not the unclean, that God might dwell in them and walk in them. Applying these principles, however, personally to the saints at Corinth, he adds: "for ye are a temple (article omitted) of the living God," and asks "What agreement hath a temple (article omitted) of God with idols?" But some will ask, Why, then, the figure of "the *one body*" made use of in 1 Cor. xii.? Let us then shortly consider that chapter. Chapters xii, xiii. (in parenthesis), and xiv. form one paragraph in the Epistle, whose subject is spiritual gifts. Its object is to give gifts their right place in the church, and to order their exercise. Gifts had been abused in Corinth, having been exercised for self-exaltation, and not for edification. The gift of tongues had been especially thus abused, and was being coveted in a carnal spirit. This is clear from chapter xiv. 12 to 26, and therefore the conclusion concerning the exercise of spiritual gifts is "Let all things be done to edifying." It is important to remember this whilst meditating on these chapters.

The subject is premised by Paul reminding the christians at Corinth of their former low estate, led away to "dumb idols," and how deliverance came by the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, since "no man can say Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost." This puts the saints into their right place, as debtors to grace, owing all they are, and all they have, to the living power of the Holy Ghost.

Concerning spiritual gifts we learn, 1. There are "*diversities of gifts*, (mentioned verses 8 to 10,) but the *same Spirit*." The presence and living energy of the Holy Ghost in the church, forms the key-truth in this chapter. The Lord Jesus, having ascended on high, has fulfilled the promise of the Father (Acts i. 4, 5,) and sent down the Holy Ghost from heaven. The Holy Ghost is therefore on earth, dwelling in the church, and acting in living energy in the members of Christ. All gift, therefore, is by the power of the Holy Ghost. As Christ took the form of a servant upon earth, so the Holy Ghost takes, as it were, the place of a servant in the church. He distributes gifts indeed "according to his will;" but Christ is Lord (v. 5); the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost being an incorrect expression, the office of the Holy Ghost being to glorify *Him*, and to take of *His* things (the gifts are Christ's, Eph. iv. 7 and 8,) and shew them unto us. Still, we have to remember that all gift, knowledge, and power in the church, are *by the same Spirit*.

2nd. "*Diversities of ministries* (v. 28), but the *same Lord*." The apostles, prophets, teachers, &c., are *servants* (ministers, 1 Cor. iii. 5, and stewards, iv. 1,) in the church of the same Lord Jesus. They hold an *official* place in the church, for one common *master* and *Lord*. This again indicates the character of this epistle. They are not lords over God's heritage, but servants for edification. Let us remember this concerning our gifts; we hold them under responsibility to serve Christ, unto the edification of His church.

3rd. "*Diversities of operations*, but the *same God* which worketh all in all." As there are diversities of ministries, prophets, teachers, governments, helps, &c.; so each servant has in his peculiar ministry a

special character of operation, or working, committed to him of God, which he is to wait on, and cultivate, without trying to imitate the operations of others. This also is of great practical importance to remember. There may be several prophets or teachers, in a church; to one is given the fervent power of a Peter, to another the eloquence of an Apollos, to another the persuasive gentleness of the beloved disciple; let each cultivate and use his own character of ministry, remembering that it is "the same God that worketh all in all,"—all sufficiency and increase being in God. 2 Cor. iii. 5; and 1 Cor. iii. 6.

4th. "The *manifestation of the Spirit* (whether seen in gifts, ministries or operations) is given to every man to *profit withal*." "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." This brings into responsibility each believer, and leaves no room for glorying. Each believer has a place of service, a gift in the Church of God, divided to him according to the will of the Holy Ghost, which place he is responsible to know, and to use for the *profit* of the church.

The human body, with its many and varied members, is used in illustration. Being many members (hand, eye, foot), it is yet one body. The whole body is not one member, but many; yet being many, these members are one body. "So also," says Paul, "is the Church;" *i.e.*, "the general assembly and church of the first-born." (Heb. xii. 2, 3.) Into this one body all believers have been baptized by the one Spirit, having been made to drink into one spirit.

This figure of the one body manifestly refers to the church as in the world; the gifts, ministries, &c., being exercised on the earth. It therefore teaches concerning the church down here, that even as God has set different members in our natural bodies, all these members having special offices for the benefit of the body; so hath God set in the church some apostles, some prophets, some teachers, &c.; each to wait on and use the ministry God has committed to him for the profit of the whole. As also there is no division in the natural body, but all the members work harmoniously for the whole; so in the church all should seek to use their gifts in harmony, seeking only the edification of the rest, having "the same care one for another."

This is true of the church of God generally, and in one sense through the whole of its earthly history; for we in our day profit by the labors, sufferings, and faithfulness of the servants of Christ in past ages; and it becomes us so to watch and work, that the church of God in the present and future times may be profited withal. The members, or gifts, are in the body; hence if baptized by the one spirit into the one body, I am a member of the church of Christ wherever gathered; and as such to be received by every church. If God has committed to me any ministry, whether of teaching or rule, and I am removed to another church, I am thus to be commended to it, and received; yet not of compulsion, but according as they are able to recognise the gift of God in me.

This is, however, fully compatible with what we have previously noticed, that each church possesses an individual local responsibility to the Lord Jesus, and that the saints in each assembly are, in an especial sense, "*members in particular*" thereof. For, taking in illustration the human

dy, we not only find in it different members, a hand, an eye, a foot, &c., but there is the right hand and the left hand, the right foot and the left foot, &c., and each of these members, though in the body generally, possesses its own place in the body and its own local responsibility to the head. Again we have not only a right and a left hand, but each hand is corporately composed of many members (the fingers and thumb), and these members, though in the body generally, are nevertheless members in particular of their respective hands; the thumb and fingers of each hand having an especial membership with, and responsibility to, one another. Even so is it with the churches of God upon earth. Whilst there is a *general* membership binding the believer to the general assembly and church of Christ; there is also a *particular* membership, which links him more immediately with that particular church in which he is placed of God—a local membership and responsibility, which pertains solely to him and the saints in his immediate locality, even those who constitute the church of God in that place. It is clearly according to this membership and responsibility that the saints in the church at Corinth are dealt with in the case of the fornicator (1 Cor. v). Thus Paul says, verse 1, "There is fornication among *you*," clearly meaning amongst the saints at Corinth, and them only. "And *ye* are puffed up;" shows the self-satisfied carnal condition of the Corinthian church. "And have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among *you*;" *i.e.*, definitely from amongst the church at Corinth, those whom it became to mourn, and not christians generally. So all through this chapter the pronouns "*you*" and "*ye*," refer definitely and alone to the saints at Corinth. To them certainly belonged the shame and rebuke, and to them also the duty to act, and put away that wicked person from among themselves.

Whilst the "*within*" and "*without*" clearly apply to acknowledgment amongst the people of God, to the difference between Christians and the men of the world, it applies *primarily* in this case to being within and without the church at Corinth. The church at Corinth was God's candlestick, His assembly in that city; therefore, not to be in it, was to be regarded as amongst the men of the world. The local character of the discipline, as in connection primarily with the church at Corinth, is plainly expressed by the term "*yourselves*": "Put away from amongst *yourselves* that wicked person."

Paul does not say "put away from amongst *us*," as from the general fellowship of saints; nor yet "from *the church* (or assembly)," as from the whole church of God upon earth; but he says "put away from among *yourselves*"—*i.e.*, definitely from the saints assembled at Corinth. The Greek is yet more emphatic. It is not merely ἐξ ὑμῶν "from amongst you"—*i.e.*, merely from amongst Christians; but the word αὐτῶν is added: ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν—"from among your own selves, *i.e.*, from among the saints gathered at Corinth, *apart from all others*; such being the force of αὐτός, as is exemplified in 1 Pet. ii. 24: "Who *His own* self bare our sins in *His own* body on the tree." Turn again to the same case in 2 Cor. vii., and we see from the whole tenor of the passage, and the constant recurrence of the personal pronouns "*ye*" and "*your*," that the apostle had in his mind only the saints

gathered at Corinth, and not believers generally, as he says in ver. 11 : "In all things *ye* have approved your (own) selves to be clear in this "matter." The saints all over the world were not implicated in the guilt of Corinth, but only such as were "members in particular" of the church of Corinth. *They* were called on, therefore, to mourn, and to put away the evil doer from among *themselves*. *They* had obeyed the command, put away the evil doer, and sorrowed after a godly sort, and thus they had in all things approved *themselves* to be clear in the matter.

There is one body—the general assembly and church of Christ. All who are Christ's belong to this body, but its unity consists in all its members being made to drink into the one Spirit. It is a unity of members, not of churches; and to attempt a corporate unity of the churches is simply to endeavor to fuse into *one* the *seven* golden candlesticks. Such attempts are not according to the mind of God, and their evil tendency ever is to draw off the consciences of saints and churches from the Lord's judgment, and occupy them with the judgments one of another. The general membership of Christians is a doctrine to be acknowledged and maintained by the churches; but it can only be practically manifested by all saints drinking deeply into the one Spirit, so that "the *whole* multitude of them that believe" may be of one heart and one soul.

I would now notice how Paul, in rebuking the church at Corinth for its guilt in suffering moral evil amongst it, deals with it after the manner in which Christ deals with Thyatira. Whilst the apostle sharply rebukes the church for disobeying his former epistle "not to "company with fornicators"—a guilt, aggravated, too, by the heinousness of the crime tolerated in the church, "that one should have his "father's wife"—he does not condemn the church as guilty of fornication, but rather for its disobedience, and for carelessness concerning the purity of the assembly. He calls upon the whole church to humble themselves before God; yet he puts a difference between him *who did* and those who *did not* the evil. Shame, rebuke, and humiliation fall upon the church generally, but the evil doer must be delivered to Satan.

Turning to the Old Testament, we find that the ceremonial types throw great light on the manner in which God would have his people deal with outbreaks of evil amongst them. In Numbers v. 1 to 4, Israel is commanded concerning putting without the camp. Three kinds of ceremonial uncleanness, (typical of the outbreaks of sin,) are mentioned; viz., leprosy, an issue, and defilement by the dead; and such as were thus defiled, were commanded to be put without the camp.

This passage is analogous to 1 Cor. v.—as in Israel one sentence of putting without the camp awaited the leper, or him who had an issue, or him who was defiled by the dead; even so the church was to "put "away" any man, called a brother, who was either a fornicator, covetous, an idolator, railer, drunkard, or extortioner. God also instructed Israel more definitely concerning these cases of uncleanness; giving them "the law" of the leper, (Lev. xiii. and xiv.): "the law" of the man with an issue, (Lev. xv.); and "the law" of him who is defiled by

the dead, (Numb. xix). A burnt offering and a sin offering were needed for the cleansing of the two first; whilst for the latter uncleanness, the ashes of the red heifer were provided. To neglect, or confuse these instructions would have been folly and sin in Israel; even though the general precept in Num. v., had been obeyed. This shews the deep importance of acquainting ourselves with the precepts, as well as the principles of God.

In Lev. xi., we find another kind of ceremonial uncleanness. It was contracted by eating, or having to do with the carcases of such creeping things and unclean animals as were forbidden Israel for food:—they were commanded “not to make themselves abominable with any creeping thing,” nor “unclean with them.” If Israel had merely argued from general principles concerning such persons, they had doubtless brought them under the law of the leper, or the man with an issue, &c.; but turning to scripture, we find special directions given concerning such persons,—“they were for their cleansing” to “wash their clothes in water,” and “be unclean until evening.” There is, however, yet another form of ceremonial uncleanness to be considered. It is brought before us in Lev. xv., in connection with the man with an issue, and in Num. xix., in connection with those defiled by the dead. It resulted from a clean person having to do with such unclean persons as God commanded should be put without the camp. It may be termed *the uncleanness of association*. We find in those chapters, that if a clean Israelite had to do with such unclean persons, he was thereby himself rendered unclean, and unfit to eat of the holy things (Lev. xxi. 1 to 5;) and needed for his cleansing to wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, (indicating a deeper character of uncleanness than pertained to those who had partaken of unclean animals), and was unclean until evening. This teaches the corrupting, leavening nature of sin; and how necessary it is that the evil doer be “put away,” because of the contaminating influence he exerts upon such as personally *have to do* with him (not on the whole camp), defiling them, and rendering them unfit for communion with God. We must mark, however, that whilst such as had to do with the unclean person (Num. v. 1 to 4,) say a man with an issue, were thereby made partakers of his unclean condition; they were not so far defiled as to come under the law of him that had an issue, so that they also afterwards defiled all who had to do with them, *ad infinitum*; nor did they need a burnt offering and sin offering for their cleansing. They were simply commanded to wash their clothes, and bathe themselves in water, and were unclean until the evening. No: *uncleanness through association* was the penalty of having *personally to do with the original unclean person*.\*

I wish now to call attention to two points, concerning which it appears to me that great mistakes have been made in the matter of discipline. The first point is, that the discipline of the church should only be exercised towards the *person* who *has done* the sin, or who *holds* the evil doctrine. Scripture is very clear on this point. Thus it says (1 Cor. v.): “if any *man* be a fornicator . . . with such an *one* “no, not to eat;” and again: “put away from amongst yourselves that “wicked *person*.” So also in 2 Thess. iii. 6: “Note that *man*, and have

"no company with *him*;" and again in Titus iii. 10: "A *man* that is "a heretic . . . reject," &c. As there is not a single passage of Scripture which commands that discipline be exercised towards a church (*i.e.*, towards believers collectively), we have no Scripture warrant for rejecting any one on the ground that he has come from any particular church; the only scriptural warrant for discipline being that the person has himself *done* the sin, or that he *holds* the evil doctrine.

As far as I can ascertain, the second and third chapters of Revelations are the only portions of Scripture which imply the corporate rejection of churches. Christ threatens in them to remove the candlestick from Ephesus, and to spue Laodicea out of his mouth, unless they repent. This is assuredly the Lord's prerogative, and is nowhere delegated to his servants, to whom it only belongs to deal with the individual, as to what he personally is, or holds. Of course if a church (I do not mean a denomination) *professed* such evil doctrines as Christ hates (as a Socinian church does, professedly denying the proper deity of the Lord Jesus), we could receive none from it; not, however, because they come from it, but because to be of it they must individually profess the evil doctrine. We should thus still deal with them according to what they individually held.

Though we may find it necessary to separate from Christian assemblies because their ecclesiastical principles more or less practically ignore the lordship of Christ, or the presence and authority of the Holy Ghost, or set aside the order of God's house, so that we dare not maintain open communion with them till they have repented of their evil position, we must take heed to own what is of God in them, and to remember that God, more or less, recognises them as his servants, and as forming part of Christ's church. We should, therefore, seek to help with them in service, as far as we conscientiously may; and gladly welcome in the Lord's name those amongst them who commend themselves to us on a personal examination. The Lord has lately led many of His people to separate from such ecclesiastical positions as seemed contrary to His word; and to gather together simply in the name of the Lord Jesus, seeking to own the presence of the Holy Ghost in the church, to distribute gifts "to every man severally as He will." Are we, however, to think that Christ only owns such assemblies as His churches—as His body on earth? For more than 1,000 years—indeed, till within the last 30 or 40 years—these principles were almost entirely lost sight of by the church of God, and we know of no assemblies of saints thus gathered. Had Christ then, during that long period, no earthly church (I am not speaking of individual saints), were there no candlesticks, no churches, owned as such, of God? If so, has He now disowned them, simply because He has been pleased to give us a little more light? Surely we cannot pretend that all saints outside of our assemblies are practically (I do not mean spiritually) outside the church of God? Such thoughts seem to me to be very evil and mischievous; tending to pride and cold sectarianism. Has not Christ, from Pentecost till now, had churches, candlesticks on earth, which he has been owning, and amongst which he has been walking? Are we not, then, to seek to own what Christ owns; whilst we seek to be separate from all that which is contrary to the Word?

believe that Scripture never warrants our imposing as a term of communion upon any *real child of God, blameless in walk, and sound in doctrine*, that he first renounce the assembly he has been in fellowship with; even though we regard its church principles to be so far wrong as to hinder our having open communion with it. As a child we are to receive such an one into the family; as a member into the body; though it would, of course, be our duty to seek to instruct him more perfectly in the will of God.

But some will say, How long are we to continue to act thus towards one who continues to have fellowship with other such churches, but seeks at the same time occasional fellowship with us? I do not see that the Scripture places any limits to our acting in grace to such an one, and seeking his edification. Ought we not rather to rejoice that our brethren are willing to come and feast with us on the fatness of the Lord? Faithfulness might, indeed, ere long require that we tenderly admonish, or it may be rebuke, such for inconsistency; still, I think we should not act in discipline towards them, because it is rather a matter of personal responsibility between them and the Lord Jesus; and to their own Master they would stand or fall.

To the church it only belongs to enquire concerning any, Is he of the household of faith? If so, to him belong the family table and privileges; whilst to him also apply the family laws and discipline, just because he is a member, and not at all on account of attainment or knowledge.

The second point is, that the evil doer is to be "put away," not merely from the Lord's Table, but also from the *general communion of saints*, whether in the assembly or the circle of private friendship. Thus the command in 1 Cor. v. 13 is: "Put away," not from the Lord's Table, but "from amongst *yourselves* that wicked person." Of course the commandment does apply to the Lord's Table, as that feast is the highest expression of Christian communion, but it also extends to *all* acts of Christian recognition. Thus, in ver. 11, Paul again says: "I have written unto you *not to keep company* . . . with such an "one, *no, not to eat*"—alluding, as the context clearly shows, not *alone* to the communion of the bread and wine, but also to the fellowship of Christian homes.

We must turn, in connection with this point, to another scripture, the Second Epistle of John, verses 10 and 11, which is repeatedly quoted in support of the exclusive discipline, but which I have not yet noticed, as it forms part of a private epistle, *i.e.*, one written not to a church, but, like the one to Philemon, to a private Christian. It is held that this scripture teaches that if a person received one who brought false doctrine, he became thereby partaker of his evil deeds; so that other Christians ought to deal with him as they would with the one who held false doctrine; in fact, as if he stood in the same place with him; and also that this principle was applicable to the inter-communion of churches, "*ad infinitum*."

It appears to me that those who hold the above view have not only overlooked the general character of this Epistle, but have also failed duly to weigh the words of the text. These verses form part of an



epistle written by John, not as an apostle, but as an elder. They are not written to a church, but to an individual—a sister; not as in the church, like the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, who were rulers in the church, but in the privacy of the home circle. As its character, therefore, is *private*, it ought not to be used for regulating church action, for to do so would be to wrest the object for which it was written. It may be asked, however, whether it is not lawful to apply this passage to church matters also, as God's principles of dealing with evil are always the same. Again, I reply, the principle certainly, but not the precept; for think what confusion and evil working would follow the misapplication of the private precept of forgiveness in Luke xvii. 3 and 4, and the church precept in 2 Cor. ii. 6 and 7, for illustration by individual Christians taking upon themselves the discipline of the church; yet these precepts equally spring from the same great principles of holiness and grace. The character of this epistle is private; *i.e.*, it belongs to the family circle, being addressed to "the elect lady and her children." This is rendered more emphatic by its being written, not to a brother, one who might possibly be a teacher or elder, but to a sister, one who could not therefore be in a position of authority in the church. Its object seems to be to enforce in private life our responsibility to honor the Lord in all things. The Lord does acknowledge private rights (Acts v. 4) and the home circle with its own immediate relationships and responsibilities, but Scripture plainly shows us that even in the family circle and more private concerns of life we are the Lord's servants, responsible to glorify Him; so that an offence which at the first would only concern me and my brother and ought not to go any further, may, if not repented of, ultimately become a matter for church action in the Lord's name (Matthew xviii. 15 to 18).

Again, as we previously noticed, we are told in 1 Cor. v, that though it is not altogether forbidden Christians to company (of course in the fear of the Lord) with the evil men of this world, "for otherwise" we "must needs go out of the world," ver. 9 and 10 (see also 1 Cor. x. 27); yet, if one "called a brother" were an evil doer, we are positively forbidden to keep any company with him, "with such an one *no not to eat*." The "keeping company" and "eating" forbidden here refer manifestly, not alone to the eating and communion of the Lord's table, where those "without" are not admitted, but also to the friendships of family and social life in which we have often to meet with the evil men of this world, and that without wrong. It would not, however, become Christians to receive into family or social friendship one who had been "put away" for drunkenness, covetousness, or other moral evil. No; says the apostle, "with such an one, *no not to eat*." The like instruction seems to be enforced in this epistle with regard to one holding evil doctrine, "receive him not *into thine house*, nor bid him God-speed."

By receiving the holder of evil doctrine into her house, and bidding him God speed, the elect lady would have set private friendship above her duty to Christ; made light of his evil deeds, and become partaker thereof. The chief emphasis in the warning is, however, directed against "bidding him God speed," an action which would imply a positive sympathy in his behalf, and furtherance of his evil course.

Those who do so sin, and like such as had to do with a man with an issue (Lev. xv.), become defiled, and partakers of his evil condition. We do not read, however, that they stand in the same place as the evil doer, and under his condemnation; such a conclusion is mere inference, and contrary, I believe, to the tenor of the scriptures we have been considering. I much question whether it would be right to deal in discipline with one who broke the injunction of these verses, because, as they form part of a private epistle, the responsibility of obeying them would lie rather between the individual and the Lord, than the individual and the church. The commandment, however, forms part of God's word; it would therefore be right and fitting for his brethren, and especially the elders of the church, to solemnly admonish him in the Lord's name concerning his sin therein; but having done so, further action, (unless he was found to have embraced the doctrine,) must be left to the Lord, who will judge, even by death sometimes, such as refuse to judge themselves; see 1 Cor. xi. 30-31. I note this because we need to guard so carefully against the encroachment of ecclesiastical authority over the private conscience, and it is a dangerous sign when men speak much of "*the church*," its decrees, and authority, &c. The Lord has committed to every church the judgment of its members; even as Paul says, "do not ye judge them that are within?" and this delegated authority needs to be faithfully maintained. It is however defined, and circumscribed, by the precepts of the word, and it deals with sins of so presumptuous a character, that the conscience, even of the evil doer, cannot but justify that action, whereby he is put away till he repent, as being fitting and honouring to God. In all other matters we need carefully to maintain the exercise of the individual conscience before God.

The exclusive system not only excommunicates the church which suffers evil doctrine; but it takes a second step, maintaining that churches which act otherwise, are also to be separated from, as in "the same place" as the evil doer; and finally, that all who refuse to exercise discipline towards these last, are through them worthy of excommunication, *ad infinitum*. Let us suppose for a moment that this doctrine is scriptural. I would ask whether those who hold exclusive views, practically carry out those scriptures on which their system professes to be founded?

As far as admission to the Lord's supper goes, the communion of the bread and the wine, they do so; but they generally yield but a very partial obedience with regard to Christian communion and recognition privately, often in acts of prayer and praise, and in the home and social circles. Does not the reason of this lie in their spiritual instincts and affections over-leaping the narrow bounds of an iron ecclesiastical system, so that it is practically manifested that "we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren?" Surely it is thus they are betrayed into an ecclesiastical position, which, so far as *discipline* is concerned, reduces the Lord's supper, which is the emblem of the real communion of saints, to a mere ritualistic ordinance; and are found guilty of but a partial obedience to those commands on which their system is founded. But not only so; for those holding exclusive

## CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

ground are generally self-condemned for disobedience to the Word, and excommunicated thereby; seeing many of them have repeatedly received into their houses (contrary to the express command, "receive him not into thine house"), and held Christian communion with, and bidden "God-speed to" the very individuals whom they had excluded from the Lord's table, as standing in "the same place as" the evil-doers. It manifestly follows, according to their system, that by doing so they have likewise become partakers of their evil deeds, and stand in the same place as they do; and that all who have afterwards received them have likewise been placed in the same position of excommunication as evil doers. "Multiply the receptions "*ad infinitum*," the principle is the same." Now, as many who have thus received those excluded from the Lord's table, have been received and retained in communion in many exclusive gatherings, and there has been constant inter-communion between such assemblies and other assemblies, I much question whether there is a single individual amongst the exclusive gatherings, who is not "de facto" excommunicated by his system as standing in the same place as the evil doers. If Peter said, concerning the Jewish ceremonial observances, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"—(Acts xv. 10), surely we may say of this system, if it is to be faithfully carried out, that it is a yoke neither we, nor our brethren are able to bear. As I said in the Preface, I have felt the burden of this system, and thank God for delivering me from it. I would, therefore, affectionately ask my dear brethren, who may read this pamphlet, not to harden their hearts to a yet more rigid conformity to their system, until they have at least weighed prayerfully the Scriptures we have been considering, lest haply in their very zeal they may be fighting against God.

### CHAPTER III.

Are others to have no liberty of conscience in this matter? Had only those churches been excommunicated which neglected or refused to take any measures against the evil when brought practically into connection with it, and continued to maintain open communion with the church which suffered the evil; such discipline, if not quite scriptural, might have generally commended itself to the consciences of the saints. It does, however, appear an exceedingly solemn, yea, an unrighteous thing, for us to apply such passages as "he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds" to the condemnation of those who, so far from bidding God-speed to the holders of evil doctrine, condemn, and, according to their light, deal with, the evil doctrine and those who hold it; only because they cannot with a good conscience adopt the same course as we judge to be right. With us they hate the evil, and seek to deal with it in obedience to Christ; and yet because of a conscientious difference as to the extent and character of the discipline to be exercised, they are to be excommunicated as standing in the same place as those who hold and forward the evil doctrine.

And not only so, but, "not content therewith," the exclusive system demands that we cast out of the church all who dare not con-

sent in excommunicating these last, and so on, "ad infinitum." Is not the great question concerning *persons* in these things, whether they are on the *Lord's side* or against Him? Are we not in great danger, through the natural egotism of our hearts, of forbidding and condemning others because they do not follow the Lord "*with us*?" Luke ix. 49. Christ's principle is: "He that is not *against us* is *for us*."

But it will be asked in connection with this point, whether a person can be in and out of the church at the same time? Surely, it will be said, the discipline of one church ought to be endorsed and supported by all the other churches? Do not we disown the church if we disown its acts; for would not the fornicator, put away by the just discipline of the church at Corinth, have been thereby equally put away by every other church on earth? I answer, that in putting away any from the church we do not put him away vitally, *i.e.*, from the real membership of the body in its Ephesian sense, from his standing in relationship; but we exclude him from having fellowship with us in the visible communion of saints, and in that blessed position of testimony for God which belongs to the churches upon earth.

To the latter question I answer, that the fornicator at Corinth would not thereby have been necessarily put away from all the other churches. The action of one church is only binding upon another so long as it is clearly according to the Word of God. Each church is, therefore, bound to accept the judgments of another church only in as far as this is the case. With regard to the Corinthian fornicator, his guilt was so manifest, that he would most certainly have lain under the just discipline of every church of God. He could not have been knowingly received anywhere, save in contempt of Christ's authority. This would have been equally true, whether the church at Corinth had judged him or not; because of the common duty which all churches owe to Christ. Had he presented himself to any other church, after he had been put away by the Corinthian church, in obedience to the apostolic command, there would have been no necessity for re-judging his case. His sin was so heinous as to leave no room for doubt concerning the necessity of exercising discipline towards him, and therefore the action of the church at Corinth would certainly have been endorsed. In a regular way, as long as there can be godly confidence between churches, they should generally recognise, in the Lord's name, each other's deeds and discipline. It would, therefore, be very wrong to receive one who had been solemnly put away by another church, unless there was *very good ground* for setting aside its judgment.

We are not bound, however, to own the deeds or discipline of any church, as of *necessity* those of the Holy Ghost, *i.e.*, as being *infallible*. Failure and sin ever pervade even our holy things, therefore we must always weigh whatever man has to do with in the balances of the sanctuary. We may thus be compelled at times to question, or disallow, the action of another assembly; but it does not follow that we must therefore disown it as a church of God, indwelt by the Holy Ghost. No; we only recognize that our fellow-believers gathered there are, like ourselves in the body, compassed with infirmities and temptations, liable to grieve and quench the Spirit, and thus (losing the sense of His presence) to fall into error in their judgment of spiritual things.

Surely one church is not bound to receive implicitly any discipline which it believes to be contrary to the mind of the Lord, just because it *has been enacted by another church*? Look for example in John's Third Epistle at the church under the influence of Diotrophes excommunicating the apostle John. Were all other churches bound unquestioningly to accept this discipline, simply because it had emanated from a church gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus; or would it have been a denial of the unity of the body when they refused to do so? Surely not! The obedience of each church, being due directly to Christ, may not be delegated to other churches; even though they are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, and have acted professedly under the guidance and by the authority of the Holy Ghost. Whenever there is a case of doubt, it becomes each church to go to the Word for guidance, and to dare to be true to Christ, even though it may seem thereby to compromise the certainly desirable expression of church unity.

This discipline enforced by Diotrophes against the apostle John, is the only thing which I can find in scripture analogous to the exclusive system; for "not content" with excluding the apostle and those who laboured with him (Diotrophes receiveth *us* not, v. 9), he also rejected the brethren who came from him, and finally forbad those who would receive them, casting them out of the church. We only need to be told that this discipline was extended *ad infinitum*, to have a complete prototype of the exclusive system. We know not on what grounds Diotrophes exercised this discipline towards the apostle John, but we do know that he was wrong in it, and that a love of pre-eminence actuated him in his wickedness. But Diotrophes not only did wrong in rejecting in selfwill one who was an honored servant of Christ, but he sinned further in the manner in which his blind zeal led him to extend the discipline, from the apostle John and those who were associated with him, to those who would not consent thereto; as it says: "but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, "receiveth *us* not . . . and *not content therewith*, neither doth he "himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and "casteth them out of the church." What evil! what sin! and yet there were many in that church blindly and zealously supporting him in this sweeping condemnation. What is the added exhortation? "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good." Truly, "it is good to be zealously affected always;" but let us see that it be in a good thing. Gal. iv. 17.

Churches may be gathered, as all primitive churches were, only in the name of the Lord Jesus, and yet they may fall into such a carnal condition as to greatly mistake the guidance of the Spirit. No church can therefore rightly lay claim to its decisions being by the *absolute* authority of the Holy Ghost. If it be enquired of concerning its authority for acting, it can safely take the stand of *obedience*, and say, "Thus saith the Lord;" but any other position lands us at once amongst the assumptions of Romanism.

Say that two, or three, or more believers gather together in principle round the *name of the Lord Jesus*, and in the acknowledgment of the *presence and authority* of the *Holy Ghost*. Does it therefore follow

They shall always so infallibly have the guidance of the Spirit that what they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven? Scripture shows that primitive churches so gathered often fell into a carnal condition, and were then apt to entertain the higher opinion of their own spiritual attainment. How much more must it be so with us in the present time of failure and ruin! Such was the Laodicean condition, and the state also of the church at Corinth when Paul wrote: "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us," but added with sorrow of heart, because of their really needy, low estate: "I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you." Say that we meet *in faith*. Are not there degrees of faith? Does not the prayer constantly become us, "Lord, increase our faith?" and might not Jesus well say, because of its weakness, "Where is your faith?" Again, though we may meet recognising the presence of the Holy Ghost in the church to guide it, and to distribute gifts to every man according as He will, are we not warned against grieving and quenching the Spirit? or have believers and churches got beyond the necessity for such warnings now? To be led of the Spirit we must be filled with the Spirit, and it is only in *proportion* as a church is thus filled with the Spirit that its decisions will be spiritual. Grant also that we assemble only in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we not gather round His name doctrinally, and yet be carnal? for were there not carnal ones at Corinth who boasted "I am of Christ?" Alas! saints may hold orthodox views, and gather together on correct scriptural principles, and yet have very little of the presence of Jesus or of the power of the Holy Ghost in their midst. John xv. 7 gives the secret of the Lord. Jesus says "If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." Now it is only in *proportion* as those gathered in a church are individually abiding in Jesus that they will so attain to the mind of the Lord that what they bind on earth will also be bound in heaven.

Though several churches may take different action on the same matter, it does not follow that one church must be right and the rest all wrong. May it not be that each church may have glorified Christ in a measure, and in a measure failed, either in the action taken, or in the manner of carrying it out? Or may it not also be that all the churches were walking so far from Christ as to have neither apprehended nor obeyed the will of the Lord? There is danger both on the right hand, and on the left, and the opposite of one evil course is not necessarily the Lord's narrow path of obedience.

I firmly believe that whenever Christians gather together in the Lord's name to exercise obediently and humbly that holy discipline which He has enjoined, that they may with faith look for Christ's presence in their midst, and the practical guidance of the Holy Spirit. They may also, without at all claiming infallibility for their decisions, surely expect to see the hand of the Lord confirming the action taken in His name towards the evil doer; if he be not a sheep, making clear that he is only one of the swine returned to its wallowing; but if he be indeed one of Christ's own, humbling him, chastening him, and bringing him to

godly repentance, so that the church may have the joyful duty of comforting and receiving back again the poor wanderer. When some such result does not manifestly follow the discipline of a church, it may well question whether there has not been failure, and whether what it has bound on earth has indeed been bound in heaven. It becomes us not to be high-minded, but to fear; remembering concerning spiritual things that now we only know in part and prophesy in part.

Concerning the things we have been considering, Scripture seems to teach:—

1. That *all* who in any place believe in Jesus Christ should assemble themselves together in His most blessed name for the exercise of the fellowship and communion of saints, and for collective testimony to the world, forming thereby a church of God in that place.

2. The rule for Christian fellowship being “Receive ye one another, as Christ also hath received us, *to the glory of God*” (Rom. xv. 7), we should be careful to receive *only* those whom Christ has received, and the end of church fellowship should be *God’s glory*.

3. A *corporate responsibility* thus lies upon all in church fellowship to endeavour to promote the glory of God, both by “provoking one another to love and good works, and by hating, and dealing with, all evil—whether moral or doctrinal.”

4. *Gross moral evil*, such as is mentioned in I Cor. v. 11, must be dealt with by the church, *putting away* the evil doer, until he evince godly sorrow for his sin.

5. *Doctrinal evil*, such as Christ hates, must also be met by putting away him who holds or teaches it until he repent thereof.

6. *Intercommunion between churches* is secured to the glory of God, by letters of commendation between them. This is all that is necessary when they can put godly confidence in one another.

7. When one church has to do with another, in which it *cannot place godly confidence* because of doubts concerning its church principles, or because of the known, or reported, *sufferance of evil within* it, whether moral or doctrinal, it must *withdraw from open communion* by letters of commendation, and only receive upon the *personal examination of all* who come from it as to the following points: 1. Whether the person desiring communion has truly *found Christ* (John i. 41). 2. Whether his *walk is godly*. 3. Whether he be *in doctrine sound*. A difference would thus be put, as the Lord gave discernment, between such as *are*, and such as *are not Christ’s*; between those who *walk*, and those who *walk not according to the Gospel of Christ*; and between those *who have*, and those who *have not evil doctrine*.

8. The examination and dealing are to be *personal*; according to what the individual *is, or holds*.

9. *Each church* is responsible in these things *directly to the Lord Jesus*.

If the three last paragraphs of this summary are according to the Word (as I think the Scriptures we have been examining show them to be), it follows that the exclusive discipline not only lacks the plain commandment of Christ, but that it also fails in harmonizing those leading principles of holiness and grace which perfectly characterize God’s government, and which should actuate the church. Whilst rightly

making much of God's light and holiness, it fails in having fellowship with that pitying love of God our Father, which instructs us *how* to have "compassion of some, making a difference," Jude 22. It is indeed a hard, dry theory; blighting some of the most precious fruits of the Spirit in those who embrace it. Its results have been very sorrowful. Not only have hearts been alienated and broken, but churches have been scattered thereby, God's work has been hindered, and great reproach brought on the name of the Lord Jesus. When Jesus spake of the great sacrifices which His disciples must be prepared to make, saying; "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me;" and again: "Suppose ye that I am come to send peace upon earth? I tell you nay; but rather division," he referred to that shame, persecution, and separation which would fall upon his people from *without* for His name's sake. *Within* Jesus leaves us peace, and says: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." We may rejoice, and leap for joy, when men separate us from their company for the Son of Man's sake; but oh, how the world rejoices, and leaps for joy, when there are strifes and divisions amongst the people of God! These things should bring us in the dust before God; and if ever it be our solemn duty to put away an evil doer from among us, ought it not to be with humiliation and mourning, because of the dishonor done to Jesus, and with earnest weeping supplication that the erring brother may be speedily restored again?

In exercising discipline, the church has not to legislate, but simply to deal with sin according to the instructions of the Word. It must put away a drunkard, or a railer, because it is commanded to do so; yet who shall say whether there may not be many in a church on whom it may not exercise discipline, because they have not openly committed the sins with which it is commanded to deal, but whom the Lord may regard as being in an infinitely worse condition than the poor drunkard, seeing our responsibility and guilt are proportionate to our light and privileges.

Such questions belong to Him who searcheth the hearts. It is for the church to judge the actions and doctrines of men. Therefore in making a difference between such as have, and such as have not, evil, it has to distinguish according to their words and deeds; and its dealings must be strictly regulated by the wise, gracious, and holy instructions of the Word.

In the various conversations I have had about the exclusive system, and in all the letters and tracts I have read in support of it, one fact has especially struck me, and that is, that it is either wholly deduced from texts which merely set forth general principles; or else from precepts which do not instruct us concerning the matter under consideration, viz., church discipline. Such passages for instance as 2 John, 10-11, and 2 Tim. ii. 21. Christ's commandments concerning discipline are so plain, that we can unhesitatingly say of them, "Thus saith the Lord;" such passages, for example, as 1 Cor. v. 13, and 2 Thes. iii. 14. When we come to deductions and inferences, we are liable to error, and it little becomes us to cast our brethren out of the church, just because their inferences differ from our own. I believe the *plain* commandments of the Word are quite sufficient for every case of



church government and discipline, without our adding to them our own inferences. Churches may find it necessary to make from time to time local enactments for carrying out these commandments in detail, and should seek the Lord's guidance therein; still such enactments must ever be regarded *solely* in the light of *bye-laws*; expedient and locally necessary for the time being, to be continued or altered according to circumstances, but not to be forced upon the acceptance of other churches.

We need to approach scripture tremblingly, remembering that it is *God's* word. We should seek therefore to handle it reverently; prayerfully weighing every *word* thereof, for "every word of God is pure." The words of scripture are significant words. The Holy Ghost never uses words at random; each word has a chosen meaning; uttering no uncertain sound. I believe that if this had been more remembered, and the significance of scripture words more carefully weighed, especially in connection with the context, such a stupendous system of excommunication as the present had not been founded; but scripture seems to me to have been taken almost at random, and isolated expressions used to sustain pre-conceived ideas and theories.

We have not time to examine all the many passages which are thus alluded to, but I think it will be well just to look at 2 Tim. ii. 21, which is a text often quoted by exclusive writers. They hold this passage to be an injunction to us to separate from those who are vessels to dishonour (believing that the word "these" refers to such persons), so that we may be vessels unto honour, meet for the master's use; and this precept is further applied to the church separation, or the excommunication carried out under the exclusive system.

I would first remark concerning this text, that even if it were an injunction to separate ourselves from those whose walk is not godly, since it is not given as to a church, it could only have been intended to admonish saints privately to keep aloof from those who are not living to the glory of God. The text says "if a *man* therefore purge *himself* from these;" it concerns, therefore the personal action of the individual believer, and that too, not in the way of commandment, but of exhortation. The discipline of the *church*, however, is given in the way of commandment, and it implies the *corporate*, or *united* action of the *many members*; therefore, to apply this passage to the discipline of the church is to allow that any individual member may exercise the functions of the body, for it says, "if a *man* therefore purge himself," &c. But, secondly, the text does not say "if a man *separate* himself from these;" but it says "if a man therefore *purge* himself from these," words possessing totally distinct significations. I can separate myself only from that which is outside myself, but I purge myself from something within me. As we just noticed, Scripture uses chosen, significant words; therefore, when it speaks of dividing certain people from others, it does not speak of purging them from them, but of separating them from them; see Matt. xiii. 49, Luke vi. 22, Acts xix. 9, 2 Cor. vi. 17, and Gal. ii. 12. Our English version is sufficiently plain in the matter, but the Greek word sets aside all doubt. It is not καθαίρω, which means simply to cleanse; but it is ἐκκαθαίρω, which signifies to cleanse out *internally*. The word

only occurs in one other place in the New Testament: the 1 Cor. v. 7, "Purge out therefore the old leaven." Here we find the force of the word clearly brought out; that it refers not to external, but internal cleansing. The evil—the leaven—was within the church, not without; therefore they were commanded not to separate from it, but to purge it out; and, concerning the evil doer, he was to be "put away," as the apostle says; "Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore, 'put away' from amongst yourselves that wicked person." Hence it is plain that when Paul says, in 2 Tim. ii. 21: "If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour . . . meet for the Master's use," he has no intention of directing our thoughts to the duty of withdrawing ourselves from those who walk carnally, but to the more important, nearer responsibility, of cleansing the inner man, our own selves, from those things which grieve the Lord, and hinder him from honouring and using us. There is no thought in the chapter concerning *church* responsibility, testimony, or purity; it concerns the Christian as an *individual*, instructing him (especially one called to divide the word of truth, and teach others) how he may be "approved unto God—a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." It becomes him to "endure hardness," not entangling "himself with the affairs of this life;" he must "strive lawfully," and labour first, ere he can partake of the fruits. If, therefore, he would desire to be a "vessel unto honour," he must purge himself from the natural tendency to love of ease, love of present things, and from self-pleasing in the work of the Lord. He must also "depart from iniquity," but more especially must he shun that evil propensity which works in those who minister the Word, to indulge in "strifes about words to no profit," and "profane and vain babblings," such as those into which Hymenæus and Philetus fell. Verse 23 repeats a similar warning: "but foolish and unlearned questions avoid," &c. Timothy, as a young man, was likewise exhorted "to flee youthful lusts," and to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a *pure heart*." Such is the practical, profitable lesson of this chapter. I must be emptied of self, else I cannot be filled with the Spirit; a vessel "sanctified, meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." It by no means follows that those who zealously condemn and separate from others are themselves vessels unto honour. Thousands have done this, whose hearts have been filled with pride and all uncharitableness. It is the pure heart which fits us for the Master's use, and this we can only obtain by cultivating a spirit of self-abnegation, self-judgment, self-purging. "Follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." These words do not take up *church* reception or rejection, but they indicate the spirit which should personally animate the servants and followers of Jesus. It is a chastened spirit; a spirit which hungers and thirsts after righteousness; a spirit of faith, love, and peace; a spirit which seeks to own and cleave to *all* who personally love and cleave to Jesus, even those who "call upon the Lord out of a *pure heart*."

Such a spirit of humble fervent devotedness to Jesus at the first animated those called Brethren. They grieved that the members of the

one family should be alienated from one another, and separated to other names than the one name of Jesus ; but, recognising in every denomination those who were personally following, "righteousness, faith, love, peace, " and calling on the Lord out of a *pure heart*," they determined to know *all such as such*, owning no name but Christ's, no gathering point but Himself. They would endeavour to keep the "unity of the Spirit, in the "bond of peace," loving and recognising all who are Christ's as brethren ; rejoicing in all the grace of God in them ; and if there was that in which they could not joy, but were obliged in faithfulness to Christ to separate from, they would yet take no high place in the condemnation of their brethren, but the low place of humiliation and confession for them ; and meetings for humiliation and prayer for the common failure and shame of the church of God were continually held. We became strong, numbers increased, and, wearying of Daniel's blessed position of association with Israel in confession and supplication (Daniel ix.), we have seated ourselves in the judgment seat over our brethren, and ended by instituting a system which (almost more than any other), under the plea of keeping the unity of the Spirit, makes void that unity ; and of maintaining the unity of the body, divides and scatters its members. Glorifying in light more than in love, we have made attainment in knowledge our standard, and neglected to cleave to all who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. May the Lord grant us repentance, that we may remember from whence we have fallen, and do our first works ; and may He revive those precious truths in our souls which animated us at the beginning, and wrought such personal devotedness to Jesus, such humbleness of mind, such compassion, and such fervent love towards His people.

Oh teach us, Lord, to know and own  
 This wondrous mystery—  
 That Thou with us art truly one,  
 And we are one with Thee.

\* God knows I do not desire to make light of the sin and danger of association with evil; for who can touch pitch and not be defiled, or who can take fire in his bosom and not be burnt? It is because sin has such a fearfully corrupting power that Paul so solemnly warns the Corinthian Church that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."—1 Cor. v. 6. This passage, however, never teaches (as the exclusive system asserts) that all in Church communion are immediately and simultaneously contaminated or leavened by permitting an evil doer to break bread with them. Such an idea seems to me to be little else than ritualism, or mysticism. It rather teaches us that even as a little leaven introduced and left in a measure of meal will work with more or less power until at last it leavens the whole lump, so the wicked example and practise of an evil doer, who is suffered in a Church, will assuredly exercise a contaminating, corrupting influence upon those who *have to do with him*, and thus upon the Church generally, until at last the entire assembly may be leavened thereby. This is true concerning both moral and doctrinal evil. Such is the important and most practical lesson the Apostle would enforce when he says: "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened." Discipline must be exercised that "others also may fear"—that "great fear" may come upon the Church, so that none may dare to dishonor Christ by indulging in fornication, covetousness, railing, or drunkenness, or in whatever else is contrary to the Gospel of Christ and sound doctrine. See 1 Tim. v. 20; Acts v. 11 to 14; 2. Cor. vii. 11, and 1 Cor. xv. 33. A corporate responsibility therefore lies upon each Church to exercise holy discipline, and a corporate shame and guiltiness would fall upon all the members of any Church which neglected thus to obey and honor the Lord by "putting away" evil doers. This is, however, a very different thing from that corruption in morals or doctrine which is the sure result of the first sin in *suffering* the evil doer; a corruption which has such a mighty power to increase and work more and more, that at last it may even leaven the entire assembly, even as the Scripture says: "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."