

OPEN COMMUNION,

WITH

LIBERTY OF MINISTRY,

THE ONLY PRACTICABLE GROUND

FOR

REAL UNION AMONGST CHRISTIANS.

By an Ex-Member of the Society of Friends.

“WHILE ONE SAITH, I AM OF PAUL; AND ANOTHER, I AM OF APOLIOS;
ARE YE NOT CARNAL?”—1 Cor. iii. 4.

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&c.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF UNION.

The necessity of union is so generally felt and acknowledged and the advantages derived from it are so manifest, that it is unnecessary on these points to say many introductory words.

It might be truly affirmed that nature itself teaches the importance of fellowship and co-operation, to those who are striving, in the midst of difficulty and danger, after some common end. “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”—Eccles. iv. 9.

The importance of a close and co-operating union, such as becomes fellow-labourers and fellow-sufferers, who need each other's sympathies and aid, is abundantly confirmed by the injunctions of the New Testament.

John xvii. 20. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be ONE; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*”

Eph. iv. 4. “There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling:” and the practical exhortation which is grounded upon this fact is, that we should endeavour (ver. 3) “to keep the *unity* of the Spirit in the bond of peace;” and in the following part of the chapter the Apostle goes on to exhort (ver. 15) that, “speaking the truth in love we may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. From* whom the whole

From whom, not *IN* whom,—that is, the union here spoken of is not the hidden union of the Church in Christ, which is spoken of in the 2nd chapter, 21st and 22nd verses, but its *manifested* union here below. ef ers to their “*walk*” on earth.—See 1st verse.

body fitly *joined together*, and *compact*ed by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Rom. xv. 5. "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore *receive ye one another*, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." We find here, and in many other parts of Scripture, unity of mind inculcated as well as outward union, and most desirable it undoubtedly is; but nevertheless we must not forget the directions given for our guidance when it cannot be obtained. "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us." "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, *whereto we have already attained*, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. iii. 15).

We see from the passage above quoted out of the 17th of John, that this practical fellowship of Believers is not merely necessary as promoting their own comfort and power of service here,—it is also enjoined as peculiarly affecting the object and end of Christ's mission. What is it that God desires? and what does the renewed heart desire more than this, "that the world should believe that the Father hath sent the Son." This is the object for which the Lord Jesus prayed; and he prayed for the means which would produce it; and the means are, the *manifested* union of his disciples. He prayed that they might be ONE, that the world might see their union and believe. The world sees not things which are hidden, and therefore it is the *manifested, palpable* union of the household of faith which is here set before us, as the object for us to seek, because it is that for which the Lord Jesus prayed.

ON THE SCRIPTURAL MODE OF MANIFESTING UNION.

The mode in which this union is to be manifested, in a definite and intelligible form is too important to be passed over unnoticed in the New Testament. The appointed symbol of public fellowship is the "one bread" and the one cup. 1 Cor. x. 15—17. "I speak as unto wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread

which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? *For we being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.*"

It is clear, therefore, that the Lord's Supper is the appointed visible symbol of Christian fellowship, and we accordingly find it was the practice of Believers to "come together in one place" to take it. At Troas, "upon the first day of the week, when the disciples were come together to break bread, Paul preached to them" (Acts xx. 7). See also 1 Cor. xi. 20, where we learn the same truth; and whilst directions are given to guard against its abuse, the practice is distinctly approved. "Wherefore when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another; and if any man hunger let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto condemnation" (ver. 33).

If any one will take the trouble to consider for a moment, he will see that it is only by an outward act of this kind, that union can be shewn to the world. Meeting together does not shew it, for unbelievers may come in, and it would be ungracious, unscriptural (1 Cor. xiv. 23), and contrary to the law of this country to prevent it; and without some visible act, the body of believers could never be distinguished. That act is plainly pointed out and commanded to be observed in the New Testament. It is, as we have seen, "breaking bread," and drinking wine together in remembrance of an absent Lord, "till he come."

The term "free or OPEN COMMUNION" is adopted to indicate the right of all who are known, or supposed on the best evidence we can command, to be sincere believers in the Lord Jesus, to come to the table of the Lord, however different their degrees of faith and love, however diverse their judgments on many points, which, however important in themselves, are yet not such as to prevent their being recognized by the Lord Jesus as his members.

Rom. xiv. 1, 3. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye. Let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth, for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" Rom. xv. 7. "Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us."

These passages are sufficient to prove that whilst all are to be excluded whose profession and practice are not such as to entitle them to the name of Christian, yet that all, even the weakest and most mistaken, are to be received without being obliged to violate their consciences on points for which

the Lord does not reject them. Particular opinions as to modes of Baptism, forms of Church government, and the like, ought to be no impediment to their admission. To oblige any one to give up his views on these points, or to forsake the attendance of a minister under whose teaching he supposes that he receives benefit to his soul, is surely anti-scriptural; it savours of intolerance and bigotry; and, moreover, it entirely prevents the prayer of our Lord for the unity of the Church (as recorded John xvii. 20.) being answered.

The whole church is one in the sight of God, and he who, by any rules that he may make or put in force, cuts off one true member of that church, on account of an offence, for which God does not cut him off, or which is not mentioned in the Scriptures as an offence to be visited with excommunication, is guilty of the sin of schism, and surely offends God. The course to be pursued with those whose practice does not accord with their profession,* is pointed out in the following passages:—

1 Cor. v. 11. “Now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? but them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” 2 Thes. iii. 6, and 14. “Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

Matt. xviii. 15. “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

Heb. xii. 15, 16. “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up

* If the *profession* be not such as to give ground for believing an individual to be a Christian, it is taken for granted that he has no right at the table of the Lord.

trouble you, and thereby many be defiled : lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”

The most common argument against Open Communion for all Believers is, that obedience to the commands of Christ is a necessary pre-requisite. For example :—it is said that the Baptism of Believers is a plain command, and those who have been baptized in infancy have never obeyed it,—therefore they are not admissible to the table of the Lord. Let us now for a moment examine whether the principle can be maintained throughout in practice, viz. that obedience is a test for communion. In the first place, it is freely admitted that disobedience persisted in, and manifesting itself in those fruits of the flesh, condemned by the Apostle in 1 Cor. v. 11, as just quoted, and Gal. v. 19—21, is a sufficient ground for excluding from communion. And further, if the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Gal. v. 22, 23, be so far wanting in any individual as to indicate that he is the graceless or “profane person” spoken of by the Apostle in Heb. xii. 15. 16, as above, he certainly ought not to be admitted, though no positive act of disobedience can be proved against him. But to assert that disobedience is a ground of exclusion, farther than this, can hardly be maintained from Scripture. Take it for granted (and it is not now intended to be affirmed or denied) that Infant Baptism is a complete nullity. We know that there are many devoted servants of God who do not think so, and who cannot see that it would be right to be re-baptized ; and will those who would exclude them maintain, that all who cannot see it right to obey every plain command should be excluded likewise ? If this rule were to be acted upon, perhaps they might have to be excluded themselves. There are some exceedingly plain commands of Christ which are very little obeyed at this day. “Resist not evil” (Matt. v. 39). “Lay not up treasure” (Matt. vi. 19). And there is one of the Apostle Paul’s (2 Cor. vi. 14) : “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” There are those who think that these commands ought to be literally obeyed, and that a disregard to them is one of the chief causes of the present low state of religion. The reasoning used to explain them away is quite as weak and as easily seen through as that which is used in favour of Infant Baptism ; indeed the latter is the more plausible, as must be admitted even by those who hold it to be fallacious ; but we hear of none who would exclude from communion

for disobedience to these plain precepts, unless it be carried to the extent already spoken of. Why, then, should the Baptism question be a ground of exclusion? It will be difficult for any one to give an answer to this question, which will not involve consequences much more sweeping than he will perhaps be inclined to follow out; and any church which attempted to follow them out, would presently be scattered to the winds. As for those who throw open the communion table to the world, by admitting all who choose to come, on the plea that we are commanded "not to judge," they plainly act in disobedience to all the directions of the Apostle, which have been already quoted, wherein there are plain directions for judging in the church. How, indeed, could church order or discipline go on without it?

ON LIBERTY OF MINISTRY.

By this is intended to be understood, permission to each believer to speak in the church, when it is met together *as a church* for the worship of God, PROVIDED he be able to speak to the edification of the body.

It will be proper to show—

1st. The general principle or the Scripture truth that leads to it.

2dly. The exhortation and precepts of the Apostles for carrying the principle into practice.

3dly. The evidence for the practice itself in the Scriptures.

1st. The principle or fundamental truth which leads to the practice in question is this: That the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers, and communicates to them gifts of one kind or other for the profit of the body, not confining his gifts to one individual only, but "dividing to every man severally as he will." And thus whilst it is certain that all, even the feeblest members, have some office in the body, though it may be but to minister to the temporal need of believers, it is possible and likely that there may be *several* who may be able to teach or to speak to edification, exhortation, and comfort. To reject or forbid the exercise of such gifts through arbitrary regulations of our own devising, is surely to quench the Holy Spirit, for who has given to any of us authority to say unto the Lord's prophets, Prophecy not. If obedient, we *must* recognize and honour those whom we believe (our conscience bearing witness) that God hath sent to teach, to exhort us, or to rule.

Moreover, it is not likely, perhaps impossible, to find all the gifts which God hath given for the edification of the body, united in one individual. The evangelist preaches the glad tidings of salvation,—the pastor feeds the flock of God, and watches over them in their wanderings,—the teacher unfolds the Scripture,—the prophet speaks to edification, or exhortation, or comfort. Would either the Scripture or experience lead us to conclude that all these gifts are united in one individual, or is it not rather written that, as the natural body hath many members, so also is the body of Christ? “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him,” so that while there is unity, there is still diversity. “And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Cor. xii. 18, 21). Thus, therefore, whilst it is true that all are not teachers, nor all prophets, nor all pastors, it is equally true, that every church may have *several* of each of these, and that all are to be “esteemed very highly in love for their work’s sake.”*

Perhaps it is scarcely necessary that the following passages should be quoted; but they are introduced to confirm the statements which have been made, to shew that every believer hath the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, that although there are diversities of gifts, yet that the feeblest believer subserves some need of the body, and that its growth and vigour are dependent on the healthful ministration of its several members.

John xiv. 16, 17. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive.” Ver. 23. “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

Acts v. 32. “And we are his witnesses of these things: and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”

Rom. viii. 9. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

1 Cor. iii. 16. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

1 Cor. xii. 3. “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are differences of ministries, but

* Thus the church at Antioch had not a teacher, but “teachers” (Acts xiii. 1.)

the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." "Wisdom," "knowledge," "faith," "the working of miracles," "discerning of spirits," and "divers kinds of tongues." Ver. 11—13. "All these worketh that one and selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, . . . and have been *all* made to drink into one Spirit." (The verses which follow after these shew that each member of the body, even the most unworthy, is equally necessary as the most highly esteemed.)

Eph. iv. 7, 8. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Ver 12. "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

These passages are amply sufficient to prove the first position that the Holy Spirit dwells in all true believers, and communicates to them gifts of one kind or other, for the profit of the body, which is the church; not necessarily, however, gifts of speaking, as has already been remarked.

The very idea of such a thing will of course be rejected and ridiculed by the world, as also by worldly professors. It is incomprehensible to the natural mind, and it is to be feared is little apprehended by the majority of Christians. Few indeed there are who act as though they realised it. Personally to lay claim to the possession of the Spirit appears almost like presumption; but it is a truth plainly revealed, and the Scripture cannot be gainsayed, though attempts are too often made to explain it away. Instead, however, of being a cause of pride, it must, if properly viewed, be productive of the deepest humility in the sincere Christian, when he reflects how utterly unworthy his present earthy tabernacle is to be a dwelling place for the Spirit of the mighty God.

It is a truth of such importance, and has been long so much over-looked by the bulk of professing christians, that it might naturally be expected that some grievous errors in practice would be found to have crept in as a consequence of its neglect.—These will appear, if we observe—

2dly. The exhortations and precepts of the Apostles

with regard to the practice of the church, as necessarily resulting from this truth.

1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God: if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth."

Rom. xii. 3. "I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us*, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

Heb. x. 25. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

These precepts and exhortations for the exercise of the divers gifts communicated to believers, whether ordinary or extraordinary, are as plain as words can make them. The passage in Hebrews, just quoted, is the only positive precept* for Christians to assemble themselves together at all, and the object for which they are directed to assemble themselves is "*to exhort one another*,"—not to be *exhorted* by one person.†

We now come to see how these precepts were obeyed by those to whom they were addressed; and we shall find the whole in perfect consistency.

* The practice of meeting together is plainly referred to in the following passages, though they are not direct exhortations:—Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xi. 20; Jude 20.

† It has been thought that this passage is unfairly used here, because the words "one another," are not in the original. But any person who will read and consider the text with an unprejudiced mind, must see, that, though not expressed, they are necessarily understood. For the believers were directed to assemble *themselves* together, to exhort—whom? or what?—not surely to exhort the walls! and there is no mention made of any others assembling with them. Who, then, could it be that they were to exhort but "one another?"

3dly. The evidence for the practice.

We do not find any *detailed* account of the mode in which the assemblies of Christians for worship were conducted; but we are able to gather all we need from a few expressions of the apostle Paul, when writing to correct some irregularities which had crept into the church at Corinth, in consequence of the liberty of ministry enjoyed in that church; and it is remarkable that it is precisely in the same manner, from the same epistle, and owing to the same circumstances, that we derive our chief evidence that it was the practice of the early Christians to observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor. xi. 18 to 24), the Spirit of God choosing this apparently indirect mode of communicating information to such of the children of God as have faith to receive it. 1 Cor. xiv. 26. "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a *psalm*, hath a *doctrine*, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation."

Here we have the practice as distinctly marked as it is possible to be. It would appear, from the following verses, that the Corinthians had been impatient to exercise their gifts, and we have some important directions and exhortations of the apostle, which belong more strictly to the second division of the subject, but will be better understood here. The apostle, in consequence of these irregularities, does not say, Let one man take the lead, and teach in your assemblies, and let the others be learners. What he says is, "Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in a tongue, let it be by two, or at most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."

It is generally objected to this passage that it speaks altogether of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which are not now in the possession of the church, and that it is, consequently, inapplicable to the present time. It is, however, by no means clear that the premises are correct on which this objection is founded. A person may surely give out a "psalm," or explain a "doctrine," without any greater measure of the Spirit's influence than is possessed by believers at this day. And because the *extraordinary* gifts were exercised in the church in question, it by no means follows that the *ordinary* and *abiding* gifts, as "teaching,"

and the like, were not also exercised. The extraordinary ones would appear to have been the most abused, and therefore they are dwelt upon at greater length; but the same principle applies to all, and the general exhortation is, "Let all things be done unto edifying."

The passage in the 12th of Romans, above quoted (page 11), might appear to refer almost; if not altogether, to the *ordinary* gifts. The only question is as to "prophecy," named in the 6th verse, which is not unfrequently used in a subordinate sense;* and from the 11th verse of the 1st chapter of this epistle, where it is said, "I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift," it might seem that the Romans were not in possession of any of those extraordinary gifts which were communicated by the laying on of the apostle's hands. But be this as it may, all the other gifts enumerated are still possessed by the Church, and the directions are to use all gifts for the edifying of the body of Christ; as we are distinctly told in Ephes. iv. 8—12, and as is clearly implied in the chapter under consideration, verses 4, 5, "For as we are many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." "Having, then, gifts," &c., the apostle goes on to say, "let us use them."

But if one man assume, or allow it to be understood, that he possesses qualifications for every office himself, being teacher, exhorter, ruler, and every thing, there is no room for the exercise of those gifts which are possessed by the other members of the body of Christ. Nothing like restraint on the ministry of men (of women we speak not) can be proved from the New Testament to have had place among the early Christians, for any other cause than unsoundness of doctrine (see 2 John, ver. 10: Rom. xvi. 17), or want of edification in their teaching.

What the conduct and precept of Christ were with regard to this matter, we may read in Mark ix. 38—40. "And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbade him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, *Forbid him not*, for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part."

* 1 Cor. xiv. 3.

The conduct of Paul was equally marked, as recorded by himself in Phil. i. 15—18: “Some indeed preach Christ, even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, *whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice.*” What a contrast this affords to the conduct of those at this day, who would confine the preaching of the gospel to the privileged order, and exclude the layman, as he is called, however eminent the gift possessed by him!

It may here be remarked, that the term *layman*, or its equivalent, is never found in the New Testament. At the time when all the apostles remained at Jerusalem, the rest of the Church, *i. e.* its private members, went every where preaching the word (Acts viii. 1—4.) For eight years, Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the word before they were separated unto the special work to which they were then called by the Holy Ghost, and commended by imposition of hands at Antioch (Compare Acts xi. 22—26, with Acts xiii. 2, 3). And Apollos seems to have laboured to the end without ever having received such commendation to his work. At all events, “when he was disposed to pass into Achaia,” after he came to a knowledge of the truth, he went and preached “publicly” and effectually at Corinth, without waiting for Paul to ordain him (Acts xviii. 27.) In short, there is not any instance in the Scripture of *liberty to preach the word* being in any way consequent upon the laying on of hands, or any other similar ceremony. Gifts were, at times, communicated by the laying on of hands (2 Tim. i. 6); but there never seems to have been a question that when gifts were possessed, they ought to be exercised; and early believers assuredly preached, and preached successfully, without any ordination or appointment by man (See Acts xi. 19). When the authority of the Apostle Paul was called in question in the churches of Galatia and Corinth, he does not seek to establish it by reference to any human ordination, but tells them that he is “An apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Gal. i. 1). And to the Corinthians, he says, “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me Examine yourselves. whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. xiii. 3—5

“Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of my apostleship are ye in the Lord” (1 Cor. ix. 1, 2).

And respecting the false teachers who would lead them astray, he never says, ‘If they bring not proof of having received ordination from me, Paul, or one of the twelve, receive them not.’ But what he says is, “there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. i. 7, 8).

How different this language from that which is not unfrequently used to a poor hungry Christian at this day! “True, your minister does not preach the gospel faithfully: but you have the prayers, which are most beautiful compositions, and sound in doctrine; and with them you ought to be satisfied, rather than go to hear men who, though they may preach the gospel more faithfully, have this great deficiency—they have not received ordination at the hands of the bishop.”

The elders, or bishops, in the primitive churches (for that these titles are synonymous is proved by Acts xx. 17 and 28,* and Titus i. 5—7) were appointed by the apostles to rule in the various congregations or churches, or to watch over them. They were to be “apt to teach,” “holding fast the faithful word as they had been taught, that they might be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus i. 9). But their chief office was that of Ruler or overseer, as is shown by the 3rd chapter of 1 Tim., and the following passage from that epistle, ch. v. 17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word

* At the end of the second epistle to Timothy there is an apocryphal note, wherein it is stated that he was ordained the first *episcopos*, or bishop, of the church of the Ephesians. In the 20th chapter of Acts, verse 28, while Timothy continued to be the companion of the Apostle Paul (verse 4), we are told that there were many *episcopoi*, or bishops, at Ephesus. The word is, however, there translated “overseers,” and thus the glaring inconsistency of the apocryphal note is not discernible by the English reader. Query—is it possible that the difference in the translation of the word in the two places could have arisen from the circumstance that the translators were Episcopalians?

and doctrine :” from which it would appear, that there were approved elders who did not labour in word and doctrine ; probably from the circumstance that there were others in the church better qualified for this work. As to the ordination of teachers, many of whom were not elders (Acts xiii. 1) as a necessary pre-requisite to their speaking in the church, we read not one word about it in the Scriptures ; though we do read of those who preached and taught successfully without it. And there is not the slightest reason to suppose that the elders or rulers of any church would have excluded any teacher ordained of God who might have happened to visit them.

Even under the Old Testament dispensation, in which there was an order of Priests appointed by God, there was no such exclusive system adopted. We find repeated instances recorded of entire strangers, nothing better than “laymen,” being permitted, and indeed requested, to address the company in the Jewish Synagogues. It was the constant practice of the Saviour to teach in them (Luke iv. 15, 16 ; Matt. xiii. 54 ; John xviii. 20). The same was the case with the apostles Paul and Barnabas (Acts xiii. 14, 15 : and xvii. 2). Thus we see that a poor carpenter* without a home (Mark vi. 3 ; Luke ix. 58 ; Phil. ii. 7), and a wandering tent-maker, accidentally coming in, were permitted to teach in the established churches of Judæa ; and that the assumptions of the Jewish Hierarchy, which was clearly and undoubtedly founded by the authority of God himself, were not so great as those of the Christian Hierarchy, which, to say the least, can boast of no such authority. And thus that dispensation, under which greater liberty ought to be enjoyed, is, by the assumptions of men, rendered one of increased restrictions. This is, however, only

* Far be it from me to speak of the Saviour thus with the view of derogating from his character : on the contrary, I believe that his deep humiliation was essentially connected with his highest glory. It is so stated in Philippians ii. 9, “*Wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him.” Yes, He who was before all things, and by whom all things consist, and who is now at the right hand of God, angels and principalities and powers being made subject unto him, was once a poor carpenter without a home. But how few of his professed followers think of this ! Many high professors at this day, will turn away with disgust from the idea of admitting to their company a poor disciple of Jesus. Does not this give reason to suppose that if such individuals had lived eighteen centuries ago, they would have turned their backs and shut their doors on the lowly Jesus himself?

what might naturally be expected ; since it is ever the case, that usurped power requires more external aid for its support than that which is legal and undisputed.

The advocates of Apostolical succession build their arguments chiefly on the fact that Paul communicated spiritual gifts to Timothy, (2 Tim. i. 6), and perhaps to Titus, and directed the latter to ordain elders or bishops in each of the cities of Crete, where Churches had been raised up. And he further directed Timothy to commit the things which he had received of him (Paul) to faithful men who should be able to instruct others also (2 Tim. ii. 2). But this is a very slender basis on which to found so important a principle, as that none shall be allowed to teach in the Church but such as have received this derived apostolical ordination. Such a mighty superstructure raised upon so narrow a base can be compared to nothing more aptly than to a pyramid inverted, and made to stand upon its point. It might give needless offence to describe the various substantial props by which it is prevented falling over with its own weight ; suffice it to say, they are furnished in no small measure by the indifference and supineness of the people of God, who, under the idea of getting rid of responsibility, pay others to do that work which, if they looked more to God and less to their farms and merchandize, He would qualify them to perform themselves : but they will one day have to answer for the use of their talents. As to Ordination, however : in order to give importance to this word, there are five distinct Greek terms of different significations, which are all converted into it ;* and admitting that it was intended that this human ordination was to continue (which is by no means admitting the principle sought to be deduced from it as already adverted to) how could it come down to us through the long night of papal apostacy ? Surely it is unscriptural to maintain that ordination from the hands of a wicked man, though he may be ever so outwardly clothed with the robes of sanctity, can be of any value whatever. How can a man impart that of which he is not himself possessed ? And as for those who hold that the elders are to be chosen by the Church collectively †,

* These are—*ἐποίησε*, Mark iii. 14—*ἔθηκα*, John xv. 16—*γένεσθαι*, Acts i. 22—*καταστήσης*, Titus i. 5—*χειροτονήσαντες*, Acts xiv. 23.

† Instances are not unfrequent wherein the whole of the seat-holders in a chapel join with the members in voting for a minister. Surely no one will maintain that there is a shadow of Scripture to

they have even less scripture still to support their case. For most assuredly Titus was commanded to "ordain," or more literally to "appoint," the elders or bishops in the churches to which he was sent (Titus i. 5). Directions are given him for his guidance in making the appointments, and not a word is said about his recommending the Churches to select bishops having the proper qualifications. Paul and his companions "ordained," or chose elders in the Churches which they visited (Acts xiv. 23). The whole church chose the deacons (Acts vi. 5), since they were to have the charge of the *temporal* concerns. But there is no other instance of the Church collectively exercising a special choice. In the case of the vacant apostleship (Acts i. 23), the Church chose two, and God determined the election.

The present circumstances of the Christian Church are somewhat analogous to those of the Jewish nation during the time of the Judges. God was their King, and when they were oppressed by their enemies He raised up Judges who delivered them out of their hands. But these Judges received no human appointment. They wished, however, to be like the nations around them; and instead of trusting God, desired an earthly king, for which he was displeased with them, though he granted their request.

Christ is now the head of his Church, and though it is in as great disorder as the Jewish nation under the Judges, he can raise up those who are able, not only to feed his own flock, but also "to preach the Gospel in all the world for a witness to all nations;" and let us beware of being of the number of those who try to restore order by choosing to themselves a king; or refuse to recognise ministers whom God has commissioned, because they have not received ordination at the hands of men, or are in some way authorized according to the rules of some system, which man in his wisdom has devised as a necessary addition to what he might seem to consider the imperfect word of God.

There is, indeed, one portion of Scripture, from which

be produced in support of such a proceeding as this. I would just ask those who are thus uniting with the world, either in choosing or paying their minister, to consider, whether they are not breaking the command given in 2 Cor. vi. 14. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers?" And whether that which they are accustomed to look upon with so much complacency as "the voluntary system," is at all like the voluntary system of the New Testament, or is any more voluntary than it is of a tenant to pay the rent of a house to his landlord?

they who are inclined to build a system on one part of the word of God and pass over others, may argue that there were, in the times of the apostles, single individuals appointed in each church, to whom all ministrations were confided, to the exclusion of other offices and other gifts. The portion referred to is, the messages to the churches in the Revelation, through their respective angels. It is very uncertain what these angels were. The word in the original means a "messenger." Admitting, however, for the sake of argument, that they might possibly have been some presiding or superior elder, surely they could have nothing in their relation to the churches, which was inconsistent with such texts as 1 Cor. xiv. 26, and 1 Pet. iv. 10, which prove that all who were properly qualified were allowed and encouraged to speak in the assemblies; or with such other texts as Acts xiii. 1, and Acts xx. 17, 28, which prove that there were many teachers and many *episcopoi*, *i. e.* bishops in the same church.

With regard, then, to the second subject proposed for investigation, *viz.* the liberty of ministry, we see both the *principle* and *practice* of it clearly stated in the Scriptures. If we were able to discover the principle only, and could not find it carried into practice, there might be reason to apprehend we were in some measure mistaken as to the principle itself: or if we merely saw the practice recorded, and had no development of the principle from which it resulted, nor any exhortations or directions respecting it, we might again feel doubtful of our ground. But when we see the *record* of a practice resulting from a principle, plainly laid down, and which, moreover, we are exhorted to *carry into* practice, the whole case is clearly proved for any one who is desirous to take the Scriptures, and nothing but the Scriptures, for his guide.

It is said by some, that the liberty contended for may be enjoyed when Christians are assembled in more private companies; that they may then exhort one another, and edify the body, or at least a part of it. That such meetings may be desirable is not denied, unless intended to be substitutes for that public gathering of believers in breaking bread, which alone fulfils the requirement of the Scriptures; but if intended to excuse our neglect of this, private meetings become a dangerous snare; they effectually maintain division in the Church: they render Church discipline impossible; heretical doctrines may be disseminated unchecked, and the cross avoided, which is often found to follow when the

manifested union of believers, on scriptural principles, is sought to be maintained.

Having then proved that open communion and liberty of ministry have strong, indeed undeniable, scripture evidence in their favour, no further argument ought to be required by any Christian in their support. But if it can be shewn, that they form together the only practicable ground for that union among Christians which was so strongly inculcated by Christ upon his disciples, an additional and very powerful reason is adduced for their being adopted.

It is easy to perceive that there can be no union without mutual toleration; and if Christians will not meet together at the table of the Lord without being all of one mind, they will never meet at all.

But not only must they be content to tolerate each other's differences of opinion (even as it is written "Whereunto ye have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing"), they must also meet on an equality; that is, there must be no further inequality than arises from the diversities of gifts which God has bestowed on them. But if one man (let him be ordained by the pope, a bishop, the presbytery, or in any other manner) is to be the *only* one allowed to speak, and that to the exclusion of others who may be equally or better qualified than himself, there never can be even an approach to union.

The want of this union is felt and confessed by multitudes of the people of God; and attempts have been made to bring it about partially by means of Bible, Missionary, and Tract Societies; but what union could subsist even there, without liberty of speech for all sects and parties uniting in them?† These, however, are a very poor substitute for that union which Christ prays may exist among his disciples to the end of time, as recorded in John xvii. 20, 21. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

† There are those who can attend these meetings, and tolerate a great deal which is objectionable, under the idea that the end sanctifies the means. but who immediately take offence if any thing be uttered in an assembly of believers which does not accord with their pre-conceived views or prejudices. From what can this arise, but that it is Satan's nearest and dearest object to sow dissension among the people of God? and if he can only get them to mix up with the world, immediately he blinds their eyes to the extent of the evil.

Is the conduct of Christians now, as regards this very point, such as to cause the WORLD to believe, that Jesus, the master whom they profess to serve, was the Son of God?

The general fear is, that disorder would ensue from the introduction of such a practice as is here contended for. Disorder did ensue at Corinth, and yet the practice was not prohibited: on the contrary, it was fully sanctioned, and rules laid down for its regulation.

If worldly unconverted men were admitted and suffered to remain, disorder might soon be expected to arise, which it would be found impossible to quell—but obedience to the commandment, “Put away from yourselves that wicked person,” is the remedy for this evil. Indeed, it is only by obedience that we can expect difficulties to be overcome. The more close the obedience, the greater often will the difficulties appear; but Almighty power exercised in grace can overcome them all; and this it is to which we are encouraged to look. The same grace which has put it into our hearts to meet, can alone bless our meeting, and supply that which our necessities require. If we need government, He can give to some grace to rule, and to others grace to obey; and where the gifts of His Spirit are valued and recognized, or sought to be recognized aright, there we may suppose His faithful blessing to be. We see some families in which reverence and love towards the parents, and brotherly affection among the members, secure a sweet and healthful union, according to God. But if selfishness usurp the place of brotherly love, and self-will the place of filial reverence, the principles of union are gone. Forced arrangements may cloke the evil, and preserve an outward show of decency—but such a family is but as a whited sepulchre; and so it is with the Church of God. Order, according to the Spirit, that is, a due recognition of the gifts that He may have been pleased to give, is obedience; disorder, that is, the non-recognition of these, is disobedience; disorder, cloked by human regulations, is disorder and hypocrisy. And is not any thing better than to frame a system which will go on smoothly (as some systems will) before the eyes of men, when perhaps neither among minister nor people is one to be found who has passed from death unto life? What cruelty can be greater than thus to deepen the innate darkness of the natural heart?

The liberty contended for is not liberty to the flesh, but liberty to the Spirit. It is NOT the right of every man to

speak ; but it is the right of God to speak through any man whom he pleases to make use of. To avoid the abuse of this by the flesh, the Church wherein the gifts are exercised is to judge (as directed in 1 Cor. xiv. 29), whether the speaker give forth the mind of the Lord, as revealed in the Scriptures—" Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge." If judgment was to be exercised on what was spoken by a prophet, surely it ought to be on what comes from an ordinary teacher. And if any one thinks that this is not a sufficient guard, all that can be said is, that it is the only guard which God has given : and if we make ourselves wiser than God, there is an end of all scriptural inquiry.

It must be carefully borne in mind, that the whole of these remarks are intended to apply merely to the assemblies of *Believers*, when met *as a church* for worship and edification, and at which unbelievers, though not excluded (1 Cor. xiv. 23), are not supposed to be present ; that is, the special object of the meeting is not for them. And surely it is highly desirable that believers should thus meet at least once on the Lord's day, to offer that praise in which it is utterly impossible for unbelievers to join, and to commemorate at once the dying love of their Saviour, and his victory over the grave, by partaking, on the day on which he obtained this victory, of those emblems of which he has especially commanded us to partake, and which are the most appropriate means of bringing the momentous events of the crucifixion forcibly before the mind. His body was broken for us, and his blood was shed for us, Satan thus gaining a temporary ascendancy, his love for us permitting it : and we commemorate this love on the day on which he obtained the victory over Satan, as was shewn by his rising again from the dead. " Christ our passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast."

" And what assured comfort is contained in this : " The " Passover of God is the simple ground of rest and security : upon the blessed value of this, the children and the " people of God can feed within—the security of the blood " being upon their door-posts. That meets the destroying " angel ; and he goes, and can go no farther. Within all is " peace—judgment may be around, and conflict and trial " before, but the church rests on the security, which faith has " afforded or enjoys in the Paschal Lamb, eaten within the " blood-stricken doors. This is not the work of the Spirit " of God, save as revealing it in and to us. The work of

“the Spirit detects sin, leads into conflict, animates unto those exercises, which ever bring to light the evil shortcomings and failures of our own hearts, but is never the ground and warrant of peace. It may be the means, on being charged by the enemy, of proving that the peace we have is not a false one, but is *never* the proper ground and warrant of peace ; for it is ever connected with imperfection, and perfectness somewhere must be the ground of peace with a perfect God. ‘By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.’ ‘He has made peace by the blood of his Cross.’ Nothing can be mixed with this ; nothing *in* us can come up to the measure and expression of holiness which that blood affords, or therefore can make peace as it does. It is the very vindication of perfect holiness against all sin (for it was holiness in its intolerance of sin which required so precious a sacrifice), and it is therefore the *perfect* peace of the believer against all sin ; for the thing which at all measures it, puts away and cleanses from it, all those that are walking in the light. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.’ ”

But although meetings for Christian fellowship and worship are suited only to Christians, and not to the world, yet the Gospel of reconciliation—the message of love to those who are dead in trespasses and sins—is the world’s proper due. “Go ye unto all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” The Apostle could stand before a mingled multitude, and say, “Men and brethren, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins,” and “through Him all who believe are justified from all things.” To use every opportunity for collecting the world, in order that the glad tidings of salvation may be preached, is certainly the bounden duty of the believer.

In these meetings, the special object is the conversion of sinners, though believers may, and often do, receive profitable instruction. They are equally necessary as the assemblies of believers, though they surely should not be allowed to supersede them. They may, and ought to be held as frequently as persons can be induced to come together, and preachers be found to address them. In assemblies of this kind, one man properly gifted may very suitably take the whole upon himself. Numberless instances might be adduced from the New Testament in proof of this. Liberty of ministry on such occasions, for all present, would not only lead to confusion, but would be a useless accumulation of

energies into one place, which should be exercised in some other unoccupied corner of the wide harvest field.*

In conclusion we may ask these two questions :—

Does any union, short of church union manifested in the Lord's appointed way, satisfy the requirement of his Word?

Who are the most open to the charge of schism—those who are willing to unite in observing the Lord's command, by meeting and breaking bread with all who are brethren in Christ, on the wide, but simple ground of brotherhood in the faith; or those who refuse to unite on this simple ground, and make or sanction rules or systems, which either shut out from their communion those whom they are constrained to acknowledge as brethren, or by want of discipline, turn what ought to be the Lord's table, into the table of the world?

* In the case of teaching also, it may be very desirable for any one who is able to instruct the church, by unfolding Scripture, and leading them into deeper apprehension of truth, to collect believers in assemblies in which he may be the sole speaker, either because he may be the only one able to teach, or else because sufficient time would not otherwise be afforded. In all such arrangements perfect liberty may be allowed, subject only to the restriction, that all things be done unto edifying, and in love.

NOTE.—There are not a few who have read the former editions of this Tract, and have expressed their approbation of it, as setting forth principles in accordance with Scripture; and yet they have not thought it right to *act* upon the principles. Let such remember that the day is coming in which every man's work shall be made manifest of what sort it is; and it would be better for them not to have known the will of God, than, after having known it, to walk contrary to it. *Numbers* are not requisite for a gathering of believers; for the promise of the Saviour is, "Where two or three are gathered together *in my name*, there am I in the midst of them."

Dear brethren, members of the flock of Christ, whom he has purchased with his own blood, it is for you only that I write. The world cannot understand these things; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." But you know them, or if you are faithful in your walk you may know them, for if ye be Christ's the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in you, and "he that is *spiritual* judgeth all things, yea, the deep things of God." But remember, that if you are meeting in any other name than Christ's, or glorying in any other name than that of Christian, you are not spiritual, and are not walking as you ought to walk. "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not *carnal*, and walk as men?" . . . This is the word of God, and let God be true, though every man be a liar.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John xiii. 17). "And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation," "and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" when "the faithful Witness" which "testifieth of these things" will surely come, and "give to every man according as his work shall be."