

THE LAPSE OF TIME: Has It Changed the Situation?

Being a Letter on Certain Present Difficulties.
2nd Edition

My Dear Brother:

Your kind letter reminds me that I have never answered your earlier communication. I had not really forgotten this, and had been hoping, from time to time, to find opportunity to reply. I felt that the subject of your letter was one that called for careful consideration, and more than a hasty reply. I shall now endeavor to take the matter up, as the Lord may enable me; but I am free to own that I have no love for controversy, and it is with reluctance that I approach a subject involving anything of the kind.

In the first place, permit me to assure you, dear brother, that I can very well understand your feelings, and your desire to be on terms of loving fellowship with both the circles you refer to. I can say more. I can say that I desire the same thing myself. The Lord knows how often I mourn over the divided state of "Brethren," and what a burning shame and disgrace I feel it to be—and this, too, I trust, not in any spirit of party feeling. I feel the present state of things to be our common shame. It should exercise every one of us and bring us low before God. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." I. Cor., 12:26.

Thank God, we know the time is not far distant when all the Lord's people shall be forever united, in the presence of Him who has loved us, and given Himself for us; where "all taint of sin shall be removed, all evil done away." All these vexed questions will then be settled, no more to rise. Yet we have a present responsibility which cannot be ignored. One desires to see more general exercise concerning it. Let us pray God for a fresh, widespread stirring of heart and conscience among us, irrespective of our ecclesiastical positions, and

that there may be a turning to God in fervent prayer for restoring mercy!

One does not necessarily mean to intimate by this that all are alike guilty, but the shame of it all is a *common* shame. And then, too, as has recently been pointed out by a beloved brother amongst us,—there was a state that called for the chastening hand of God; and we may well pause for a moment and inquire of ourselves if that state has been confessed and judged before Him? I believe if there is to be any degree of blessing or recovery among us, it must be preceded by confession and humiliation. See how beautifully this order is maintained in Ezra 10, where restoration comes in from gross evil, and departure from God. First we read: "The people wept very sore," then Shechaniah, representing them, says, "We have trespassed against our God," and then—but not till then—he adds, "Now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing." Where are the weepers among us today? May the Lord, with whom are mercies and forgivenesses enable us to answer this question, and to know something of His restoring mercy, ourselves!

In all this I do not doubt, dear brother, that we are in accord; but I am sorry to find, as I proceed further, much in your letter with which I cannot agree. Your way of solving present difficulties would be to ignore the barriers that exist, without inquiring too precisely into them. You would forget the past. You would have the divided companies meet together again, as though all had been well from the beginning. And with these yearnings of the heart, one can well sympathize. But don't you see, dear brother, we cannot always yield to the impulse of affection? Our hearts must be governed by the Word of God. Nothing else can guide us. Natural emotions—yes, even spiritual affections and longings—all must be controlled by that Word. We must be able to say, "It is written."

As your difficulty particularly relates to what is generally called "the Grant party," I must speak of this. I don't know what your thought is as to the origin of this separate company. Probably, however, you will agree with the most of brethren that its beginning was unhappy. It is

not my thought to enter into the details of the controversy that brought about so sad a result as the dividing of the saints. Enough has been circulated as to that. I just desire to establish the fact that the beginning of the Grant table is well known to have been under a cloud. This is so generally admitted, even by leading brethren among the supporters of Mr. Grant today,* that I shall take it for granted in this letter. One may choose phrases as to this. The setting up of the schismatic table may be modestly termed "unwise," "precipitate," or "regrettable," but the point is, it was obviously not the result of the Holy Spirit's leading. The plain truth is that it was an independent table, and the beginning of a sorrow which has continued to this day.

I gather from your letter, however, that you may say, "Yes, that may all be so, but it does not concern us today. It happened a long time ago. Let us forget about it, and get together again." If this is your thought, dear brother, let me assure you that if it were a Scriptural solution to the difficulty I would be rejoiced to accept it. But let me ask you, Does God forget? You and I may agree to overlook the past, but strife and division among us is not only a personal sorrow. *It is a sin against God.* What would a settlement be worth that left God out? This is a serious point, and one that it is well to consider in this day of expediency.

*To substantiate this statement the following complete copy of a circular issued by well known supporters of Mr. Grant two or three years ago, is printed:
"To the Saints gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Beloved Brethren: We desire to address you upon a matter, which while the act referred to occurred a number of years ago, still has a bearing upon our relation here in practical fellowship.

In the division at Montreal, in 1884, it will be remembered that a well known and faithful servant of the Lord, was judged by the majority of the assembly to be a person—for his doctrines, or for the manner in which he maintained them—unfit to have a place with us at the Table of the Lord. A large minority in the meeting dissented from this action, protesting earnestly against it as they had against what led up to it. On the following Lord's day after he had been put away, you will remember this minority met at Craig Street and continued the breaking of the bread without any interval. It is of this that we wish to speak.

Without going into details, we believe that in this

The lapse of many years may seem to minimize the gravity of this question to us, but with Him one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Ah! dear brother, listen: "*God requireth that which is past.*" Ecc. 3:15. No veneering of the surface, no plastering with untempered mortar, will pass His searching eye; and it is with Him we have to do. David had sinned against his fellow man, but in the presence of God he could say, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." Psa. 51:4.

But even from a human standpoint, is it proper to assume that time makes wrong right? Let us consider this a little. Let us go back thirty years to the setting up of the Grant table. For the purposes of this letter, as already indicated, I shall consider it admitted to have been a wrong step. Very well, then, we begin with this evil thing, in the year 1884. It could not have been the Lord's table then, set up without the guidance of the Spirit of God. God is not the author of confusion,

beginning a fresh assembly in separation from their brethren meeting at N. H. H. a new issue was raised, which was calculated to disturb the minds of many. We therefore believe that this was an unwise step and not in accordance with that patience, forbearance and long-suffering which the Word of God inculcates. We believe that had the saints refrained from this act until sufficient time had been given for brethren elsewhere to know what had been done at Montreal, opportunity would have been given for the Spirit of God to awaken conscience, and to minister the needed truth in grace to those who had been concerned in this whole sorrowful matter.

We believe that while the minds of many were made up, and that while there was a good measure of knowledge of what was taking place, yet it was due the Lord and to our brethren everywhere, that so sudden and radical a step should not have been taken until after every effort had been exhausted and opportunity for consultation had been given. Believing in common with large numbers of saints then, and now, that our brother could not be considered fundamentally unsound, nor a heretic or party maker, we could not justify the action of the majority or take sides with them. We have, therefore, gone on with another in the refusal of that action, rather than in approval of the special detail at Craig Street of which we speak.

We may add, however, that profiting we trust by our failure at that time, we have sought, when trouble threatened, to avoid precipitancy, and to be more patient, careful and deliberate.

This statement is given in the belief that we should clear ourselves before the people of God as to the

and it certainly was confusion to set up another and rival table in opposition to the one long established at Natural History Hall. We could not conceive of the Lord owning two hostile and conflicting tables in the same place, nor could the Holy Spirit (who does the "gathering" referred to in Matt. 18:20) have led to the establishment of such a state of things.

But if it was wrong then, it must be wrong now. If you deny this, I will ask you to tell me just when the change occurred? If the Grant table was not the Lord's table thirty years ago, but is the Lord's table today, there must have been some one special time when wrong became right. When was that?

The independent table was set up in 1884, I believe. Was there some magic quality about the year 1885 that changed it? Did 1886 do it, or 1887? Did the lapse of five change it? Did ten years?—twenty years?—thirty years? Come, now, dear brother, let us get to the point here. What particular time effected the change?

Is it not true that a table begun in independence thirty years ago, remains independent to the pres-

principle involved. We do not do it with any ulterior motive, it having been for many years in mind. As a matter of fact, free expression, both private and public has been given this sentiment. Should it, under God, be the means of assuring any of our beloved brethren as to our practice and principles, we shall be only too thankful, longing that in this day of feebleness and rebuke, those who love the Shepherd's voice, may be drawn more closely to Himself and, therefore, by blessed necessity more closely one to the other.

The following Brethren have expressed their full fellowship with the above for themselves and for many others.

- B. C. Greenman, Toronto, Canada.
- H. A. Gray, St. Paul, Minn.
- W. H. Wilson, Chicago, Ill.
- A. M. Scott, Alton, Ill.
- J. H. Fleming, Minneapolis, Minn.
- J. B. Gottshall, Lehighton, Penna.
- Geo. McCandless, Philadelphia, Pa.
- J. F. Parker, Plainfield, N. J.
- P. J. Loizeaux, Plainfield, N. J.
- T. O. Loizeaux, Plainfield, N. J.
- Samuel Ridout, Plainfield, N. J.
- J. T. Manaban, Elizabeth, N. J.
- Geo. McKenzie, Kenilworth, N. J.
- T. G. Perkins, Newark, N. J.
- J. T. Gilmour, Brooklyn, N. Y.
- J. B. Jackson, Boston, Mass.

ent day, and always will remain independent, until restoration is effected in a godly way? The foundation remains unchanged. Suppose you build a house. You are in a hurry, and you put in a poor foundation. The house is all finished, and it looks as nice and is as comfortable as any other house. Time passes. You forget all about the foundation. It is out of sight, anyhow. Does your forgetfulness make the rotten foundation any better? Does the lapse of time improve it? Does it not always remain a rotten foundation? Even the presence of nice people in the house does not make it any better; and one gladly owns to the presence of godly and estimable saints in the Grant fellowship.

Again, in reading through your letter, I notice you say, in speaking of the coming of the Lord, "our hatred will then be forgotten." Now, dear brother, I object to this expression. I am sure I don't know any brethren who "hate" those in the Grant circle. In my own case, far from hating them, I love them, and I believe this is the general feeling among us.

Separation from other Christians is sometimes (alas! too often) a proper and scriptural course. We must obey the Word of God though it be painful to us. I rejoice to know that in heaven I shall be forever with all the redeemed, and I wish it could be so here. But I find in Scripture a variety of injunctions which make such a thing impossible. With some I am not to keep company (2 Thess. 3:14); others I am to mark and avoid (Romans 16:17); certain others are to be put away from the Lord's table (1. Cor. 5), and then there are the well known principles of 2 Tim., 2:21, with which you are no doubt familiar, and those of the Old Testament concerning the leprous house, in Lev. 14. All these scriptures and many others show that we cannot unite indiscriminately with all Christians, however much we might desire it. But we are nowhere told to hate those from whom faithfulness to God's Word separates us. On the contrary, we are never to cease loving them, and we should do all in our power for their restoration. In the latter I believe we fail.

The solution to the Grant trouble is very simple. We long to receive these beloved saints again to

our bosom, at the Lord's table. All that is necessary is for them to return there, owning the error publicly which so many of them own privately.

We do not claim to be exempt from all fault or failure in the controversy. It very rarely happens that all the fault is on one side. But the principal thing in question is the status of the Grant table, and there is very little difference of opinion about that.

Then again, as to love: Does not true love seek the good of its object? If I truly love a brother who is in a wrong course, is it love for me to go on with him just the same as if nothing had ever happened? Should not love be faithful? Would it be faithfulness in me to sit down and break bread with Grant brethren, who, whether they know it or not, have been going on in a wrong course for many years, or would it be faithfulness to refuse to endorse the wrong and thus bring the question pointedly before them? Scripture says: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

To slur over and forget evil is not God's way. He does not do this in His individual dealings with us, nor does He do it with His people collectively. Evil must be judged. As another has said, "Did He forget the sin of Solomon, who built high places for false gods, to please his wives? Did he forget the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, or of Ahab, who sold himself to work wickedness beyond all others?"

In conclusion, I notice you ask the question, "What is the Lord's table?" In answer, I would say it is "where two or three are gathered unto the Name of the Lord Jesus." You will observe it is not where two or three "gather themselves" together. It is where they "are gathered." This means that there must be a Gatherer. The Gatherer is the Holy Spirit. The Lord's table is not any place set up in the energy of nature. It is the place where all is consistent with what the Name of the Lord Jesus stands for, and those who are there are brought there by the energy of the Holy Spirit of God. How completely this shuts out self-will, and the workings of religious pride!

It is a significant fact that the followers of Mr. Grant appear to have openly given up this truth as to the character of the Lord's table. I trust I

may be pardoned for saying they first lost the reality, and then even the theory of it. I quote from a recent copy of one of their publications ("The Gleaner," of Feb'y, 1914): "*But perhaps the biggest item on the credit side of our ledger, if one may be permitted to compare, where all is so precious and vital, is the truth that no company of Christians, not even ourselves, can claim a monopoly of the Lord's table, or of gathering in the name of the Lord. Had this truth been known thirty years ago, perhaps division might have been averted.*"

This seems to me a sorry subject for self-congratulation. It suggests the thought of one glorying in his shame. Shall it not be said that this is the natural outcome of the looseness and disorder connected with the Grant movement at its beginning, and characteristic of it to this day?

Thank God, the truth remains as it ever was. There is yet such a thing as the Lord's table, in a distinct and particular sense; and, by grace, there yet remain some whose privilege it is to be gathered there.

I agree with you, too, dear brother, in what you say about divisions. They are of the enemy. Scripture forbids division (I. Cor., 1:10), and one of the triumphs of Satan today is the broken state of the Church. And we should feel this, too; not merely our own local troubles. But, as has often been pointed out, *standing fast for God's truth is not division*. Those who seek, by divine grace, and in whatever feebleness, to stand fast for God's truth are on the original ground. The others are the ones who have departed, and the remedy is simply for them to return where they once were.

I trust that nothing I have written will give offense, either to you or any other dear brother with you. As I said at the beginning of this letter, I can, and do, sympathize with you, and understand your feelings very well, but you see the question is one that affects the Lord, as well as ourselves. If it were just a personal matter we could afford to make little of it, but can we *do this with a matter which concerns the Lord, and His glory?*

J. R. G.

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