

# **SPIRITUAL BALANCE**

or the **PERILS** of  
**UNSCRIPTURAL  
EXTREMES**



**WILLIAM BUNTING**

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UNSCRIPTURAL EXTREMES

by

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## FOREWORD

The aim of this brochure is stated in the first chapter. It is essential that it should be kept clearly in mind. It is "devotion to the Lord; separation from the world; simplicity of heart and life, and a love for all God's people."

Of the days of the Judges it is recorded that "the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways" (ch. 5.6). Then of a later time it is said that "in the day of battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul . . ." (1 Sam. 13 v. 22). Their enemies by their strategy had robbed them of their liberty and of their power to assert and fight to maintain their liberty. Coulters and mattocks, be they filed ever so sharp, were poor substitutes for swords.

To divert the Christian from the highway into some bypath, whether it be Bunyan's "bypath meadow", which leads to ease and worldly pleasure, or into some ecclesiastical and Pharisaical cul-de-sac; and to denude him of the only weapon of offence in his armour, are two of Satan's main ways of seeking to defeat the purpose of God in connection with our testimony. This is true both individually and collectively.

Ecclesiastical rigidity on the one hand, and the supplementing, if not substituting of the display of natural talent for the exercise of spiritual gift, on the other, are subtle but sinister temptations of the enemy. We need to be aware and beware of them. Hence the great and constant need of keeping in their proper perspective the four things mentioned by our brother in chapter 1.

At the time when the exclusive and high-church tenets of the "Needed Truth" movement were first propagated, the late Mr. J. R. Caldwell blew the trumpet of alarm in no uncertain sound, warning against its inroads. Excerpts from it appeared in "The Witness" in Aug. 1929 under the title, "The Three Gatherings of the Saints." At a Conference in Los Angeles in 1936, I heard the late Mr. W. J. McClure echo that call. He referred to the exclusivism of the group which followed J. N. Darby, as patterned after the Church of England,

and that of the Needed Truth, a much less erudite movement, as patterned after Scottish and Irish Presbyterianism. That is a true assessment. He was warning against the infiltrations of these views into the open assemblies.

In over 40 years of full-time service for the Lord, one has seen the baneful and very sad effects of this tendency to extremes. Homes are divided by it. Brothers and sisters, both in the flesh and in the Lord, are separated as by an impassable gulf by it. On the other hand, brethren who could not meet to break bread together on the Lord's Day will meet for lunch on the Monday for business discussions.

While travelling from Dover to London last year, the guard engaged us in a conversation regarding the grounds of Dulwich College, saying that during the war an attempt had been made to use them for building purposes, but that the authorities—"You know the **exclusiastical** authorities would not let them", he said. He could not get the word "ecclesiastical" when he wanted it, so he coined the word "exclusiastical", at which we rather laughed, but of which a mental note was made. For there is a great deal of that "exclusiastical authority" to be found.

The autonomy of each assembly and the liberty of the servant of the Lord to act as before God should be acknowledged as of cardinal importance. They should not be bartered.

Whilst condemning sectarian labels it behoves us to see that we are free from the charge. It is just as wrong to speak of "gathered out Christians" as it is to accept any other denominational title, be it Baptist or Pentecostal.

One is thankful for our brother's urge and attempt to direct the believers and assemblies into the Apostolic Highway of "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and love to all the saints."

May it please God to bless the brochure to this end.

**J. M. Davies**

## CHAPTER I

### THE UNIVERSAL FACT

Irrespective of where we look in the material realm we may learn the absolute necessity of balance or equilibrium. All mechanical and engineering works illustrate this. Every watch and chronometer, for example, must have a balance-wheel to regulate the instrument's beat or rate. Ships and planes are fitted with stabilisers which govern their tendency to roll and pitch. Wheels, large and small, have to be balanced. You could not travel with pleasure upon your bicycle were the wheels not 'true'. In business, the Board of Trade demands that all scales for determining weights should be evenly balanced. The Inland Revenue Department likewise insists that every firm must periodically prepare a Balance Sheet to show its financial returns. The commercial value of a country's exports put against its imports is described as a Balance of Trade. And for the preservation of peaceful relations between different States, an international Balance of Power must be maintained.

The Creative Works of God teach us the same lesson. Think of Job 26.7: "He . . . hangeth the earth upon nothing." Job evidently knew that the earth is a globular body. Incidentally, how did he, living some 4,000 years ago, gain such knowledge? The ancients believed the earth to be a great plain. The Hindus described it as a vast flat surface, resting upon the shoulders of four huge elephants. Yet the patriarch knew what modern astronomy demonstrates—that the earth is a sphere floating in space. How can we explain his amazing insight? There is only one answer—Job's words were given by Divine inspiration.

Think again, however, of the words—"He . . . hangeth the earth upon nothing." That is, it is not suspended from anything. It has no visible support. No pillars uphold it. It hangs from "nothing". You could not hang your pocket handkerchief upon nothing. Could you? Try and see. Yet this Earth which weighs some 6,000 million, million, million tons, is 25,000 miles in circumference, has a land surface of 196,000,000 sq. miles, an equatorial diameter of over 7,926 miles, which spins round upon its imaginary axis from west to east once

every 24 hours, and which travels in its orbit round the sun with a velocity of  $18\frac{1}{2}$  mls. per sec., completes its revolutions year after year for centuries and millennia with unerring accuracy and precision. How then can we account for this staggering phenomenon? Well, God has so designed the great forces which we speak of as centripetal, that they hold not only the earth but the entire universe in a state of equipoise. Astronomers tell us, however, that if the Earth's speed exceeded  $18\frac{1}{2}$  mls. per sec. the planet would depart from its orbit and fly into the distances of space. If, on the other hand, it were less, it would begin to fall towards the sun and would ultimately go up in flames; but the speed has been adjusted by the great Architect and Creator to give the Earth a stable equilibrium.

One or two more illustrations from Creation must suffice. Isaiah asks: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?" (40.12). The reference is to the waters in the oceans of earth. These have been placed in their beds of sand in correct quantities, as if God had measured them out accurately with His own hand. With this science is in perfect accord. Were the water surface greater, we should be flooded out with rain. Were it less, we should not be able to grow enough food to support life. God, however, has so balanced the quantity of waters with the needs of man and beast that we have the requisite rainfall—not a drop too much and not a drop too little.

Isaiah next asks, "Who hath . . . meted out heaven with a span?" "Heaven" here, of course, is the atmosphere, and the question implies a fact which science acknowledges, namely, that there is a boundary or limit to the height of the atmosphere. Science teaches, however, that the atmosphere has weight—a fact stated long before the days of Galileo or Newton, for Job informs us that part of God's great plan was "to make a weight for the wind" (ch. 28.25, R.V.). Now, the weight of atmospheric pressure is 14.73 lbs. to the square inch. If the boundary of the atmosphere were higher, the weight would, of course, be correspondingly greater; but in that case men and beasts would sink under the burden. If the boundary were lower, on the other hand, the pressure would be so much lighter, and all animal life would be panting for breath. God, however, Who meted out heaven, fixed its height so that His creatures have exactly the correct balance of atmospheric pressure for their lungs—not an ounce too much and not an ounce too little. Other similar examples from Creation could be furnished. Thus Job 37.16 speaks of "the balancing of the clouds". These,

however, will suffice to illustrate our point; and in the presence of works of such amazing design and accuracy how we should adore the infinite majesty, wisdom, power, and beneficence of our great Creator God.

A consideration of MAN, the apex and crown of the earthly creation, cannot fail to reveal illustrations of the same feature. With what interest our parents watched when as little ones we attempted to take our first steps unaided. We were simply striving to gain our physical equilibrium. While still children we learned to cycle, which was just a matter of practising to balance our bodies upon the two wheels of the machine. Again, man is endowed with two eyes, two ears, two arms, two hands, two legs and two feet, the two members of each pair being absolutely necessary to afford proper balance. Should one member of any pair be removed or even hurt, how deficient, awkward, and one-sided a person becomes! For example, what but a crooked, uneven walk can result from the legs of the lame not being equal (Prov. 26.7)? Not only so, but in 1 Cor. 12, where the local assembly is viewed under the figure of a human body, **all the members** bear a complementary relation the one to the other. This makes for the perfect equilibrium and harmony of the whole. It is true that some members are “feeble” and “uncomely” but our all-wise Creator, Who balanceth all His works, “hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked, that there should be no schism in the body” (vs. 24,25). We shall have more to say of this in our next chapter.

In the holy ordinance of Matrimony we have yet another example. In marriage the wife is given as “an help meet” for her husband (Gen. 2.18). “The word means not ‘helpmeet’, but ‘one over against him’, as bone corresponds to socket, as mortice to tenon; a counterpart, one apposite to him, not opposite. Each is adopted to the other, so that the proficiencies of the one make up for the deficiencies of the other, and contrariwise” (A. T. Pierson). If in the matrimonial yoke the wife is the “weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 2.7), that fact is counter-balanced by the “honour” which her husband is responsible to pay her. Physically, temperamentally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually they complement each other, thus ensuring that happy marital balance, without which life in the home could not flow smoothly and pleasantly.

It will thus be seen that both in the works of man, and in the infinitely vaster realm of the works of God, the principle of balance



and equipoise is everywhere in evidence. All this should teach us the salutary lesson of how necessary proper balance is in every sphere of Christian life and service, which, of course, means the avoidance of all unscriptural extremes.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE WRITTEN WORD

God has displayed His glory in His Work (Ps. 19. 1-6), and in His Word (vs. 7-11). In what He has made, His eternal power, wisdom, holiness, beauty and love are revealed. In what He has written we behold, in addition, His grace—His undeserved, unmerited favour—an attribute of His Being which the light of nature never could reveal. Hence the glory of the written Word surpasses that of all God's works, marvellous and majestic beyond description though the latter be.

Of the numerous Divine features of the Word of God, the one which at present interests us is the perfect balance of all its parts. For as all Creation is characterised by order, arrangement, harmony, and equilibrium, so is this Book of Divine revelation. Far from being a compilation of disconnected writings, like a jumbled pile of tickets in a lottery bag, this sacred Library, comprised of sixty-six books, is essentially one, throughout which, like a silver thread, the grand unifying purpose of redemption runs, binding all together.

Not only is the Bible one harmonious whole, but as stated, all its parts are in just proportion one with the other. A close study reveals it to be a Book of perfect and marvellous balance. Numerous examples of this could be given, of which a few must suffice. We know the Scriptures are in two great divisions—the Old Testament and the New Testament. One is concerning Israel; the other, concerning the Church. One is written in Hebrew; the other, in Greek. One leads up to the Cross, the other radiates its glory from the Cross. "No two twins," says A. Saphir, "could be more alike in figure and in feature" than these Testaments.

In the one we have the account of Adam, the first man, the head of the old creation, of his "generations" (Gen. 5.1), and of how he sinned by eating what hung upon a tree. Its first five books tell of the line of Divine choice, of the formation of the Kingdom of Israel, of the statutes and enactments of the Law, both moral and ceremonial. In the historical books we trace Israel's subsequent spiritual state and the many vicissitudes of the nation, consequent upon that state. The

poetical books breathe the spirit of personal devotion and collective worship; while the prophetic books point forward to the sufferings of the Messiah, the judgment of the wicked, and end in their closing chapter with the Second Coming of Christ, under the celestial figure of "THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS". Now, with this in mind, think of the subject matter of the other, the New Testament. In it we have the account of "the last Adam", "the second man", the Head of the new Creation. It is "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (Matt. 1.1), the sinless One, who for us hung upon a tree. Its first five books tell of the men He chose out of the world, of the formation of the Church, and by precept and example teach us the Law of Love. In the Epistles we trace the spiritual state of one local church after another and learn valuable lessons from God's governmental dealings with them. Here, too, we find inspiring examples of personal devotion and principles for the corporate worship of the saints. Finally, we come to the Revelation, the prophetic book of the New Testament, in which John so frequently looks backward to Calvary and onward to the great consummation of all things—the Second Advent, the last Judgment, and the eternal glory of the redeemed—all confirmed in the closing chapter by Him Who is described under the celestial figure of "THE BRIGHT AND MORNING STAR".

That there is a remarkable comparison between the two Testaments will be admitted by all, but the fact which in particular we wish to notice is that neither one would be complete without the other. The Old needs the New, the New requires the Old. The one is the counterpart and complement of the other. You never would understand the Old without the New, the New would be meaningless without the Old.

"The New is in the Old contained,  
The Old is by the New explained."

Here is perfect balance.

The Old Testament is thus plainly seen to be a preparation for the New Testament. This is remarkable, is not it? How could so many writers, living at different time periods, write to contribute to a volume which would be a preparation for another volume, which they did not know would ever exist, and which as a matter of fact was not completed until about 500 years after their work had been finished? The only explanation is that both Testaments were penned by the same

Author—the Holy Spirit of God. What we wish to notice now, however, is that each of these is perfectly adjusted to the other. They form a balance of truth which has no compare in all literature. “The Bible,” said Dr. A. T. Pierson, “is a kind of organism. Its parts so fit into each other, as that none can be dispensed with, all being complementary, each to the other.”

Let me give you another illustration. Consider the first three chapters of the Bible. What have we there? We have the creation of heaven and earth, a man and his wife placed in a beautiful garden, a river, the tree of life, the entrance of Satan and of sin, man fleeing from God, the curse of sin, and the expulsion from Eden. Were this all that we were told, how dark, how lost, and how utterly hopeless would be our lot! This, however, from the pen of Moses, is only half the story. John, some sixteen hundred years later, provides us with the other half, in the last three chapters of the Bible. Here we have a new heaven and a new earth, the Lamb and His wife glorified, a beautiful city, the crystal river proceeding out of the throne, the tree of life, the banishment of Satan, and the judgment of sin. Here there is no more curse, no more separation from God for ever, and here redeemed man, far from wishing to flee from his Maker, cries with deep longing, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” Thus if Moses sees Paradise lost, John sees Paradise regained. The last three chapters of the Word perfectly and beautifully balance the first three by bringing to a close the story which is there begun.

Many other illustrations could be given, did not space forbid. Any book is dull and uninteresting if the author continually harps upon the same monotonous note. The subject matter of the Bible, however, is not like a service of sounds of one unvaried tone. It is more comparable to a great orchestral composition in which there is a harmonious blend of sounds, and in which the trained sensitive ear cannot discern a discordant note.

In the Bible you have, amongst other things, history, biography, chronology, geography, theology, philosophy, prophecy, precepts, poetry, doctrine, romance, and epistles. It is a book of endless variety, written in simplicity of language, yet containing the most sublime and transcendent truths, and anticipating some of the most profound modern scientific discoveries. All its many parts and subjects are written in just and due proportion. It is not one-sided, or prejudiced in favour of East or West, or of any race or society of people. It does not

stress any truth or concept at the expense of others. In it there are the human element and the Divine element, but these never clash with each other. The Bible is a book of perfect symmetry and balance, and for this reason it appeals to all classes and conditions of men.

A study of the individual books of Scripture reveals that in many cases they too complement and balance each other. How could we understand the typical teaching of Exodus concerning redemption, for example, had we not the Roman Epistle? What a meaningless book Hebrews would be, were it not that we have Leviticus! Every student knows that Ephesians is the Joshua of the New Testament. Ezra gives the building of the House; Nehemiah, the building of the Wall. Who can fail to see that Daniel is the key to Revelation, and that Revelation explains Daniel? Romans declares the Gospel, Galatians defends it. Galatians emphasises that we are justified by faith without works; James, that we are justified by works because they are the evidence of faith. James teaches that where there is faith there will be good works; Jude, his brother, that where there is no faith there will be bad works. Ephesians and Colossians are the counterpart of each other. In the former the mystical Body (the church) is viewed as the complement of the Head (Christ), in the latter it is seen to be complete in the Head.

That a similar relationship exists between many other books of Scripture could easily be illustrated. This introduction must suffice. It will also be found that several of the books are themselves divided, the one part balancing the other. In addition, it will frequently be observed that a great subject of revelation is dealt with in two chapters, usually far apart, each of which presents its own aspect of the subject, and neither of which would be complete without the other. Thus John 3 gives us the spiritual significance of the well known incident of the serpents in Num. 21. Exodus 12 must be known to appreciate the teaching of 1 Pet. 1. To understand the antitypical meaning of Heb. 9, one must be thoroughly conversant with the ritual of Lev. 16.

Scripture has perhaps no more beautiful trait than this—the perfect evenness and balance of its message and of all it inculcates. It inculcates Bible study and prayer, for example. Again and again they go hand in hand. So, too, worship and service must each have its proportionate place in the well ordered Christian life. In reading Scripture we must not pick and choose special portions. “All Scripture is . . . profitable.” Only by studying every part of the Word can the mind of God be fully known, a proper spiritual equilibrium be

maintained, and “the man of God be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3.17).

“The Book of the Ages,  
Of balance, of power,  
Is the Book called the Bible,  
The Book of the hour,  
Exhaustless its treasure,  
Eternal its store,  
All the good of the others,  
You’ll find here—and more.”

(W. H. Houghton)

## CHAPTER 3

### THE LIVING WORD

That which is characteristic of the written Word is equally characteristic of the living Word—our adorable Lord Jesus Christ. His glorious Person, His speech, and all His ways were marked by the most amazing poise and gracious equilibrium. He was the Son of God (Heb. 1), Who became the Son of Man (Heb. 2). Throughout His unique and stainless life, Deity and Humanity blended in the most harmonious unity in His wondrous Person. Thus, being Man, He was weary on one occasion and slept in a fishing boat; but being God, He arose and with calm dignity rebuked the raging storm. Again, being Man, He wept with the Bethany sisters and then, in the solitary grandeur of His awful Godhead, called Lazarus back from the domain of death. It is because He was the dependent Son of Man that He can so tenderly sympathise with our needs; and because He is the Omniscient and Omnipotent Son of God that He knows and fully satisfies them. What a wonderful Saviour! In the words of Jean Paul Richter, He, “being the Holiest among the Mighty, and the Mightiest among the Holy, has lifted with His pierced hand empires off their hinges, has turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the Ages.” An old Divine once exclaimed: “In Thee, O Christ, we can contemplate and must confess all the beauty and loveliness both of heaven and earth; the Beauty of heaven is God, the Beauty of earth is man; the Beauty of heaven and earth, art Thou, O Thou God-Man.”

The Lord Jesus is the ideal, the full-orbed Man—the perfect Representative of what God had desired humanity to be. He fully and perfectly revealed the heart of God. In Him every grace of the Spirit was displayed in undiminished comeliness. For this reason we have four pen portraits of Him in the Gospels. For, as one has said, “there streams from Jesus too much light for one mirror to reflect it all.” The “Synoptic” Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) give an account of His ministry in Galilee only, until they come to His last journey to Jerusalem. John fills up the gap by furnishing incidents and ministry in Judea and Jerusalem. Thus a balance in the inspired accounts is

preserved. We have His glory as King in Matthew, as Servant in Mark, as Man in Luke, and as the incarnate Son of God in John. In the three Synoptics we have three separate views of the human side of our Lord's life. "They set forth His perfect Manhood in all its regal grace and majesty, in all its human sympathy and beauty, in all its healing and redemptive virtue . . . If we may dare so to speak, the synoptists approach their great Subject from **without**. St. John unfolds it from **within**. He has been guided to pierce the veil of sense; he has penetrated far beyond the human features . . . into the central depths of His Eternal Personality". (Bishop Liddon). It can thus be seen that in this marvellous fourfold presentation, we are safeguarded against a narrow, one-sided conception of Him Who was the delight of the Father's heart. Matthew is believed to have written for Jews; Mark, for Latins; Luke for Greeks; while John writes for the world. The obvious reason for this is that though He sprang from the most bigoted and exclusive race upon earth, Jesus Christ is the one Catholic Man who satisfies the deep longing and needs of all peoples, East and West, ancient and modern.

Nothing scarcely is more striking in the life of our beloved Lord than the manner in which He avoided wrong extremes and so preserved a proper balance. John tells us, for example, that "grace and truth" came by Him—not grace without truth, and not truth without grace—but "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ". Each was ever in perfect proportion. Again, Luke speaks of all that He began "both to do and teach", for there was not the slightest inconsistency between His practice and His preaching. The one was at all times in happy balance with the other. By day, by night; at home, abroad; in secret, in public; with friends, with foes; before God, before man; when praised, when persecuted; He presented one glorious, unbroken front. In His life all the fruit of the Spirit was displayed in Divine plenitude. He was the fine flour of the meal-offering, in whose nature was nothing rough or uneven, and in whose conduct every grace was in proper relation with other graces. As the various colours converge into one all-glorious rainbow, so all the moral beauties of the saints down the ages met in Him in glorious perfection. Abraham was marked by faith, Moses by meekness, Elijah by courage, David by valour. In each case, however, the grace was conspicuous and put other graces in the shade, but in our Lord no moral glory outshone others. No quality, no excellence protruded. Every virtue was in



perfect and lovely proportion. In His attitude towards others, He was meek but never weak, courteous but never familiar, gentle but never effeminate, firm but never tyrannical.

“His Name encircles every grace,  
That God, as Man, could show.”

Assailed by all the craft and cunning of satanically inspired men, He ever kept a true and even balance. One example must suffice. Thinking to entangle Him they asked, “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?” Had He replied “Yes”, they would have accused Him of betraying Jewish aspirations. Had he replied “No”, that would have been trumped up as sedition against the Emperor. But, with a wisdom which astonished and silenced every adversary, He gave the well balanced reply, “Render . . . under Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Matt. 22:21).

An aged hand-loom weaver, who was in fellowship in Lisburn assembly (Northern Ireland) when I was a boy, was always delighted to have visitors in his “shop”. After showing them his machine and giving a demonstration of his weaving, he would invariably remark “But I never wove a perfect web.” There had always been some blemish, dropped stitch, or other flaw in his work. Thank God, there was One, Who from the manger of His humble birth, to the mount of His shameful death, ever wove a perfect web.

“Christ is the fact of facts, the Bible’s theme,  
Who stands alone, august, unique, supreme.”

In Him we behold,

“Full-orbed humanity,  
Crowned with Divinity;  
No taint of iniquity,  
No trace of infirmity.  
“Ecce Homo! Behold the Man,  
“Ecce Deus! Behold thy God.”

In our Lord’s present session for us in heaven, we again observe the same principle of balance. We rejoice that on the tree He saved us

from sin's fearful penalty. But how are we to be saved from sin's indwelling power? It is by His ministry upon the throne; and without that ministry, how one-sided our salvation would be! We needed both a Sacrifice and a Priest. Again, there are two distinct aspects of Christ's priesthood viewed in the Hebrew Epistle, neither of which would be complete without the other. It is after the **pattern** of the Aaronic priesthood, but after the **order** of the priesthood of Melchisedec. Further, as Great High Priest, He is "merciful and faithful" (Ch. 2:17),—"Merciful", that is manward; "Faithful", that is Godward. Thus He fully meets all our needs as failing creatures and does so without the compromise of one iota of God's holiness. Coming to Him we "obtain mercy", wherein alas we have succumbed to temptation in the past, but we also "find grace" to overcome present and future temptation (Ch. 4:16). There is a perfect balance in His tender, gracious and sympathetic priestly ministry. What a wonderful Saviour He is!

Not only is He our Great High Priest, however, He is also our Advocate. He is our Priest in "things pertaining to God" (Heb. 2:17); He is our Advocate "**with the Father**" (1 Jo. 2:1). As Priest, He is the One Who "Himself hath suffered being tempted" and Who therefore "can be touched with the feeling of our infirmity" (Heb. 2:18, 4:15); but as Advocate He is "the righteous One". Finally, He acts as our Priest when we "are tempted" (Heb. 2:18) to sin, but as our Advocate when, despite all the rich resources of His grace at our disposal, we yield to temptation and commit sin (1 Jo. 2:1).

Closely connected with all of this is the aspect of things presented in Pss. 109 and 110. In the former, the poor, persecuted and betrayed Man has Jehovah to "stand at His right hand" to deliver Him (v. 31); but in the latter Jehovah addresses the same Man saying "Sit Thou at my right hand." It was with these words that the Father saluted Him on the joyous morning of Ascension—"Sit Thou at my right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (v. 1). This is where He is to-day, "at God's right hand"—"higher than the Heavens", "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). He sits there in the seat of honour, majesty and authority—there at the very apex of uncreated glory. And what is His response to the Father's welcome? You find it in Ps. 16—the triumphant Psalm of the resurrected Christ—"at Thy right hand

there are pleasures for evermore". Eternal praises to His worthy Name!

"Jesus takes the highest station,  
Oh what joy the sight affords!"

As we have seen, He sits there as our Great High Priest, and His priesthood will never end—"Thou art a priest **for ever**, after the order of Melchisedec" (Ps. 110:4). Never will He have to pass on His priestly robes to another, as did Aaron. The "dew of youth" will rest upon His radiant brow eternally. This, however, is not all. Just as God addressed Him when He left this world saying, "Sit Thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool", so when He brings Him back into the world (Heb. 1.6 R.V.) He will say "Rule Thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Ps. 10.2). Now it is "SIT THOU", then it will be "RULE THOU". Priesthood and Kingship will be His for ever. Like Melchisedec of old, He will sit as a Priest-King upon His throne. What a day it will be when amidst the acclamations of "all the angels" (not just a few as at His first Advent) and the loud praises of redeemed hosts, He takes His seat! "And He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. 6:13). That is to say "the counsel of peace" will find a perfect balance between His Priesthood and His Kingship. There is a comparison, too, between the kingship of Melchisedec and that of our Lord. Melchisedec was "first . . . king of righteousness, and after that . . . king of peace." (Heb. 7:1, 2).—the two features of kingly rule displayed in perfect counterpoise, as they were later in the respective reigns of David and Solomon. In like manner, the many diadems which will eternally adorn the brow that once wore the cruel, cursed crown of thorns, will proclaim His universal sovereignty to be one of unswerving justice and calm, serene, tranquility.

To conclude, Peter speaks of "the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow" (1 Pet. 1.11), and we believe the latter will be eternally commensurate with the former. As the height of a mountain is consistent with the depth of the ocean that laps its foot (see chap. 1), so the measure of His awful humiliation Who sank so low for us, will be the measure of His exaltation and glorification. The one will be balanced against the other, to the infinite and eternal delight

of His Father, His redeemed family and the myriads of His shining angels.

“Jesus, Priest enthroned, Jesus, King of peace,  
Thou art King of Salem, King of righteousness;  
All Thy people call Thee, call from near and far;  
Come, Thou Root of David, bright and Morning Star”.

(C. T. Lambert)

## CHAPTER 4

### BALANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

All that has been considered underlines the indispensable necessity of keeping an even spiritual balance in all things—mental, doctrinal, prophetic, ecclesiastical, and practical—in the Christian life. God's path for His people in all times is as unswerving as a rule. He leads them in "a straight way" (Ps. 107.7 R.V.). By simple faith and implicit obedience we can cleave to that path. Naturally, we are creatures of extremes, of course, and because of our temperamental biases, are always in danger of losing a proper balance, of becoming side-tracked and diverted into bypaths which lead to the most unscriptural lengths. Hence we are warned, "Turn not to the right hand nor to the left" (Prov. 4.27). Again, God has promised, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and to the left" (Is. 30.21). Thus if we are sincerely desirous, we shall be preserved from all deviation, and led on in a path, balanced on every side by Scripture.

Many passages of the Word inculcate the need for this. If the Master manifested "**grace and truth**" (Jo. 1.14), for example, surely the servant should do likewise. Scripture exhorts us to be of "one mind and one spirit". Now, "**truth** will give us the one **mind**, and **grace** will give us the one **spirit** . . . But if the machinery of truth be not lubricated with the oil of grace, there will be a lamentable creaking and straining at every attempt to move. A cold, dry, mechanical holding of the truth will never commend Him in Whom 'grace and truth' were blended in divine harmony. On the other hand, that which professes to be grace, apart from truth, is simply "the strange fire of fleshly compassion" ("Truth and Tidings").

Again, we are to "speak the **truth in love**" (Ep. 4.15). "Love and truth", says W. E. Vine, M.A., "are never to be separated . . . Love that is pursued at the expense of truth is mere sentiment . . . It is not of God. Truth that is maintained at the expense of love is frigid theory. It lives in the element of legalism." ("The Church and the Churches", p. 49).

With both grace and love we associate the **heart**; with truth, the

**head.** If the heart be too large, one's health will be impaired; if the head be too large, one may be mocked as a monstrosity. So don't be all heart, or all head, spiritually. Bishop Moule once saw a brass plate on a door, bearing the name of a firm. It was "Head and Hart". Learning that poor Hart had died, the good man said, "Alas, how true that often is in Christian work, but so let it not be with you and me."

In our service, **zeal** and **knowledge** should balance each other. It was in her zeal for what she believed was God's cause that Israel rejected Christ; but she lacked knowledge (Rom. 10.2), for "had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (Cor. 2.8). There is great need today for men of the calibre of John Blackadder, the noble Scottish Covenanter of the seventeenth century, upon whose tombstone are engraven the lines:

"Zeal warmed his heart  
And reason cooled his head."

It would be quite impossible, however, even to allude to all the numerous passages which by precept or example teach the essential need of Christian poise and equilibrium. Nehemiah's men held the **sword** in one hand and the **trowel** in the other (Neh. 4), the New Testament counterpart truth of which we find in Jude, verses 3 and 20. It is important that we should "contend for the faith", but it is equally important that we should "build up ourselves on our most holy faith". The one must never be done to the neglect of the other. Again, Scripture has much to say regarding our spiritual **standing**, but it has no less to say regarding our spiritual **state**. There is **individual** truth, but there is also **assembly** truth. We are to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement" both "of **flesh** and **spirit**" (2 Cor. 7.1). The Pharisees prided in outward cleansing, while they were inwardly corrupt. Such imbalance is hypocritical and hateful to God. When there was trouble in the church at Jerusalem, "the **brethren appointed** that Paul and Barnabas should go up" to help to settle it (Acts 15.2). In Gal. 2.2, however, Paul tells us he "went up **by revelation**", **from God**, of course. The one passage supplements and balances the other. The Apostle acted under Divine guidance, but also in happy fellowship with his brethren.

In Bible study the same principle of balance is to operate—"rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2.15). The R.V. gives,

“handling aright”; the R.V. Marg., “holding a straight course”; and J.N.D., “cutting in a straight line”; while A. Way translates: “drives the ploughshare in a straight furrow”. There is diversity of opinion as to the exact figure which Paul here employs. Whichever of the many suggested ones it may be, however, it implies at least this, that the studious workman is to have the intelligent ability to expound Scripture in its contextual setting, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual”, distinguishing between things which differ, and giving each historical lesson, doctrine, prophecy etc. its due place, with orderly and Spirit-taught precision and equipoise.

These are a few of the many passages which teach the need of Christian balance. “God give us equilibrium,” says Robert McClurkin, “that quality which will develop balanced lives. This will deliver us from reeling to extremes and enable us to walk a straight path with Christian dignity and poise.”

### UNSCRIPTURAL EXTREMES

To illustrate the perils of unscriptural and unbalanced extremes, we shall now look at a few examples of these which lie scattered upon the pages of our Bibles. We find them in connection with:—

#### (1) CLEANSING, John 13.8, 9

The scene here is the last Supper. Our Lord in wondrous grace stooped to wash the disciples' feet. This was too much for Peter. “Thou shalt never wash my feet,” he exclaimed. Clearly he was wrong, and the Lord accordingly corrected him. Then Peter flew to the opposite extreme. “Lord,” he said, “not my feet only, but also my hands and my head,” and again he had to be corrected. First he would not be washed at all. Then he wanted to be washed all over! What a lack of balance! What an example of unscriptural extremes!

#### (2) SAFETY, Psalm 30.6; 31.14, 15, 22

In these two Psalms David is the speaker. He was here in sore distress and tells us how he felt about it. Three times in our verses we have the expression, “I said.” And what did he say? “I said I shall never be moved.” This was his sentiment before the trouble befell him, but he soon learned that such self-confidence was entirely unwarranted. Listen, however, to his language in the next Psalm. “I said, I am cut off.” And was David cut off? Not at all, for his God

delivered him. But you see how he went from one unscriptural extreme to another. Now hear him a little earlier in Ps. 31: "I said, thou art my God. My times are in Thy hand." This was a proper attitude, a balance between the two wrong extremes.

(3) SERVICE, Ex. 4.10; Num. 20.10

In Ex. 4 Moses was asked to go as God's ambassador to Pharaoh. He pleaded, however, "I am not eloquent . . . I am slow of speech." This was a mere excuse, for in Egypt he had been "mighty in words" (Acts 7.22). The day came, moreover, when he had too much to say, when he was too quick of speech, as Num. 20 testifies. Moses went from one unjustifiable extreme to another.

(4) WORSHIP, 2 Chron. 26.16; 28.24

We have looked at Peter, David and Moses; now we must look at Uzziah and his grandson, Ahaz. Uzziah's grave error was that he wanted too much of God's House. He rushed in where angels fear to tread. That was entirely contrary to the law. His grandson, however, went to the opposite extreme, for he not only stopped going to the Temple himself (as his father Jotham had done in chap. 27,) but he "shut up the doors of the house," so that his people could not enter it at all—another example of evil extremes.

(5) ATTITUDE TOWARDS SIN, Jud. 18.30; 20.21, 25, 31, 39, 46

Israel's great sin in Jud. 17 and 18 was idolatry. It is amazing that the people did not seem to have a qualm of conscience about it. No one was put to death for it. No voice was raised in protest against it. Not even a little finger was moved to stop it, and it continued, we are told, "until the day of the captivity of the land." When we turn over the page to chapters 19 and 20, the great sin charged against the nation was immorality. Here the people's rights were outraged, and such drastic action did they now take that a tribe was practically "cut off" (Ch. 21.6.) and 65,000 men fell in battle. What a shocking example of wrong extremes, and of the utter lack of wise godly balance!

(6) CHURCH DISCIPLINE, 1 Cor. 5.2; 2 Cor. 2.8

The delinquent at Corinth had committed a scandal which would not even "be named among the Gentiles." Yet this flagrant misconduct had been allowed to pass unnoticed by the assembly. Here, certainly, was extreme looseness. The remarkable thing, however, is that when the delinquent of 2 Cor. 2 (whether or not we think of him as the same



person as the transgressor of the first Epistle is for the present immaterial) had genuinely repented of his wrong, the saints seemed just as unwilling to forgive and receive as they had been to exercise discipline in the former Epistle. The pendulum had swung completely from one wrong extreme to another.

(7) THE LORD'S RETURN, 1 Cor. 4.8; 2 Thess. 3.11

The Corinthians it would seem, were losing the hope of the Lord's Return, and were settling down to "reign as kings." Some at Thessalonica, on the other hand, evidently believed the Coming to be so near that they no longer needed to work. Here again we have two opposite extremes, both of which were most unscriptural.

These seven examples teach us how apt human nature is to rush to extravagant extremes.

## CHAPTER 5

### SECTARIANISM

There is no evil perhaps to which man's heart is more inclined to gravitate, or relative to which unscriptural extremes are more prone to manifest themselves, than sectarianism. In view of what I have written, it is therefore felt that these pages would not be complete without some warning of its subtle and insidious perils. "A sect," says W. E. Vine, "is a division developed and brought to an issue." Where a number of persons unite in rallying around a favourite leader, doctrine, or ordinance, to the exclusion of others, you have a sect. Today, in the multitudinous divisions of Christendom, sectarianism is seen in full bloom. Let us be clear that however much men may condone and try to justify it, it is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5.20), and therefore must be judged as sin by the believer. Sectarianism has been possibly the greatest bane from which the work of God has suffered in the Christian era. It has been a cause of hatred, bitterness, bigotry, strife and persecution all down the ages. No Christian therefore should be ignorant of its perils.

### THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

With pleasure we recall that the early apostolic Church was free from the blight of this sin. In it the desire of our Lord that the unity of His people should be visibly manifested before the world (John 17.11, 21-23) was gloriously fulfilled. Then "all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2.42). At least six times it is stated that those saints were of "one accord" (Acts 1.14; 2.1, 46; 4.24; 5.12; 15.25). Nothing could surpass the pristine beauty and sweetness of that fellowship. It marked the heyday of the Church's power. Alas! It did not long continue. Sectarianism soon began to show its ugly form. Today, as just pointed out, we see it in full bloom wherever we look.

**“THE BRETHREN”**

Now, it was due to their being wearied of the prevailing confusion of Christendom, and to their being anxious to recapture the simplicity of gathering to the Lord's Name alone, that brethren began to meet in assembly fellowship early in the last century. Meeting thus they proved by hallowed experience that it was just as possible to assemble in an unsectarian manner in their day as it had been in the first century. The following is proof of this, and we quote it, as it has to do with the unsectarian character of their meetings. It is an extract from “The Parliamentary Report on the Census of 1851”, and was, under the heading “Religious Worship”, a review of the various denominations in Britain. Part of the definition of “the brethren” ran thus: “Those to whom this appellation is applied receive it only as descriptive of their individual state as Christians, not as a name by which they might be known collectively as a distinct religious sect. It is not from any common doctrinal peculiarity, or definite ecclesiastical organization that they have the appearance of a separate community, but rather from the fact that, while all other Christians are identified with some peculiar section of the Church of God, the persons known as ‘brethren’ utterly refuse to be identified with any.

“Their existence is, in fact, a protest against all sectarianism, and the primary ground of their secession from the different bodies to which most of them have once belonged, is that the various tests by which, in all these bodies, the communion of true Christians with each other is prevented or impeded are unsanctioned by the Word of God. They see no valid reason why the Church (consisting of all true believers), which is really one, should not be also visibly united, having as its only bond of fellowship and barrier of exclusion the reception or rejection of those vital truths by which the Christian is distinguished from the unbeliever.”

It will be appreciated, of course, that this is not a statement of belief by one of the brethren themselves, but a Parliamentary Report. Assemblies, as is well known, have ever been particular in stressing that their “bond of fellowship” excludes all who are guilty of moral evil, as well as those not sound in the faith. In the Report the eligibility for church fellowship is viewed only from a doctrinal standpoint. Issuing from the high source that it does, it is an invaluable testimony to the unsectarian character of assemblies in the first half of the last century.

## OUR ATTITUDE

That sectarianism is sin all will readily admit. The singular thing, however, is that those who profess to have learned this are divided upon their attitudes towards it. It is here that, as suggested, we again perceive the perils of unscriptural extremes. Some, on the one hand, who decry the spirit of sectarianism, would impose denominational innovations upon the assemblies, knowing full well that this will wound many consciences; and some never appear happier than when assisting to build up sectarianism by uniting in service with the religious world. Some fail to distinguish between love for all saints and love for all the sects in which saints may be found.

On the other hand, there are those who inveigh against the sects, yet who, perhaps unconsciously, exhibit a most sectarian attitude and outlook themselves. It may seem strange, but we may have a horror of sectarianism and yet be cherishing the very spirit that produces it. We may boast in our scriptural position, yet manifest a very sectarian condition. "Sectarianism", says Andrew Stenhouse, "is an evil root that will spring up anew in the place where it was believed to have been eradicated, for it is as natural to the flesh as it is foreign to the Spirit" ("The Sin of Sectarianism", p. 1). It is just here that many good men have failed in the past. "Our shame," confessed Mr. F. W. Grant, "is public. It requires no spirituality to see that exactly in that which we have professedly sought we have failed most signally. 'The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' is just most surely what we have not kept.'" ("A History of the Plymouth Brethren", p. 323). These are weighty words which should be a warning to us today. For a sectarian attitude is hateful to the Lord and always sternly censured in His Word. Thus when John said, "Master, we saw one casting out demons in Thy Name, and we forbid him, because he followeth not us," our Lord immediately rebuked the partisan spirit of His disciples, saying, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9.49, 50). The same tendency was beginning to assert itself at Corinth, and of all the serious evils in that assembly, both moral and doctrinal, it was the first one which Paul by the Spirit corrected. There was as yet no open division. The saints still met together (1st Corinthians 11.20), but they were split into factions, ranging themselves under their favourite leaders, and dividing into parties, one against the other. In correcting them, Paul no more spared those who favoured his own

style and line of teaching, and whose party cry was, "I of Paul", than the others. Of the other New Testament passages where this evil is found, the most important is doubtless John's Third Epistle. In it we are afforded perhaps the last glimpse of a local church in the apostolic age, and it is both sad and significant that in it sectarianism was working havoc of God's testimony. Here again this sin is strongly condemned.

### THE NATURE OF SECTARIANISM

The reason for such strong denunciations lies in the nature of sectarianism. A moment's reflection should make this obvious. "The Church, which is His Body" (Ephesians 1.22, 23) is indissolubly and eternally one. Its glorious unity, being the fruit of His toil and death, is most precious to Him. Nothing can destroy it. No schism can mar it. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16.18). He loves all His dear children equally and therefore delights to see us give expression to this. He repeatedly and jealously pleads with us to do so. He asks us to exercise "all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love" in our "endeavour" to express it (Ephesians 4.2, 3), and will not, we may be certain, fail to minister to us grace and "more grace" to this end. Only in the case of serious evil, condoned and persisted in, are we at liberty to dissociate ourselves from other saints in expressing this essential oneness. Sectarianism which is schism, however, is an absolute denial of the organic unity of the Body. Hence it is a positive dishonour to the Head in Heaven, a cause of division amongst saints and of stumbling to the world. If by faith we apprehend the abiding truth of this oneness, we shall perceive the heinousness of sectarianism in God's holy sight.

In view of these things, therefore, how sedulously we should guard against betrayal by this subtle sin! For as we have seen, we may preach against it and all the time be deep-dyed with it ourselves. In the most insidious ways we may all unconsciously slip into a sectarian attitude. It is easy, for example, to become alienated in affection from Christians not in our circle and to develop a proud complacency as a "select community", even though ostensibly we do not make "High Church" claims. A Pharisaic spirit which says, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (Isaiah 65.5), is purely sectarian. The very light which the Lord has graciously granted us

upon His Word, may be prostituted into a party badge, and "a sect founded upon knowledge is the worst of all sects". Certain truths may be magnified out of all proportion, and made the centre instead of Christ. "Wherever you find a select inner circle, formed and held together by a common belief in certain tenets, or by a community of interest in certain matters from which others are excluded, THERE you have sectarianism in essence and in character" (Editor, "The Believers' Magazine", 1908, p. 95). Even the Name of "Christ" may be used as the instrument of forming a faction (1st Corinthians 1.12). Such appellations as "The Brethren", "Open Brethren", "Separated Christians", and "Gathered-out Christians", are just as sectarian as the title "Baptist Christians". "There is the danger also", says the Editor of 'Letters of Interest', "that some innocent facilities for the furtherance of the work . . . may themselves work to mould assemblies into a denomination; such vehicles as 'Letters of Interest' itself, 'The Fields', 'Christian Mission in Many Lands' . . .". These are wise and weighty words. "It is needful too," says W. E. Vine, "on the part of assemblies to bear in mind the necessity of avoiding phraseology which unintentionally assumes that they are sectarian. The use, for instance, of the personal pronoun 'we', with reference to such churches, is reprehensible. For whom does the 'we' stand? One assembly may be in a low spiritual condition. Another may have received error . . . But it is folly to tar all with the same brush, or regard that as characterising all such communities which attaches only to certain units. . . . Each church is responsible for its own conduct alone before God. There is indeed necessarily a close fellowship between assemblies which seek thus to carry out the will of God, but that does not constitute the aggregate a sect. FELLOWSHIP is one thing: AFFILIATION is another" ("Are Christians who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ a Sect?"). The reference here to "affiliation" is most important. Scripture never contemplates any federation, combination, or grouping together of assemblies. Any such system or grouping together must therefore be regarded as a sect. It is utterly absurd too for any association of assemblies to assume that they have a monopoly of the truth of God concerning the church. However, as F. B. Hole has well said, "The truth of the church cannot be maintained by forming a party to defend it, since the forming of a party is itself a denial of the truth of the church." With reason he adds that "it is very easy to forget this" ("The Administration of the Mystery", p.7).

## CHAPTER 6

### BEGINNING OF THE PRESENT TESTIMONY

I now wish to speak about God's way for us regarding church fellowship and testimony, and the perils of our departing from it either to one side or the other. This way is marked by devotion to the Lord, separation from the world, simplicity of heart and desire, and a love for all God's people. I merely mention these characteristics without dwelling upon them. We all agree that following conversion one of the earliest steps is baptism. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2.41). Another is the breaking of bread, closely connected with which we have assembly fellowship and prayers: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (v. 42). These were the "old paths" of apostolic days, and we cannot improve upon them. May we have grace to "continue steadfastly" in them and "so much the more as we see the day approaching." Many of us recall with deep thanksgiving how the Lord first led us to walk in these simple footsteps. The preciousness of our early assembly fellowship, especially of our first Lord's Day morning remembrance meeting, has remained with us all down the years.

At this point I desire to take you back in thought to the beginning of our present testimony as assemblies of the Lord's people. It is well known that in the first quarter of the nineteenth century there was much searching after a fuller knowledge of the truth of God amongst Christians in different parts of the world. About the year 1825, a number of such deeply exercised brethren in Dublin, Ireland, who were wearied of the ecclesiastical formality of denominationalism, and who had been praying for light from the Word, began to recover these precious truths. In Christ-like simplicity they therefore came together each Lord's Day in accordance with their Master's own words in Matt. 18.20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Accounts of their first meetings are somewhat indefinite, and in certain cases rather conflicting. However, it seems clear that for a time more than one small company was in existence in the Irish capital. In one of these were Dr. Edward

Cronin, a converted Roman Catholic, and then a medical student; Mr. Edward Wilson, Secretary of the Bible Society; Mr. Tims, a bookseller; and the two sisters, the Misses Drury. They first met in Mr. Wilson's home in Sackville Street. Later, when Mr. Wilson had to leave for England, they met in Mr. Cronin's home, in Lower Pembroke Street, where several were added to their number.

Another little company was at the same time meeting in the home of Mr. Francis Hutchinson, 9 Fitzwilliam Square, in it were Mr. J. N. Darby, a clergyman with strong High Church leanings, who did not immediately resign his clerical position; Mr. J. G. Bellett, a barrister and also a Churchman; Mr. Hutchinson himself; a Mr. Wm. James Stokes; and at frequent intervals, a visitor from Exeter, England, a non-resident student of Trinity College, who had given up a lucrative practice as a dentist, to study for ordination in the Church of England, with a view to missionary service. As the principles upon which the two companies met were substantially the same, it was felt that they should unite. This they did in 1827, and as the accommodation in Fitzwilliam Square was the larger, it continued to be the meeting place. (See A. Miller's "The Brethren", pp. 20, 21). In 1828 Mr. Darby published his first pamphlet, "The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ". It set forth what the young community believed and practised, though it must not be thought of as a creed or formal confession of faith. This had a widespread circulation and was greatly used of God, so that many were added to the assembly. Indeed in little more than a year Mr. Hutchinson's house was found to be too small for the meetings. In 1830, however, Mr. John Vesey Parnell (later Lord Congleton) rented a building in Aungier Street, which became the first **public** meeting place of those who afterwards became commonly known as "the brethren". It seems clear that Mr. Parnell and a few others had also been meeting to break bread privately from about the year 1825. Miller seems quite definite that it was only in 1829 that these saints united with the company in Fitzwilliam Square (see also E. H. Broadbent's, "The Pilgrim Church", p. 348).

Accounts which have come down to us indicate that these saints must have had truly remarkable times—times of heaven upon earth—as they met to observe the Lord's Supper. Some of them used to go to their meeting-room each Saturday evening to prepare it for the Lord's Day. One of them has testified of "the seasons of joy never to be forgotten", which they experienced as they removed the furniture



and "laid the simple table with its bread and wine". What then must have been their joy next morning, when

"With Jesus in their midst  
They gathered round the board!"

No wonder it was said that those brethren enjoyed "almost apostolic blessedness".

Many of the leaders in that work were men from the front rank of society. One of them, as Christopher Knapp has pointed out, was cousin to Queen Victoria. Some were English and Irish lords. Many were clergymen, doctors, lawyers, army generals, and high-ranking naval officers—men of "moral weight, intellectual power and intelligence". J. N. Darby, a leading light, was a member of a "highly honourable family" whose ancestral home was Leap Castle, Ireland. He had graduated in Trinity College, Dublin, as a Classical Gold Medallist before his nineteenth birthday. He had studied Law and had been called to the Irish Bar. Later he had given up this profession, and had been ordained a deacon and priest in the Church of Ireland. "The movement formed," says G. H. Lang, "a brilliant galaxy of classical and theological talent and acquirement." What is more important, its leaders were outstanding men of God. Spurgeon described them as "the most loving souls found anywhere". Many of them renounced worldly emoluments, honours, and prospects, yea, gave up all things for Christ's sake. Mr. Darby turned his back upon a fortune, lived a simple and frugal life, and was once offered a half-penny in Limerick, by one who mistook him for a beggar. Mr. and Mrs. A. N. Groves devoted a legacy of £12,000—a very magnificent sum in those days—to the Lord's work, lived on a minimum, and gave away the balance of their annual income of £1,500. They later relinquished all and went to Baghdad as pioneer missionaries, and John Kitto whom they befriended, and who lived to attain eminence as a Biblical expositor, said of Mr. Groves that in the whole world there was "not one man whose character he venerated so highly". Lord Congleton lived in a house, the rent of which was only £12 per annum, had it furnished with wooden chairs, and dispensed with carpets. It was a common thing in those days to find costly personal jewellery and valuable ornaments in the Lord's offering. An old catalogue, dated 1838, gave a list of such freewill offerings which were to be sold

by public auction in a mart at Plymouth. It included silver plate, paintings, table linen, china, books, etc. It required three days to sell all the lots. The proceeds went to the poor and to the Lord's work. Yet no special appeal for any particular needs had been made. Time fails us to speak of saintly Chapman of Barnstaple, Craik of Scotland, Bellett of Dublin, Tregelles the noted Bible scholar and textual critic, Kelly of Co. Down, of whom Spurgeon said that he had "a mind for the universe", and Muller of Bristol, who received a million and a half pounds in answer to prayer, cared for 10,000 orphans, gave away £81,000, and when he died left £60 and "a fragrant memory". These and a host of others were men of true pilgrim character—men who knew their God through prayer and deep, prolonged Bible study—men whose written ministry has put Christians everywhere in their debt, and whose spiritual songs have been compared to "the breaking of an alabaster box of choice perfumes".

These early brethren were also keenly evangelistic, and from a small beginning the work rapidly grew and expanded. In many parts of the British Isles assemblies came into being as a result of their labours. The fact that in 1845 there were over twelve hundred saints in fellowship in the Plymouth meeting speaks for itself. Darby travelled extensively and was a prodigious worker. His efforts were to the "full measure of his great strength", and were never known to relax for a period of fifty years. He saw a mighty work of God done upon the Continent, wrote numerous works of an expository nature, developed an amazing gift for languages, and translated the entire Bible into English, French, and German. Indeed G. H. Lang, an accurate writer with a long and wide experience, has said that "he was perhaps the greatest single instrument employed by the Holy Ghost in the nineteenth century". It will thus be appreciated that the influence of assemblies became world-wide and "a force to be reckoned with in every corner of Christendom" (Dr. W. B. Neatby), and also that, as Blackie's Encyclopaedia says, "it seemed at first to be a movement great enough to threaten the whole organization of the Christian Church". We are not surprised therefore that many, wearied of the dead formality of the denominations, were attracted by the beauty and power of such a movement, or that it was described as being "too unworldly and sainted for our polluted atmosphere". How pleasing and refreshing it must all have been to the heart of God!

It must be understood, however, that the marvellous growth and

power of the work were not due in any way to human organisation. The leaders indeed were definitely opposed to organisation. Each assembly was directly responsible to the Lord for all its actions, and assemblies were not federated or bound by any central body or formal bond. If they all practised the same thing, it was because the same Book was their sole guide; if they enjoyed sweet inter-communion one with the other it was because of their spiritual union in Christ.

## CHAPTER 7

### DETERIORATION OF THE TESTIMONY

Alas that a work so manifestly of God should deteriorate! That it did so, we must with shame and sorrow confess. To-day the old time freshness and power are gone, and the Lord's people following in the footsteps of those early brethren, no longer present an unbroken front of testimony. In some cases they are divided and scattered like sheep without a shepherd. This has with the passing of time been attributed to many causes. One thing, however, is obvious from what we have said. It has not been due to the ignorant, unspiritual, irresponsible or fanatical character of its leaders. Plainly it has been the work of Satan; and its success in such a circle should disillusion us as to his power, malignity and cunning craft. Of the different causes of this sorry spectacle, we suggest that one of the most potent and effective which our great enemy has employed, has been the tendency of brethren to press things too far, to allow zeal to carry them beyond what Scripture commands. And this, be it noted, is just as wrong as to fall short of what it commands. Against both unscriptural extremes we must vigilantly guard. We must not "turn to the right hand nor to the left", as Proverbs 4.27 enjoins, for it is a well known human tendency to swing like the pendulum, first to the one extreme and then to the opposite. As I have tried to show on earlier pages, a spiritual balance is absolutely requisite.

Mr. Darby, as we have seen, was a good and gifted man, a giant in the things of God. We would not wish to speak unkindly or disparagingly about so honoured a servant of Christ. Yet we must not ignore the lessons which the history of assemblies, influenced by his personality and teaching in past days, is intended to teach.

Mr. Darby and some of those associated with him did not immediately sever their ecclesiastical connections when they began to break bread in a scriptural manner. As the returned exiles of Ezra's day erected God's Altar and House before rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem, so these brethren were at first more occupied with giving God His place in their midst than with separating from what was wrong. We do not blame them. They were only feeling their way towards a closer

adherence to the truth, and were acting up to the light they had received.

### EXCLUSIVISM

The day came, however, when some of them, not content with separation from the world, erected walls to divide the saints. It has been said that Mr. Darby began with "universal communion", and ended with "universal excommunication"—one more example of unscriptural extremes. He came out from sectarianism, yet he and his followers became so sectarian that "a bondage as hard as iron and as cold as ice, defined the limits of their fellowship". As is well known, they formed a circle of assemblies, with a central authority—something formerly unknown amongst them, and something entirely without scriptural precedent.

Upon his return from the East, Mr. Groves could discern that certain leaders and some of the young gatherings had already acquired strong leanings in this direction, though no official change in the internal government, or inter-relationship, of assemblies had yet actually taken place. Being exceedingly burdened about the influences which were at work, he wrote Mr. Darby a long and weighty letter, dated March 10th, 1836, warning him of the danger which he saw threatening. "Your union," he said, "**will daily become of one doctrine and opinion more than life and love, your government will become—unseen perhaps, and unexpressed—yet one wherein overwhelmingly is felt the authority of men: you will be known more by what you witness against, than what you witness for, and practically this will prove that you witness against all but yourselves . . . the most narrow-minded and bigoted will rule, because his conscience cannot, and will not, give way and, therefore, the more enlarged heart will yield.**" These and other predictions were fully verified in the years which ensued, so much so that the letter is known as Grove's "Prophetic Letter". It had, however, no salutary effect upon Mr. Darby and, under the powerful influence of him and others like-minded, the tendency to affiliate assemblies continued to increase. This tendency received a strong impetus from a letter which Mr. G. V. Wigram addressed to Mr. Darby in 1838, in which he asked, "Would it be for the glory of the Lord and the increase of testimony to have one central meeting, the common responsibility of all within

reach, and as many meetings subordinate to it as grace might vouchsafe? or to hold it to be better to allow the meetings to grow up as they may, without connection, and dependent upon the energy of individuals only?" From this it is clear that up to the year 1838 each assembly was responsible to God only, not to any central authority, and that now for the first time it was suggested that there should be "one central meeting" with other "meetings subordinate to it". Mr. Darby for years repudiated the idea of Plymouth, London or any other assembly being regarded as a Central Authority. Later, says A. B. Miller, he "advocated the idea of a given assembly being considered as the Model and Central Authority" ("What is God's Path for His People?" p. 22); and when strife arose in the Plymouth Meeting, it was almost immediately transferred to the Assembly in Rawstorne Street, Camden Town, London, for a settlement. This assembly subsequently became the Headquarters or Central Authority of what writers describe as Darby's "Metropolitan system of administration".

A meeting of brethren only, known as "The General Care Meeting" and "The Brothers' Meeting" was convened here each Saturday evening. In the course of time it became representative of all the local churches in their circle of fellowship in London. One feature of this weekly gathering was a Bible Reading in which over the years many of the great doctrines of Scripture were considered. This in itself was most profitable. Matters affecting the assemblies, such as reception, discipline, and internal order were also brought here for discussion and settlement, the elders of each assembly concerned being expected to abide by the decision of the Saturday evening meeting. Indeed, the time came when its decisions carried almost world-wide authority. In theory, of course, the Saturday night meeting did not—at first anyhow—claim jurisdiction over the assemblies, but such did its prestige and influence become, that any company not submitting to it was viewed with grave suspicion and was liable to be cut off. All companies in fellowship with it formed—so it claimed—"The Church of God on Earth". This was Mr. Darby's amazing claim. Thus, speaking of a brother who had been put away from one assembly of his little circle, he said, "I hold him to be outside the Church of God on Earth, being outside what represents it in London." What arrogant pretension! What tyranny! Could worse be found outside the Papacy? Yea, and what an utterly unscriptural concept is here expressed! for the Word knows nothing of a confederation of assemblies, or of the

term "Church of God" being used of any such confederation. It was because Mr. Darby and his adherents acted upon this principle that the division in Plymouth in 1848 assumed such serious and far-reaching dimensions. Had the scriptural autonomy of each local church been recognised, the trouble could easily have been confined within narrow limits. This was the beginning of what is known as EXCLUSIVISM.

It is not our present purpose, however, further to trace the sequence of events in Exclusivism's chequered history, but merely to direct attention to some of the extremes to which at times its principles of action have led. By its system of church discipline, individual judgment has been stifled, dearest friendships severed, whole families divided, fellowship of assemblies disintegrated, and visitors bearing letters from Godly assemblies which had not acquiesced in the judgment of the Central Meeting, given the "back seat". Only with difficulty could Mr. Darby and his former friend, Mr. Newton whose views had differed, be persuaded to shake hands. Some of the actions subsequently taken were more unjust and cruel than would be found in many worldly societies, and in some instances they sent godly saints broken-hearted to their graves. Each new division claimed to be "the church of God", in opposition in many cases, to another company nearby which also laid "sole claim to the same title, like rivals for a trade mark". What utter folly and childishness! Thus, spiritual pride, ecclesiastical pretension, carnal legality, rigidity about petty, unimportant technicalities; a subtle, secret fear of certain leaders which "took advantage of both the timidity of the weak and the grace of the strong", and a sad succession of divisions have marred and wrecked that once fair and promising work. This has been the fruit in most cases of failure to hold an even, wise, spiritual balance in the fear of God; for once this is lost the enemy has gained an advantage and under some pretext will drive us to the most unscriptural and fantastic extreme.

## CHAPTER 8

### EXCLUSIVISM

#### The case of Dr. E. Cronin

One or two illustrations of extreme disciplinary action and their disastrous consequences, from that unhappy history, may suffice to impress upon us this peril. The first concerns Dr. Edward Cronin, one of the earliest brethren in the Dublin assembly, and the circumstances which led to the first division in Exclusive Meetings.

The assembly in Ryde had been under suspicion for some years. It was described as “rotten”. Mr. Darby said it was “a defiled meeting”, “an unclean place”, and that he never would set his foot in it; while Mr. William Kelly is stated to have declared that it had forfeited all right to be regarded as an assembly of the Lord.

In Ryde, however, there was also a young assembly. One of its leaders, a Mr. Finch, had been a clergyman, but he and several others had recently come out of denominationalism, and he had been received to break bread in some Exclusive assemblies. They were not happy about seeking fellowship in the old meeting, because of its unsavoury reputation. On the other hand, they could not be officially recognised as a church by Mr. Darby’s circle of meetings, since those meetings claimed to be “one body” with the gathering which they admitted was “unclean”, and “in principle” this seemed “an attempt to make **two** bodies to **one** Head” (C.E.5). Strange, strange view indeed!

During the years 1877–1879, Dr. Cronin paid a number of visits to Ryde. He made it clear to the original meeting that owing to its corrupt state, he could not have fellowship with it. He felt guided of the Lord, however, to break bread with the new gathering. This he did at least twice, but perhaps more often (accounts regarding this, as so many other matters, differ). Dr. Cronin fully reported these visits to his home assembly—Kennington. Kennington was divided over the issue, and for several months no united action was possible. Taunts were thrown at him which had earlier been flung at saintly Groves, to the effect that he had “changed”, and that he had “never seen the



truth of the one body”, and this aged and honoured servant of God was contemptuously spoken of as “the wicked old doctor”. “The venerable offender” promised not to return to Ryde, and even offered to sit back from communion for a time, but no compromise would be accepted. Since he would not own that he had sinned, his “act of independency” called for judgment, and he was expelled from the circle of fellowship. There he could only sit and weep—a pathetic sight indeed. And this judgment was inflicted, not because of sin or unsoundness of doctrine, not even because of having united with an unscriptural sect, but simply because of having broken bread in a young assembly which had found its way out from denominationalism, and sorely needed spiritual help, but had not yet received the sanction of the Exclusive hierarchy. This is not all, however, for not only was the saintly Cronin put out and relegated amongst the unclean and immoral, but Ramsgate cut off Kennington, because of its dilatoriness in dealing with the case.

The treatment accorded to Dr. Cronin is an illustration of the length to which unscriptural extremes logically lead. For we hasten to point out that nowhere in the New Testament is there a scintilla of support either for putting away or even for silencing a brother for what godly Dr. Cronin did. His own conviction ever after was that his going to the new gathering was of the Lord, and we quite fail to see upon what ground he could be justly condemned. There is neither precept nor precedent in the New Testament for the treatment accorded him. The Acts and Epistles which cover many years of Church history, tell of the planting and growth of numerous assemblies, and unmistakably relate how pained the beloved Apostle was by the evil practices of some of them; but never do we read of a servant of Christ being hampered in his movements amongst the churches, nor of his being penalised for ministering in certain companies. Never do we read of a brother being made unwelcome, nor of the platform being closed to him, because of his having gone to such assemblies as existed in Corinth or Galatia where there were so many wrongs. Of course, if a man’s life is not clean, if his ministry is unsound or introduces “bones of contention” amongst the saints, it is a very different matter. But regarding his movements amongst the assemblies, the servant is directly under the control of his Lord. We do not mean that he should blindly visit any assembly, irrespective of its internal state. Wise judgment and Divine guidance may indicate that there

are times when more would be accomplished for God's glory by one's remaining away for a season. This was how Paul felt with regard to Corinth. In such circumstances, however, it would be very wrong to condemn a fellow-servant who would feel free to go. For God's way of restoring His people is through His Word, faithfully yet wisely and graciously ministered. Who am I then that I should interfere with my brother's exercise? Hence though Paul did not consider the time opportune to visit Corinth, he wished Apollos to do so. Yet when Apollos declined, Paul, though an ordained Apostle, recognised that his brother was Christ's servant and did not blame him.

The attitude at which we have been looking has over the years borne the most unhappy fruit of dissension and division. The sad episode of Dr. Cronin, which to him was "a great and sore trouble", which broke the heart of his beloved wife and hastened her death, is no isolated case. The history of Exclusivism has been one of discipline sterner and more drastic than Scripture ever warrants, and what is this but self-will though exercised upon the plea of "standing for the truth!"

### RAMSGATE

This, however, is not the end of the Cronin episode. When Ramsgate cut off Kennington, some in that assembly were dissatisfied with its judgment. A minority objected. Consequently the majority, which favoured excommunication, went out from the recognised meeting and began a testimony on what they claimed to be "divine ground" in Guildford Hall. The minority met in Abbott's Hill Hall, but on the first Lord's Day after the division, the smaller group could not get an entrance to their hall, and the Abbott's Hill Assembly was therefore considered "off church ground altogether". Subsequently Park Street Assembly, London, called for meetings to decide upon the Ramsgate trouble. Abbott's Hill was then officially excommunicated, as well as all who refused the Park Street decision. These included men of spotless character and intellectual gift—such worthies as Dr. Thomas Neatby, Mr. Andrew Miller, and Mr. William Kelly, the noted Bible expositor and intimate friend of Mr. Darby for over fifty years. This was in 1881. Mr. Darby, then aged and infirm, had pleaded from his sick bed that extremists might be restrained, and that his fellowship with Mr. Kelly might not be broken—but all in vain, as we have seen.

Such were some of the extremes to which the new ecclesiasticism led. Those who had preached against independency, now practised independency themselves. Those who had been so zealous to maintain the ground of the "one body", now did so by dividing the saints. "The extreme measure" of excommunication, which in former days had been scripturally "confined to Anti-christs and blasphemers", as Mr. Kelly well said, was now applied to brethen of the godliest character, and to matters of church order which needed only adjustment. Disagreement with the decision of a company of fallible elders was now to be punished with the same severity as the committal of the vile sins of the "wicked" man of 1st Corinthians 5; and party allegiance was to be more valued than fidelity to principles held out of conviction before God.

### CANADA

Tidings of these things spread quickly to Exclusive companies in all parts of the world. Even coloured saints in the West Indies had to decide upon which side they stood. The assembly in Toronto, Canada, submitted to the Park Street decision, with the exception of about fifty of its members, who were therefore put away as unfit for Christian fellowship. Those who remained wrote a letter dated October 2nd, 1882, to assemblies in their circle. In this remarkable document they admit that their decision is "not based upon a knowledge of the facts". They further explain that they "adopt this course in order to preserve fellowship with our brethren who are endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". All of this is surely amazing. Does God expect His people to be so stupid as to agree with a decision, taken thousands of miles away, without their knowing the full facts of the case? Does the Spirit's unity depend upon an assembly's judgment which time proves to be unjust and unscriptural? What right has a federation of churches to arrogate to itself the expression "the unity of the Spirit", since there are many outside its limits who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit? We must surely distinguish between the **spirit of unity**, as seen in a party or ring of meetings, and "**the unity of the Spirit**" which **all** believers are to "endeavour to keep".

It was in the year 1882 that the beloved J. N. Darby, one of the greatest servants of Jesus Christ in the nineteenth century, went to be with the Lord. It is a sombre thought, that it was in that very year,

that the first great division which rent Exclusive meetings throughout the world, reached its culmination. Mr. Darby's system of church government could be maintained only by means of a centralised authority, which, as we have seen, was first suggested by Mr. G. V. Wigram in 1838. Mr. Wigram died in 1879, just as his federation began to break up. Dr. H. A. Ironside tells us that at the end he "bitterly lamented the fact that brethren had been 'blowing ecclesiastical bubbles and playing church', and that he felt God could not go on with them in such folly" (A historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement. A83).

There was also considerable agitation in Exclusive meetings in Canada, in the seventies and early eighties of the last century, over questions concerning Eternal Life and the Sealing of the Spirit. What the respective views were need not now concern us. They certainly were no just cause for division. Through the forceful action of Lord Adelbert P. Cecil at Montreal, however, a division which had sad and widespread results was precipitated at the end of 1884. Mr. F. W. Grant, a godly teacher, author of "The Numerical Bible" as well as several other helpful works, and all who sided with him, were then cut off from communion. Lord Cecil was a brilliant young nobleman and devoted evangelist who had recently gone out from England. He was accidentally drowned in the Bay of Quinte in 1889, at the early age of forty-seven years. Mr. Grant, who never enjoyed robust health, passed away in 1901 upon his sixty-eighth birthday.

A short time after Mr. Grant's Home-call, the late Dr. H. A. Ironside, who was then with the Exclusives, visited the aged servant of the Lord, Mr. Donald Ross, in his home at Chicago. He has described Mr. Ross as "a patriarchal figure with a long flowing beard". The veteran almost immediately asked his visitor with which branch of the Exclusives he was associated. Hearing he had not bowed to the judgment against Mr. Grant, he said, "Oh, I'm glad of that." Then he said, "Frederick Grant is in Heaven." Again, with much energy, he declared, "Frederick Grant is in Heaven." Once more, in a still more pronounced manner, he exclaimed, "I tell you Frederick Grant is in Heaven—Aye—and they were glad to get him there! A little clique of them tried to cast him out of the church of God on earth. They let him die, so far as they were concerned, in the place of the drunkard or the blasphemer. But oh, what a welcome he received up there! And he's with Cecil now, and the two are reconciled.

Soon I'll be there, too—and we'll all have fellowship together at last." Then, musingly, he added, "Aye, aye, Frederick Grant was cast out himself, and yet he would not have had fellowship with me down here. But we'll all be together up there!"

"A few months passed by," adds Dr. Ironside, "and Donald Ross had also joined 'the choir invisible' whose one song shall ever be, 'Unto Him that hath loved us and hath made us kings and priests'. What a pity persons destined to such glorious privileges misunderstood one another so sadly on earth!" ("A Historical Sketch", p. 109). What a pity, too, that, forgetful of their own inherent weaknesses, their acts, whether of separation or discipline, are so harsh and hasty! History amply demonstrated that some of the very wrongs, because of which Exclusives parted from their brethren, soon began to appear amongst themselves. Not very many years after Mr. Darby had dealt with such unrelenting severity upon the heretical teaching of Mr. Newton, he himself was charged with teaching, which in the eyes of many saintly and scholarly men, was of almost equal heterodoxy. I do not pronounce upon it one way or the other. But because of it Captain P. Hall, Thomas Newberry, Editor of "The Newberry Bible", William Henry Dorman, one of the most intimate of Mr. Darby's friends, and many other gifted men, withdrew from the Exclusive fellowship.

History has shown, too, that having left the right way, the Park Street or London party of Exclusives, has since meandered far into a maze of human theorisings and speculations. Their principle of a Central Authority also has within it the seeds of successive divisions, for all companies will not agree with every decision by party leaders, and splits, which are now numerous, are therefore inevitable. Today the London Party stands sadly depleted numerically and utterly discredited in the judgment of unbiased observers. Indeed their recent upheaval and split have been so frequently and unfavourably featured in the Public Press, that men have been caused to blaspheme, and other godly groups of Exclusives have unjustly had to suffer much reproach and obloquy. This division was caused by the teaching of 2nd Corinthians 6.14-17, and similar passages upon separation from the world, being pressed to a length which is altogether inconsistent with other Scriptures, and quite contrary to the spirit of Christianity. It has resulted in family estrangements, shattered homes, and broken hearts. In more than one case, indeed, the intense mental strain caused by the

imposition of certain human strictures has ended in suicide, and in many instances Christians have returned to the denominational folds—Church of England, Methodist, Baptist, etc., from which they or their fathers for the truth's sake once seceded. Could anything be more sad or tragic! Great indeed is the peril of unscriptural extremes.

What I have now said applies, of course, only to the London Party. We gladly recognise that there are other groups of so-called Exclusives, comprised of godly souls, who would have no fellowship with the followers of Mr. James Taylor or their strange, unreasonable doings.

It is a regrettable trait, that though the history of Exclusives generally is so disappointingly chequered, they never seem to tire in their ridicule of Open Brethren. Many of them to this day believe that Bethesda Assembly, Bristol, was cut off for holding the heresy of Newton. The truth is, Bethesda denounced it, and never knowingly received to its fellowship anyone holding that, or any similar, doctrine. (See W. Hoste, B.A., "Rejudging the Question").

## CHAPTER 9

### THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

The year 1848 must have been a year of intense demon activity upon the earth. In that year modern spiritism had its inception in the home of the Fox sisters, in U.S.A.; great political upheavals shook Europe; the Wesleyan organisation that had been such a power for God, was split in two; and in that same year, as we have seen, the assemblies meeting in the Lord's Name, were tragically divided into two groups—Exclusive and Open—a division which to this day has not been healed.

“Exclusive” meetings were so-called because they refused to receive saints, however sound and saintly, from any assembly even the most godly, outside their little ring of fellowship. “Open” meetings were so called because they gladly welcomed saints from any assembly, just as they had ever done, provided they were perfectly satisfied that the applicants were clean, morally; and pure, doctrinally.

Now, in the years following the division, the pendulum in some Open assemblies swung to the opposite extreme from that at which we have been looking. If Exclusive companies were marked by legality, these became characterised by laxity. It was reported that persons who left their own assembly in a quarrel, could in many cases count upon being received with open arms in a neighbouring one, without a question being asked; and while we do not believe that any assembly must blindly abide by the judgment of another, such independency as this is nothing but a denial of godly order. In certain assemblies anyone who professed to love the Lord was made welcome to break bread, even though unbaptised and still associated with one or other of the denominations. In service the walls of separation were frequently broken down. Leading brethren shared the platform with “reverend” clergymen, and such innovations as music and choirs were introduced from the religious world. It was said indeed that some seemed to have their minds made up to destroy “every vestige of separation from the sects and systems of men”.

The writer of these lines owes much to the godly ministry and life of the late Mr. W. J. McClure, of California. Mr. McClure was saved in his native town, Banbridge, N. Ireland, in 1874, crossed to

America in 1881, and shortly after went into full time service for Christ. Writing of conditions in the assemblies in U.S.A. several years later, Mr. McClure says: "The old lines of separation are deemed too severe, and there is a decided tendency to tone down the preaching that separated us from the sects. There is a copying of the sects in the manner of carrying on Gospel work. Instead of the attraction being, as it was once, the gospel in simplicity and power, there is the attraction of music held out to draw the people. Under the plea of personal liberty, many can go back to what we left, speaking of it as an 'open door', when we know that it would not long remain 'open', if there were some of that truth that gathered us out from the sects, ministered in the place." Mr. McClure's point in mentioning these things was to show that this was "just history repeating itself", as a similar state of things had existed in assemblies in Scotland and England in earlier years ("Suggestions to a Brother", p. 10; now out of print). This confirms what I have said in the preceding paragraph. Brethren who had learned the truth of separation were grieved by these irregularities, which came to be known as "looseness"; and their grief was not lessened by the resentment with which their godly corrective ministry was at times received.

Such laxity can only result in the disintegration of assembly witness. To mention but one thing, it stands to sense that the dispersion of an assembly's resources of gift and manpower, in interdenominational service, will leave its spiritual and numerical strength seriously impaired. How can it be otherwise? Mr. McClure when he visited a certain large assembly, was saddened to find that so many of its saints frequented outside missions. He warned them that this practice if persisted in would sap the meeting of its power. His warning went unheeded—and with what result? On his next visit, a few years later, he was able to count upon his fingers the number of Christians in its fellowship.

What has been said again illustrates the fact that when some carry things to an unscriptural extreme, its moral effect is to force others to drive things to an opposite extreme. Both sides lose a true spiritual balance, which can only end in spiritual disaster for all.

### NEEDED TRUTHISM

Instead of waiting and continuing to wait, in prayer upon the living God, however, that He might restore His beloved people, many



who deplored the prevalent laxity, became impatient, and began to teach that their only remedy lay in "another coming out". Indeed it was taught that Open assemblies were entirely wrong as to church fellowship, and that quite apart from the laxity, therefore, a secession was necessary. Thus a movement was started in the early seventies which in the course of time made considerable progress. Those responsible for it soon became a recognised party. The first written ministry, so far as I am aware, advocating this new line, appeared in "The Northern Witness" in 1876. This consisted of certain questions, which were "answered *seriatim* in the next month's issue by the one who had asked them. The questions were framed with much skill, and were replied to with much plausibility." It is clever, no doubt, to ask skilfully framed questions in a magazine, and then answer them oneself in the magazine's next issue, but this does not commend itself to us as a mark of godly sincerity. Does it? "Many unwarily accepted the answers as well ascertained truths, and in the years which followed assumed them as the basis of their Church position. These new principles . . . were later . . . propagated . . . in a spirit that was very far removed from the mind of Christ" (J. R. Caldwell, "The Gathering and Receiving of Children of God", pp. 9, 10). It was following this that "in Conference after Conference the one topic ever to the front was Church position, while what would feed souls and stir hearts to practical godliness was altogether ignored" ("The Witness", 1891). Thus the distinctive tenets of Needed Truth were expounded and hailed as a new revelation from the Lord. Whole assemblies in some cases accepted them. Many of the adherents developed a pharisaical conceit and a cold aloofness from brethren who could not with a good conscience subscribe to their new teaching. In this way there grew up a circle of fellowship within a circle of fellowship, which clearly was not of God. Moreover, servants of the Lord with blameless lives and sound in assembly principles, were cruelly victimised and shut out, because they would not conform to the orders of certain party leaders. These unpleasant conditions led, in less than twenty years to an open and very regrettable schism, which once more exemplifies the simile that, like a clock's pendulum, we swing from one extreme to another.

Notwithstanding the definite statement of one author, that this division occurred in 1893, it seems perfectly clear from writings of the time that the secession crisis covered the years 1889-1894. The

seceders became known as the Needed Truth party—named after the periodical, “Needed Truth”, their recognised official organ.

The Exclusive and Needed Truth movements are in some respects very similar. Each is comprised of a circle, union, or federation (though it is only fair to say that some Needed Truth brethren object to the last term) of assemblies. In the one case it is named “The Body of Christ”, and “The Church of God”; in the other, “The Church of God”, “The House of God”, and “The Fellowship”. Each is directed or guided by a Central Authority, which all are expected to obey—with the former, a strong Assembly or influential Teacher; with the latter, the top circle of Elderhood. Each at the beginning “cut off” all assemblies which did not accept its tenets, or which refused to yield submission to its authority, because as one Needed Truth leader said, “such assemblies were neither in nor of the Church of God.” Finally, each at first appeared an attractive remedy for existing ills, appealed to human pride, and fostered that sectarian spirit which is so natural to the flesh.

In the early days when assemblies were undivided, they were a powerful evangelistic force, as we have seen. Now, however, for many years neither the Exclusive nor Needed Truth party has made any noteworthy progress in gospel work, at home or abroad; whereas the so-called Open meetings, though far from perfect, have ever been marked by active evangelism both in the home-lands and foreign field. In all, there are about 1,200 full-time workers in fellowship with them, and God has very abundantly blessed their labours. These assemblies are to be found in almost all parts of the world. Many of them are numerically large and spiritually strong, and it is a cause for profound gratitude to God that no modernistic teaching would for a moment be tolerated in any of them.

Reference has already been made to the spirit of aloofness and pharisaical conceit—that spirit which as dear Caldwell said, is “far removed from the mind of Christ”—manifested by the new party. One illustration of this will suffice. When it was seen that the extremists were bent upon division, a company of representative brethren met in conference at Windermere for prolonged prayer, confession, and discussion, that open schism might be averted. Mr. A. J. Holiday asked the question: “In the event of two brothers meeting at their mother’s death-bed, one gathering scripturally and the other not, could the brother in fellowship not pray with his own brother?” “No,” came

the astonishing Needed Truth reply, "he could not pray **with** him, though he might pray **for** him." Could a cold extreme, more unlike the mind of Christ, be imagined? (See A. Marshall, "Holding Fast the Faithful Word", p. 12).

## CHAPTER 10

### A STRANGE DEVELOPMENT

How now are we to account for this superiority complex? It was in large measure the fruit of the new teaching. For this teaching, be it remembered, was received as a fresh revelation from the Lord. In accordance with it, saints in the newly formed fellowship were taught that:—

1. **They only are in the Kingdom of God.** Here is the surprising statement of one teacher: “We do not believe that those ensnared by Satan in the many false systems of men are in the Kingdom of God”. (“Needed Truth”, vol. 4, p. 147; cf. vol. 3, p. 159; and pp. 161, 162, year 1897).
2. **They only are in the Church of God locally.** (See “Needed Truth”, vol. 1, p. 165; vol. 3, pp. 25, 62. See also vol. 71, p. 29, where we read of “the planting of the Church of God in Belfast . . . in 1894”—not “of a Church”—but “the planting of **the** Church.” Yet long before 1894 there were several companies of saints, marked by Godliness, orthodoxy, and fidelity to the Divine pattern of Acts 2.41, 42, in Belfast. Were these not churches of God?)
3. **They only are the House of God—pillar and ground of the truth.** (See numerous references in “Needed Truth” vols., also W. J. Lennox, “The House of God”).
4. **They only are scripturally gathered, because they only are gathered unto the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with His presence and power in the midst.** One teacher says: “Almost equally hopeless (with the Exclusive position) it is to be feared, is the place occupied by . . . Open Brethren. To these saints . . . no further reference will be made here; they are outside the scope of this article, of which the application is only to those who, ‘having been gathered together’ unto the Name of the Lord, definitely and distinctly, ‘in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ meet together, knowing that He is in the midst” (“Needed Truth”, vol. 2, pp. 29, 30).
5. **“The existence of the Present Fellowship does not admit of a Church of God coming into existence except in connection**

**with the already formed Churches**" (A. B. Miller's "What is God's Path for His People?" p. 52). Does not this teaching deny the possibility of the Holy Spirit raising up a church where Needed Truth meetings are unknown? Moreover, who formed or planted the first of their own present assemblies? If the reply be "God", we ask, "Can He not do the same thing again?" (See J. Montgomerie's "Needed Truth Error", p. 53).

6. **They as Churches of God have authority to discipline and even cut off a Church** as it would an individual, since according to the analogy of Num. 9 "God's legislation for the individual applies equally to the mass or the many whenever these are in the condition whereby God describes the individual." ("Needed Truth", vol. 3, p. 54, see also vol. 16, p. 56). Scripture, however, never teaches that all details of Divine legislation to Israel find a parallel in details of legislation to the Church.
7. **They have amongst them the Elderhood in its lower and higher circles, for "the Assembly is not the only administrative unit"**, these are "wider spheres" of rule. Those in the highest court are "the chief men", "the tall men" ("Needed Truth," vol. 16, pp. 55, 56, 81, 83). They have also been called the "archbishops" (J.M., "Needed Truth Error", p. 50). Only a "larger circle" than the assembly in a town can act in discipline upon an overseer ("Needed Truth", vol. 16, p. 125).
8. **Finally, they are taught that all churches in their fellowship form "one united whole"** ("Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures", p. 32). This is described as "the Community of God", "the Fellowship", and also as "a unique concrete thing, which consists of all those whom God has brought together in a VISIBLE UNITY" (N. Noel, "The History of the Brethren", p. 276). The Exclusive position is described as "hopeless" and that of Open Brethren, as "almost equally hopeless" ("Needed Truth", vol. 2, pp. 29, 30). But while these positions are thus judged their own churches are "collectively", described as "THE ONE THING FOR GOD ON EARTH" (my capitals). (See "Needed Truth", vol. 16, p. 83). Indeed, one of their writers, Henry Elson, claimed that they are "an expression of the Kingdom of God on earth—in however small a remnant—that is in advance of anything known for centuries".

Reader, these are the astounding claims of Needed Truthism. They are made by the most prominent and trusted teachers in the system. What spirit can such teaching engender but one of self-sufficiency and intolerance of others? Is it any wonder that several of their most spiritual and intelligent leaders, some indeed who had been co-editors of their magazine, withdrew from their fellowship? One such was L. W. G. Alexander, who states that in view of the things which are solemnly advanced in the Fellowship one ceases to wonder that learned men meekly acquiesce in the presumptuous claims of Rome ("Discerning the Body", p. 21). Some of these things may be denied, but the same writer assures us that in actual practice they exist. Both he and J. Montgomerie assure us that many of the saints were quite ignorant of some of the things which obtained, especially of the existence of the highest circle of Elderhood. Whether or not this is so today, of course, I do not say, but the independent statements by these two departed brethren are confirmed by the high sounding claims of Needed Truthism in the foregoing paragraph. Most of the authorities there quoted or referred to are from their own writings, which, where possible, I have named, with their respective authors.

That godly brethren warned of the peril of the laxity which had so unsuspectingly crept into some (not all) British assemblies ninety years ago is to their everlasting praise. That others, not content with a gracious ministry of admonition and restoration, should proceed to divide the saints and "label as loose, erring, double-minded, dangerous, and even worse", all who could not accept their extreme and grotesque views, is a tragedy, sad beyond words.

It is to stress the danger of all such extreme and erroneous views and to inculcate the need of wise, godly balance, that these chapters are written. At this juncture, however, a brief digression seems necessary, in order to compare the Needed Truth doctrines listed above with what we believe Scripture teaches. We believe that Scripture teaches:—

1. **That all born again souls, however misled through wrong instruction are in God's Kingdom.** How otherwise are we to understand John 3. 3-5?
2. That a company of believers, **gathered** together by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 18.20), **separated** from the world (2 Cor. 6, 16, 17) **acknowledging** only the Name and Person of our Lord Jesus

Christ (Matt. 18, 20; 1 Cor. 3.9) walking in the "Apostles' Doctrine" (Acts 2. 41 and 42), and **practising** the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper **scripturally, is thereby constituted a "Church of God"** (1 Cor. 1.1, etc.)

3. **That the context in 1 Tim. 3 indicate that the term, "the house of God" (v.15) has reference to the local assembly.** There is nothing to suggest that it embraces a group of assemblies, but in Eph. 2.21 (an holy temple"). V.22 ("an habitation of God"); Heb. 3.6 ("house"); 10.21 ("house of God") 1 Peter 2.5 ("a spiritual house"); 4.17 ("the house of God"), all the people of God in this age are included.

I shall now give my reasons for this assertion, though not considering the passages in the above order.

1. 1. Peter 2.5: Observe that:—

(a) Peter does not address the saints as a church or as churches. This is not a Church Epistle. True, he speaks of elders' responsibility in ch. 5, but Peter's subject is not church order, service or fellowship. He never once uses the word, "Church". In ch. 5.13 the A.V. gives the term in italics, and the R.V. omits it completely. I see nothing in the context here to suggest the restricted ecclesiastical meaning which Needed Truth brethren attach to our verse, and the context is usually a good guide in interpreting any passage.

(b) Throughout the chapter but two classes of persons are in view—saved and unsaved, believers and unbelievers. There is nothing here to indicate that one may be "a babe" (v.2), "a living stone" (v.5), a believer (v.6) . . . one of "the people of God" (v.10), and yet not be part of the "spiritual house" and "holy priesthood" of v.5.

(c) One becomes a "living stone" by "coming" to Christ, "The Living Stone" (v.4) Living Stones (v.5) are built on the "Chief Corner Stone," upon believing in Him (v.6). Thus they are "built up a spiritual House" (v.5) This building began at Pentecost. Since then the Lord has been "adding to the Church" (Acts 2:47), and the great edifice has been "growing unto a holy Temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2: 20 and 21).

Even if the "spiritual House" be viewed as the Local Church, it does not apply exclusively to Needed Truth gatherings, and there is no suggestion that it embraces all local churches in their fellowship.

2. 1. Peter. 4: 17; In verses 17 and 18 here, as in chapter 2, two classes of people are viewed in contrast. The terms, "house of God", "us", and "the righteous" clearly apply to God's people; the terms, "them that obey not the gospel", "ungodly", and "sinner" just as plainly to be unsaved.

It should also be plain that each of the first three expressions is inclusive of all God's people. When Peter speaks of judgment "beginning at the house of God" and adds in the next clause "and if it first begin at us", the same people—no more and no less—are contemplated. As for the "us", the use of it in other parts of the Epistle leaves no doubt at all as to how embracive it is. When we read, for example, that Christ suffered "to bring us to God" (ch. 3: 18) that He "suffered for us" (ch. 4: 1), and that He "hath called us unto His eternal glory (ch 5: 10), who will deny that all God's saints are included? Well, "the house of God" is just as inclusive as the "us", The clauses correspond and are co-extensive. All the people of God are in the House of God.

3. Heb. 3: 16; "Whose house are we if we hold fast". Does this mean that when we cease to hold fast we cease to be God's House? No, for in that case the text would have to read: "Whose house are we, while, or so long as, we hold fast." It does not read thus, however, for that is not its meaning. It means precisely what it says. Conversely, it would read: "whose house we are not, if we do not hold fast." That is, my failure to hold fast proves I am not of His House. I am a false professor. That this is the meaning is clear from v.14, where we have another "if". "We are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast" (R.V.) If I do not hold fast, I thereby prove I am still unsaved. One author objects, however, that this is to deal with the passage on "logical grounds". We admit that these are "logical grounds," and good scriptural logical ones at that. The same author claims that the "we" here shows that the passage is intended for "all the churches which go to the forming of the House of God". The passage does not say so, however, nor does the word ever teach that the House of God is comprised of local churches. The subject matter of Heb. 3 does not touch upon Church truth anyhow. Finally, Heb. 3, if properly understood, does not for a moment imperil the eternal security of the believer.

4. Heb. 10: 21; "Having a High Priest over the house of God". Here a few questions naturally arise. Henry Elson, as we have already



seen, claimed that the present "Needed Truth" testimony is "an expression of the Kingdom of God on earth . . . in advance of anything known for centuries". Is this to imply that for hundreds of years God was without a spiritual House upon Earth? That the Lord Jesus had no House of God to be "over"? and that godly saints then and now who are "not gathered out" have no Great High Priest? Are Needed Truth brethren so blinded that in their conceit they actually believe these things?

5. Eph. 2: 21 (R.V.) is basic in Needed Truth doctrine of the House of God. The verse reads: "In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord." "Each several building," it is taught, is figurative of the individual churches in their Communion. These together in their aggregate form the House of God on earth at any given time, and they are growing into "a holy Temple in the Lord."

Now, the view that "every building" represents a local church, depends in the first place upon the correctness of the R.V. reading. Should the A.V. be correct, the Needed Truth doctrine collapses. Can we be sure then that the R.V. is the proper reading? The truth is, we cannot. W. E. Vine, M.A. says that both A.V. and R.V. are possible renderings ("The Church and the Churches", p. 30); and Professor F. F. Bruce states that "the Greek witnesses to the text are fairly evenly divided between the two readings" ("Believers' Magazine", Oct. 1958).

Many English translations have been consulted in order to ascertain which of the two possible readings the majority of good textual critics and Greek scholars support. I find that the R.V. stands almost alone, while at least twenty-two of the translations I have read are in agreement with the A.V. rendering, "all the building". These translations are as follows: (1) Basic English; (2) R.S.V.; (3) N.E.B.; (4) Interlinear Greek and English; (5) W. S. Way, D.Litt.; (6) R. F. Weymouth, D.Litt.; (7) Hny. Alford; (8) J. N. Darby; (9) Westcott and Hort; (10) Robt. Young; (11) Conybeare and Howson; (12) J. B. Rotherham; (13) Moffatt; (14) R. A. Knox; (15) Douay (16) W. Kelly; (17) The Numerical Bible; (18) Chas. E. Elliott; (19) Handley C. G. Moule; (20) The Englishman's Greek N.T.; (21) C. B. Williams; (22) The amplified New Testament.

Even, however, if we accept the Greek from which the R.V. is taken as being the most reliable reading, as some scholars do, this does

not at all mean that the English rendering must be “each several building”, as in R.V. Dr. H. C. G. Moule asks: “Does the Greek phrase in the best attested reading . . . demand the rendering of the R.V. as against that of the A.V.?” and adds, “We incline to the reply that it does not” (“Ephesians Studies”, pp. 92, 93). Both Prof. F. F. Bruce and A. T. Robertson agree with this, and state that there is New Testament authority for so doing. In the phrase “all creation” (Col. 1: 15, R.V.), for example, we have “PAS” (all) without the article—a construction similar to that upon which the R.V. here is based—but plainly the meaning is not “each several creation”, nor “each several creature”, but “all creation”. See also verse 23, where obviously the R.V. rendering is correct.

It can be seen therefore that it is the A.V. of Ephesians 2: 21 that has the great preponderance of our translators’ support. Approval given to the R.V. is extremely weak, yet this is the reading to which Needed Truth brethren cling as basic to their doctrine of the House. It is supported, they claim, by 1st Corinthians 3: 9 “where each local church is a building.”

Even if it were entirely otherwise, however, even if our English R.V. had the preponderance of approval certain questions arise. What scriptural authority is there for the assertion that “each several building”, which “fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple”, is a local church? I know of none. To me this is a mere assumption. Again, what proof is there that this clause is supported by 1st Corinthians 3: 9? True, a building there symbolises a local church, but does the same figure never represent anything else in the New Testament? Of course, it does. Further, where in the Gospels, Acts, or Epistles do we read one word about local churches forming together, or growing into, the Lord’s House or Temple? Certainly no such teaching is found in my Bible. Some see Ephesians 2: 21 to be supported by 1st Corinthians 6: 19. “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” William Lincoln, says that God’s “wondrous end is, a living palace composed of living stones, each one instinct with divine life. Yea, each one of these stones is also a temple of God, a complete miniature of the whole thing. So Ephesians 2: 21, where for ‘all the building’, read ‘every building’ . . . Who but God could build such a temple, each stone a living, glowing facsimile of the entire building?” (“The Church”, pp. 14, 15). Now here is division of opinion regarding the interpretation of the R.V. of our text, and

Lincoln, who himself was no mean student, stands not alone in advocating this view.

If, therefore, there is no absolute certainty as to which is the genuine original of Ephesians 2: 21, no absolute certainty as to which is the correct English translation, and consequently no absolute certainty as to which is the true, spiritual interpretation, what certainty have our dear Needed Truth brethren that their superstructure of doctrine is erected upon a sound foundation? We ask this, especially in view of the fact that there is not one word in the earlier passages examined to support their teaching about the houses, and the House of God. Our faith is too precious to be reposed upon so untrustworthy a basis.

4. What has been said under No. 2 applies here. There are hundreds of godly assemblies "scripturally gathered", outside the so-called Needed Truth fellowship. These assemblies are "gathered into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with His presence and power in the midst". They make no high-sounding, pretentious claims. They do not believe that they are called upon, by Him Who walks in the midst of the lampstands, to pronounce upon companies of sincere, godly, and fundamentally sound Christians outside their communion.

5. Does not this teaching, relative to new assemblies coming into existence, deny the possibility of the Holy Spirit raising up a church where Needed Truth meetings are unknown? Moreover, who formed or planted the first of their own present Assemblies? If the reply is "God", we ask, can He not do the same thing again? (See J. H. Montgomerie's "Needed Truth Error", p. 53).

6. While, however, it is true that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" Romans 15: 4, scripture never teaches that all details of divine legislation to Israel in the Old Testament find a parallel in details of legislation to the church in the New Testament. To see confirmation in the O.T. for what has no New Testament precedent is surely to betray "the nakedness of the land". Ecclesiastical surgery at the hands of mere men has yet to show a single case of genuine success.

7. One looks in vain in the Acts and Epistles for any suggestion of different levels of Elderhood. Any difference that existed was simply that of ability, wisdom or development of gift. 1st Timothy 5:17. This never placed one Elder above another in status nor one group of Elders above another. It is purely inferential to suggest that

“district Elderhood” is taught by 1st Peter 5:1-4 taken in conjunction with 1st Peter 1:1. “The charge allotted” is manifestly the tending of the flock understood in a straightforward manner, the Elders being simply with the saints as in Philippians 1:1 in a local sense. There is a complete absence of a clear “thus saith the Lord” for any Elder having a care for the flock of God in any but his own assembly. To indulge in mere deduction upon these passages quoted is to produce a system of rule based upon flimsy speculation. This has the serious effect of cancelling the authority of the Lord of the churches whose presence and operations amongst the Lampstands (Revelation 2:3) is their supreme bond and in this sphere He has authorised no deputies of any kind. Spiritual leadership is to direct by example and teaching the saints of the local assembly but the government of all the assemblies still rests in the care of Him “who hath the Key of David, who openeth and no man shutteth and shutteth and no man openeth”, Rev. 3:7. It is He who holds the stars in His right hand and walks in the midst of the seven lampstands. It is in that authority alone to legislate for these vehicles of testimony and in His power alone to remove them.

Attention should be paid to another proof-text used by “Needed Truth” in this connection. 2nd Corinthians 11:28. The A.V. has it, “The care of all the churches” but the R.V. (which is the version normally used by “Needed Truth” but here it does not seem to suit their purpose) “The anxiety of all the churches”. Cf. the same Word as in 1st Peter 5:7. Nothing could be further from the mind of the Apostle than official control of the assemblies. It is most obviously the man’s godly concern and loving solicitude for their protection and welfare that is intended and there is not a shade of suggestion of his being one of an upper group to whom some unspecified powers were relegated.

8. We do not believe that the Word of God warrants any such thing as the assemblies forming “One thing for God on the earth”. History sadly confirms this scriptural finding in the split that took place in the “Needed Truth” movement about fourteen years after its inception when it was split from end to end and that division remains until now. I have said elsewhere, “We believe, however, that for churches, no matter how scripturally gathered, to claim that together in their aggregate, they form any “thing” regardless of what the “thing” may be is sectarianism, pure and simple.” Scripture never

contemplates an organised visible union, ring, or federation of churches as forming a community, Fellowship, Body, House, Flock or Church.” Dr. R. C. Edwards of New South Wales clarifies the scriptural position by saying, “Each New Testament church is itself, a unit: it is not part of a larger unit. This is readily seen in the first chapter of the Revelation. There the Lord is in the midst of certain churches in Asia. They are likened to seven stands on which lamps are placed. There is no hint of these churches of Asia being combined to form the Asian Church, one throughout the province; and the churches throughout the world are not combined to form a visible body, ‘the church on earth’.” So that “no scripture teaches that there is ‘a church on earth’ in addition to the complete church which is Christ’s body, and in addition to the existence of local churches or assemblies each of which is an entity apart from any amalgamation or association of churches.” (W. E. Vine, “The Believers’ Magazine”, Nov. 1949).

To every reader of these pages I wish to say most earnestly and affectionately that these matters have been gone into with nothing but tender feelings for the Lord’s people and with absolutely no motive but their preservation, harmony and welfare. The disclosure of unwelcome facts is as I see it God’s own method of recovery, that is, as for example, Nehemiah chapters eight and nine, by drawing attention to the failures of the past. It will be noted that we do not drag up the departure of some one group, merely, but have tried to be impartial, not overlooking the wrongs of Open Brethren. We do not upbraid any but seek only the recovery, peace and well-being of all “His own”. I have many dear friends in both Exclusive and Needed Truth circles to whom I owe much and to hurt any of these would be the furthest thought from my mind. I do not write against personalities but against the systems.

The late Mr. John Brown of Scotland, for some years one of the ardent supporters and most gifted teachers of the Needed Truth party returned later in life to the assemblies from which he had separated and with them he was happy to finish his days. On one occasion when over ninety years of age, he was asked in a Bible Reading if the remedy for certain wrongs was not “Another coming out”. “Time was”, he replied, “that I would have answered ‘Yes’, but now that I am older” —and as he spoke the tears filled his eyes—“I say, ‘NO’, ‘DIVISION CURES NOTHING’.”

## CHAPTER II

### A RESURGENCE

Enough has been said to exemplify the perils of unscriptural extremes. Some have trodden the bypath of Exclusivism, or its parallel though narrower side lane of Needed Truthism, and have ended with a wrecked testimony upon the hard and barren rocks of division. Others in revolt against these intolerant, dictatorial systems, have gone down the opposite bypath of compromise and laxity, only to find themselves at last in a spiritual swamp or bogland.

“But why repeat such matters from the past?” asks someone. Because it is absolutely essential that the rising generation in assemblies should know these things, for at different times down the years saints in various parts of the world have suffered from a resurgence of the principles of each of these schools of thought. One can be actuated by their principles, while quite clear from their errors of doctrine. After what has been written it is not necessary to add much further regarding their respective characteristics. The attentive reader will have carefully noted them. The slogan of one side is “We need a new coming out”; and of the other, “Down with the barriers of separation”. May we read aright the lessons of history and so avoid both wrong extremes. They have been tried and found wanting. Once the principles of either extreme gain a foothold in any meeting, its days of love, harmony, and blessing are in most cases numbered. Let us not therefore repeat the follies of earlier days—follies which have dishonoured that worthy Name, stumbled saints, and caused the enemies of God to blaspheme. Shun what is known as “looseness” with its false charity. Today under the plea of expediency and development, it would introduce inter-denominationalism, human organisation and centralisation, Bible Schools, sports, young people’s meetings run on worldly lines, a youth movement with uniformed parades and other institutions extraneous to the New Testament, which would rob assemblies of their distinctive character as such.

Do not, however, allow the widespread drift in that direction to drive you to the opposite pole. Keep your balance. Shun every tendency towards Exclusivism and Needed Truthism, with their lust for

control, their boycotting of godly men, and their cruel cutting-off policies—all so reminiscent of 3rd John 9, 10. The enforcement of their pet theories in some parts of the world have wounded many a sincere soul, and separated many devoted friends, and it has relegated to the place of the spiritually leprous and unclean some of the most godly and most gifted servants of Christ. It has wrecked prosperous meetings, and left them high, dry and fruitless. Has the reader not observed this? and it has alienated from each other assemblies of beloved saints which otherwise would be in the most friendly and intimate fellowship today. We greatly deceive ourselves if we think these are “the old paths” of the truth. They are bypaths from the truth. These are all serious matters which have yet to be faced at Christ’s Judgment Seat. O that God’s dear people everywhere were made aware of their perils, and could appreciate that the simple, straight, sane, safe and above all, the scriptural path lies between the two wrong extremes.

Open Brethren divisions are not as one writer in N.T. said some two year ago “innumerable”. All considered the marvel is that there is so much unity. One exception to this is in North America where virtually two camps are to be found, with limited coming and going between them. A rigid and unbending attitude has resulted in this extremism. That in this severe and inflexible line of things there is a resurgence of Exclusivism and Needed Truthism has been denied but it is useless to attempt this: both the attitude and the consequent rupture bear the identification marks of the troubles. Leadership that encourages the cutting off of assemblies has departed from the pattern of Revelation, chapters two and three. As W. J. McClure has written, “The very latest teaching God gave the church, the seven epistles of Rev. 2–3 is proof that God did not make one assembly responsible for the state or conditions of another. There is no suggestion that Sardis was expected to cut off Thyatira, or that Philadelphia was to refuse fellowship with either. That would have been an excellent opportunity to have brought out such a line of teaching, were it right.

The fact that we in the Irish Assemblies enjoy a large measure of unity and blessing is, under God, due chiefly to the work of well balanced spiritual leaders in the past who by lip and life taught us these things. Such beloved brethren as Dr. W. J. Matthews, Wm. Rodgers, Wm. Gilmore, and others, as well as teachers of the calibre of John Ritchie, Wm. Hoste, and Wm. J. McClure, who visited our

shores from time to time, were as clear as crystal upon separation and godly church order, but saw just as clearly the evils of the other divisive principles at which we have been looking, and therefore strove to keep God's dear people together. If we value the heritage they bequeathed to us, let us follow their example in avoiding unscriptural extremes. "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say." It is the writer's conviction that there are amongst us today men wise enough to appreciate the present need for these warnings, and who by grace are prepared to stand where we have ever stood. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5.1.).

An editorial of "Letters of Interest" of some years ago contained the following quotation from the pen of John Ferguson, (died October 23rd, 1940) which must appeal to all as being both fair and gracious, as being sane and sound and as being as necessary now as it was then. The caption of the article were the words of Joseph in Genesis 37.16 **"I seek my Brethren"** He said "It was surely a noble desire that filled the heart of Joseph to seek his brethren. There is planted within the heart of every born-again soul to do as this word suggest: to seek his brethren." "The sad fact," he later continues "that there has been in the last few years quite a number of unnecessary divisions is known to all who are in fellowship among assemblies of those who gather in His Name alone. In the last two or three years there have been many who have had their eyes open to the fact that much of the divided state of the Lord's people has been due to the want of both patience and wisdom in dealing with the many failures of the people of God. Harsh judgements, unscriptural decisions in matters of discipline and a general unchristianlike spirit of dealing with one another have all lent themselves to the tearing asunder of assembly unity." Continuing, he calls attention to the use of opprobrious terms which accentuate differences and create false distinctions between servants of God as well as between assemblies of God. "That the word 'loose' (a stigma) has been used to the great grief of many is a known fact. What is really meant by the word is hard to define, for it has been often used about men who have been all their lives in the assemblies and who have spent a lifetime in seeking their good. It has been used to cast discredit on men who are in many ways better in their testimony than those who use it to harm them. It is surely a decided want of grace to try to belittle a true servant of Christ in the eyes of any by designating



him or them 'loose'. The word 'tight' has also been used in a wrong way. It has been used to mean something to be shunned and applied to men who have as much true and real desire to live for God as the men who use it to their discredit. It is time that such uncharitable words and ways should be dropped: the time is too short to spend it in fighting each other. There is a common enemy at the door and it is to fight that enemy our whole energy should be used. If we sincerely and affectionately **SEEK OUR BRETHREN** we shall undoubtedly find them and just as certainly find that blessing and success which have wilted and faded in the presence of unchristianlike attitudes to one another."

## CHAPTER 12

### SUNDRY PERILS

It is necessary to repeat that God's path for His people is one of uncompromising separation from the world in its every aspect—political, commercial, ecclesiastical, social, and matrimonial. This is the plain teaching of 2nd Corinthians 6.14–17, the words of which “admit of no concession whatever; they are absolute and abiding. They are not to be regarded as sentiment or theory, or frittered away by applying them to a limited circle. Their full force and authority ought to be felt, obeyed, enforced, and manifested everywhere” (“Letters of Interest”). This teaching, if learned in fellowship with God, will preserve us from the perils of worldliness against which we have already warned. Nevertheless there are other subtle ways of departure from God. Some of these which have been considered in earlier pages, together with others not yet named, require to be specially underlined today.

### THE PERIL OF INCONSISTENCY

There is the peril of inconsistency. Vigilantly see to it, therefore, that your personal holiness, gentleness, and thoughtful consideration of others keep step with your strictness for Church order in public. Do not “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel”—many do. Be strict in judging self before criticising others. Remember that the elder's first qualification in 1st Timothy 3 is a life “without reproach”. This is but reasonable, for what weight has any man's stand for truth if it be known that his past is not normally clean, that he is greedy of gain, or that his home life is not right? Forget not that the call to “come out” (2nd Corinthians 6.17) and lead a separated life, is followed by the call to cultivate a sanctified life (ch. 7.1); and that while Paul trod a narrow path (ch. 6.14–17), he did so with a big heart for God's people (ch. 6.11). All this reveals the need of godly balance. But where the unequal legs of the spiritually lame are in evidence, need we wonder if men mock at their ungainly and ungracious walk?

**THE PERIL OF PREJUDICE**

Further, beware, dear saint, of leaving the simplicity that is in Christ and of becoming formal and legal. Beware of holding the truth in a proud, fleshly way, which is more inclined to harden than to win. Above all, beware of allowing prejudice to embitter your spirit and rob you of love for all saints, for it is amazing the length to which prejudice can drive even good men. His fellow-Exclusives used to feel scandalised when they saw Mr. J. G. Bellett walk arm in arm with so-called Open brethren upon the streets of Dublin, but the saintly man had so much of the presence of God with him, that no one dared to rebuke him. Eschew the spirit of those detractors. Many other examples of prejudice could be mentioned. Asked about special meetings which had been convened in his assembly, a brother replied, "I went some night just to pass myself." The preacher was a good and saintly man, whose service for Christ was perfectly scriptural, but he was outside the brother's little circle of fellowship. That made all the difference. Oh how low and unworthy our thoughts of God's sacred work can become, and what a narrow partisan spirit our language can at times betray! If the preacher had been one of 'his men' the brother would have been present nightly with a glowing face. Some who have developed a kind of spiritual superiority complex regularly absent themselves from their assembly meetings when certain of the Lord's honoured servants are to speak. Indeed without evidently having a qualm of conscience they allow their prejudiced party feelings to carry them to even greater extremes.

Hearing that his unconverted son while upon holiday was attending special gospel meetings conducted by two earnest evangelists, a Christian gentleman requested his boy to return home at once, which he did. The preachers, our late esteemed brethren, James Marshall and William McCracken, felt very disappointed at this, as they had been praying for the young man's conversion. The father was in an extremely narrow circle of fellowship, and the strange, unchristian request was made simply because the evangelists were not in his communion. The sad sequel to the story is that some time later the young man lost his life, leaving no hope for Eternity. Needless to say, such an attitude is utterly foreign to the spirit of Christ, but such is the length to which party prejudice can drive even good men. Beware of it, beloved, as you would a plague. It is the child of ignorance, and so

long as it controls a man's mind, a warped and perverted judgment will be his.

Since all the gifts of the Risen Head are needed, just as all the members of the human body are required if it is to function fully and harmoniously, love, and, in every way possible support all sincere. God-sent, God-honouring servants of Christ, without partiality, Partiality was a curse at Corinth, where one favoured Paul, another Apollos, and so on (1st Corinthians 1.12), as we have already seen; and it was the sin of Diotrephes carried to an extreme length (3rd John). Verses 5 to 8 there would teach us that our prayers, hospitality, and practical interest would, as far as is possible, embrace every godly, commended labourer at home and on the mission field. "Because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth" (vv, 7, 8. R.V.). Yet some assemblies seem to have fellowship with only a select few, as though the Lord of the great harvest field had no concern about the others. Oh, well it is that His love and care are not so restricted and inconsistent as are the saints' at times. Even beloved Paul had to plead with his own spiritual children, saying, "Open your hearts to us; we wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man" (2nd Corinthians 7.2). How strange and pathetic that one so near to the Lord as an Apostle—one with heart so noble, self-denying and affectionate—should have to remind those who owed their very salvation to him that he had never given them any just cause to turn against him as they had done!

### THE PERIL OF THE WHISPERING TONGUE

If you would be fair and impartial, lend not your ear to the tongue which whispers evil of another. Usually it accomplishes its malicious design by the confidential spread of rumour, surmise and insinuation. It magnifies trifles, impugns motives, misrepresents facts, and delights to create an atmosphere of suspicion. It ever takes advantage of the willing, open ear of the unwary Christian, and many a reputation it has blasted, for a lie will go half round the world before the truth has got on its boots. Speaking of the habit of some preachers to circulate slander, Spurgeon truly said that "it curdles all the milk of human kindness in a man's (own) bosom, and he becomes more fit

for the detective police force than for the ministry". Those who engage in this mean business usually take pleasure in going from house to house and from assembly to assembly, prying into and meddling with other people's affairs, much like the silly widows of 1st Timothy 5.13. Never in Scripture is the whisperer viewed in aught but an evil light (See Psalm 41.17; Isaiah 29.4; Romans 1.29; and 2nd Corinthians 12.20); and never did our Lord or His Apostles engage in anything surreptitious. When Paul heard the unfavourable report about the Corinthians he wrote to them concerning it, and shrank not from naming its authors (1st Corinthians 1.11). With him all was open and above-board, and this should ever be our attitude. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses" (1st Timothy 5.19). Whispering is a moral plague—a mischievous practice, which accomplishes nothing better than the separating of "chief friends" (Proverbs 16.28). "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people . . . I am The Lord" (Leviticus 19.16). No godly Christian could with a good conscience carry on a campaign of whisper against others. Shun the whisperer, whatever his pretence may be. He is no true friend. Tell him to be gone.

What we have said applies especially to those in oversight. Not infrequently what is spoken privately in the ear is voiced publicly in the assembly business meeting. It is surely an intensely serious matter for men to sit there and use their influence against godly labouring brethren as has on occasions been done. Sometimes those who do so are men whose own past lives are, to say the least, far from perfect. Before believing any rumour about a brother, therefore, thoroughly investigate it, and let it not be forgotten that the sin of Joab was that he fell upon and slew "two men more righteous and better" than he himself (1st Kings 2.32.). Solemn business!

### THE PERIL OF LOCAL DISPUTES

Local disputes should be confined to as narrow a circle as possible. In many cases these have their origin in petty misunderstandings and personal grievances. If not nipped in the bud they blossom out in open quarrels and broken friendships, of which we have many sad examples in Scripture. The fly in the ointment at Philippi was a difference between two sisters (Philippians 4.2.). At Corinth "jealousy and strife" (1st Corinthians 3.3) were rampant. Even Paul and

Barnabas, beloved and devoted fellow-labourers, contended so sharply on one occasion that they “parted asunder one from the other” (Acts 15.39).

Disputes amongst any of God’s people are much to be regretted. When, however, they involve elders, or ministering brethren who were wont to share the same platform, and especially when they end in open separation, as was the case in Acts 15, the issues may be very serious and far-reaching. No time should be lost, therefore, by either side in doing all possible to have fellowship restored. “A stitch in time saves nine”. “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, **first be reconciled to thy brother**, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5.23, 24). No utterance of Christ perhaps requires to be more underlined today than this. We suggest that the verses should be framed and hung in every Gospel Hall.

It will be noted that in this passage it is the person addressed who has committed the trespass. In chapter 18.15, where the other person is at fault, the same course is to be pursued—“go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone”. If there be willing minds, a true desire to understand each other, honesty in “confessing our faults one to another” (usually there are wrongs on both sides), and a bowing in humility to the claims of Christ, it is wonderful how quickly reconciliation can in most cases be effected. Should reconciliation seem to be impossible (though with Christians this should never be), see to it that so far as you are concerned you have done all that is humanly possible along the lines of Matthew 18.15–17 to gain your brother—that no one who knows the full facts can say that you left any avenue towards a happy, peaceful settlement unexplored. Much, of course, depends upon the consciences of those at variance. Where the conscience is tender, one will readily confess one’s fault. Where it is not, however, there will be reluctance to admit anything, self-justification, the spirit of independence, and condemnation of opponents.

It is regrettable to have to relate that the pages of church history reveal many cases in which brethren have not done so much as even lift a little finger to remove estrangements. Grudges, instead of being judged in God’s presence and put away, have been nurtured and brooded over. Charges have been made against old friends of things of which they were both ignorant and innocent, and the plain teaching

of Matthew 5.23, 24 overlooked. Brethren have been ignored, their feelings trampled upon, and bitterness towards them nursed and carried down to the very grave. What weight can our public ministry have, be we ever so well taught, if in practice we be lacking of the elementary traits of civility, fair play, and consideration of others? Emerson well said that "what you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say". It is surely a sad day when the fear of God and the common courtesies of life depart from a Christian community. The more serious aspect of the matter, however, is that the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18) teaches us that a man who is so lacking in love that he cannot forgive his fellow-servant thereby proves that he himself has never experienced Divine forgiveness.

### **PERILS IN THE INTERCOMMUNION OF ASSEMBLIES**

Regarding the fellowship of assemblies, forget not that every assembly is directly responsible to, and dependent upon, the Lord, for all its actions. Each one has scriptural authority to judge its own matters, but not the matters of other meetings, as is seen in Revelation 2 and 3. Yet mark that where evil is rebuked in one, all other churches are there called upon to give heed to the Spirit's warning. Scripture knows nothing of federating assemblies, as we have already seen, but it does teach that we should foster a close intercommunion of assemblies. Hence as far as it is at all consistent with righteousness, let each company respect and abide by the decisions of other companies, in all matters of reception, commendation and discipline. "The words of Ephesians 4.1-3," says John Bloor, "express the Spirit's pleasing that we maintain every link that can be maintained, in face of difficulty, opposition and distress." How grieved the Lord must be therefore when some force their way in introducing things about which all are not happy, knowing full well that this will mean the forfeiture of peace and fellowship amongst God's people!

Local disputes, which was the subject of the preceding section, should never be permitted to spread and involve other assemblies. This has been one of the great weaknesses in the Exclusive system. When a division between two companies occurs there, all other assemblies in the confederacy must 'judge the question' and decide upon which side they stand. Thus division becomes world-wide; for assembly A not only 'cuts off' assembly B, from which it has differed,

but every company that agrees with assembly B; and every preacher who dares to visit assembly B, or any meeting which has sided with it, is also automatically 'cut off'. The result is that a new circle of fellowship is thereby formed. This they say must be as a matter of 'principle'. What concerns us, however, is that **it is not the teaching of Scripture**. "It would be well," says H. P. Barker, "if all of us were to talk less of 'observing divine principles', and give more thought, as Paul did, to the 'keeping of the commandments of God' (1st Corinthians 7.19) . . . Principles may be very nebulous; commandments are definite." Much as we value oneness of mind (1st Corinthians 1.10), our fellowship with other assemblies does not at all depend upon our seeing eye to eye with them in every particular when difficulties and disputes arise. This tendency towards Exclusivism is the parent of division, and in some quarters has wrought havoc of the intercommunion of assemblies. Guard against it.

### THE PRECIOUSNESS OF AN ASSEMBLY

Even a brief consideration of the preciousness of a scripturally constituted assembly to God will impress us with the need of watchfulness against these many perils. It is called a "church of God" (Acts 20.28, etc.), having been planted by Him. It is gathered unto the Name of Christ (Matthew 18.20). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwell in it (2nd Corinthians 6.16; Matthew 18.20; 1st Corinthians 3.16). Its purchase price was the Lord's own blood, and it is the special care of the Divine Spirit (Acts 20.28). Holy angels behold with interest its order (1st Corinthians 11.10). It is God's witness in the world—"the pillar and ground of the truth" (1st Timothy 3.15), and is comparable to a vessel of the choicest metal—gold (Revelation 1.20). How great then is the sin of disowning an assembly, unless it has been incontrovertibly proven that it wilfully condones immorality or false doctrine, that it was begun in schism (Romans 16.17), or that there is clear evidence that the lampstand has been removed (Revelation 2.5)! How great too is the sin of causing trouble in, or in any way marring the peace and simple beauty of, an assembly! Not only so, but how great should be the care exercised by responsible brethren in the matter of reception to an assembly! For an assembly is just what the sum of its individual saints make it. We must therefore guard against all laxity in reception. It is to be feared



that under A. N. Groves' dictum that "life and not light is the basis of fellowship", almost anyone professing Christianity can in some quarters break bread as occasion suits. Such laxity is fraught with peril. Others go to the opposite extreme and become legal in reception. We have known of godly, commended servants of Christ—men of sterling character and sound in the faith, who had for years given of their best to the gospel—being refused a seat at the Lord's Supper, and being made to sit back with the ungodly, because of having had fellowship—not in an unscriptural sect or mission—but in another assembly gathered to the Lord's Name, which was not approved of. How unfair it is that beloved missionary brethren who have been away for years, and who consequently are not conversant with assembly difficulties and divisions which have arisen in the homeland during their absence, should be so severely penalised for paying a temporary visit to a meeting not upon what is at best a humanly accredited assembly list!

It is suggested, dear people of God, that if we possessed more of the fear of the Lord in our hearts, and a deeper knowledge of His Word and ways, we should tread more softly, and with more grace and wisdom, in His assemblies. High-handed, overbearing, arbitrary actions do not pass unnoticed by our God. He who smote Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10.2), Uzzah, (2nd Samuel 6.7), and Uzziah (2nd Chronicles 26.20) in vindication of His awful holiness, still lives; and even in modern times examples of His manifested displeasure are not wanting.

In closing this chapter, I beg to ask: "What right has any man, or men, to divide the assemblies of God's beloved people, or to assume a kind of lordship over them?" In view of the brevity of time, the imminence of our Lord's return, and the solemnity of His Judgment Seat, may God burden us to pray for the unity, holiness, and peace of His dear children everywhere. I appeal to you, beloved in Christ, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all that ye do be done in love" (1st Corinthians 16.13). Oh that our God would raise up more men with "the care of ALL the churches" (2nd Corinthians 11.28) upon their hearts, as had the beloved Paul—men of balance, wisdom, maturity, and vision, who, discerning the perils of unscriptural extremes, whether in the one direction or the other, will by life and lip point to God's path, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

## CHAPTER 13

### PERILS IN THE SERVANT'S PATH

If the Lord has called you to the public ministry of His Word, fall not short of what that Word commands, yet press not matters further than it warrants. Do not, I pray you, try to force Christians into what they have never learned from God for themselves. Any carnal Esau can over-drive the flock. The true shepherd “leads (it) on softly” (Genesis 33.13, 14). Don’t cultivate a one-track mind. Don’t be a mere spinner of words. Don’t pander to popular tastes. In ministering, “feed the flock of God” (John 21.15–17; Acts 20.28; 1st Peter 5.2). This will at times include “reproof and correction” (2nd Timothy 3.16). Give the saints something, however, to warm their hearts and edify them. Some men’s ministry is all negative, but mere negatives do not produce spiritual growth nor build up Christian character. Do not advertise the faults of the saints before unconverted people who may be listening. Further, using another figure, don’t always harp on the same string—the Bible is a Book of variety—and never go beyond what you have personally experienced. Again, don’t try to be somebody else. A noted Bible teacher used to develop a little cough when ministering, due possibly to nervousness. The remarkable thing however was that the young men who frequently heard him, developed the same little cough when speaking. Be content to be yourself.

As a servant of God, nothing is more important than that you should preserve a pure conscience. Thus if you cannot with perfect ease of mind preach in a meeting in which instrumental music is used, by all means decline invitations to do so. Do not, however, presume to judge brethren who have no such conscience, nor allow this difference of view to hinder your fellowship with them. There is no scriptural reason why you should do so. This is purely a personal matter, concerning which each one is responsible only to The Lord. It is covered by the principle of Romans 14.5: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” There were matters in the primitive churches, as this chapter teaches, in respect to which even Paul, though inspired, and possessing apostolic authority, would not legislate for others.

What is more, be consistent. If you cannot be where music is employed, can you with a clear conscience before God minister in an assembly where wrong teaching, such, for example, as the "Mauro Doctrine", or "Tribulation Theory" is held? Can you be happy to preach where there is strife and internal division, where sin has been covered, where brethren have been hypocritical and deceitful in spirit, where some Diotrephes forbids the reception of certain godly brethren, or where the professed saints are carnal and worldly?

Please remember that while we have no reference in the New Testament to an instrument being used in a church, Scripture never directly forbids it, but it certainly does forbid the evils just now named. Seek grace therefore to be consistent.

This does not mean, however, that the present writer favours an instrumental accompaniment. He has always believed it to be more in keeping with the spiritual character of the Church's worship that our praises should be without artificial aid. In addition, the singing is usually more hearty without an instrument, even though at times there may be discordant notes. The introduction of an organ or piano, too, has in many cases caused strife and division in assemblies, as well as embarrassment to servants of Christ, and not content with music in the gospel meeting in some few cases it is being introduced in the worship meeting on the Lord's Day. Surely fellowship amongst saints is more desirable than an instrument, or any substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit in our meetings.

In moving amongst assemblies, think twice, and be sure you have God's mind about it, before you pass by any meeting where, provided that the truth be spoken in a loving, tactful, balanced manner, there is room for the ministry of all God's Word. It is to be feared that some assemblies which have drifted from the simple ways of God and put upon their platforms men who know little of true separation, are to a large measure, what they are today, because that when they would have received godly ministry it was denied to them. Remember that when you refuse to go, you leave the door open for someone else to enter. Even in Sardis there were "a few . . . which did not defile their garments", and which had "an ear to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Revelation 3.4, 6). Could it have been God's will, therefore, that Sardis should have been shunned, because all there would not hear? It is only through the ministry of the Word that saints can be safeguarded and restored (Acts 20.32; 2nd Timothy 3.15-17).

How then can we expect them to avoid backsliding, or be recovered from it, if we withhold from them that living, convicting, healing Word?

It is not suggested, of course, that one should visit all meetings, regardless of how they begin, or of what their principles and practices may be. In some parts of the world there are gatherings today with which many would not be at all happy to associate, because of their wilful and persistent setting aside certain plain commandments of the Lord. It is not for us, however, to condemn fellow-preachers, should they feel disposed to visit them. We are not called upon to enact laws for others, or to expect them to walk according to our rule. In this latter matter, as indeed in quite a variety of matters, the teaching of Romans 14, about the wrong of judging one another, applies. At the risk of being blamed for repetition, it is again pointed out that in respect to many subjects, about which we have different interpretations, but which do not imperil any divine principle, the Lord has definitely laid it down as an abiding rule for us, that we are not to judge one another. Learn therefore to distinguish between the plain meaning of Scripture and your interpretation and application of it; and fail not, beloved, to perceive that many heartburning alienations and regrettable divisions might have been averted if this chapter in Romans had been obeyed. We thank God for every example of brethren being governed by its precepts. Take the baptising of converts which in the New Testament is the servant's responsibility. Most of us in performing this ordinance use the formula of Matthew 28.19: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost", believing that the clause "baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8.16) merely denotes the divine authority for the ordinance. Some beloved brethren, however, hold that the latter passage furnishes us with the prescribed form of words to be repeated, and employ it accordingly. Now surely in a case like this where interpretations differ, but where all are sincerely seeking to please the Lord, brethren of each school of thought ought to respect the convictions of the other. We are indeed thankful that in most cases it is so. It would be a thousand pities if either school were to adopt the attitude. "We are standing for the Old Paths and unless you agree with us we cannot have fellowship with you." And if brethren can respect the honest convictions of others regarding the baptismal formula, can we not, for the sake of harmony, yea, for the sake of our worthy Lord, do the

same in other matters, provided, I repeat, that no divine principle or precept is being infringed ?

The perils of the servant's path, of course, are very numerous, and it is to be understood that we have here considered only a few of these in connection with which wrong extremes are more prone to manifest themselves. In view of what has been said in earlier chapters regarding the perils of sectarianism, it is also well to remind ourselves that there is ever the tendency for one who has strong personal convictions regarding any particular truth to align himself with those who are like-minded, to the exclusion of others. "Birds of a feather flock together." A real danger to the servant of Christ lies here, especially where wealthy brethren with a party bias give liberally of their means to those whose ministry panders to their prejudices. The temptation to ingratiate oneself with an influential and open-handed personality is naturally a strong one, to which many have succumbed.

Yea, "the rich hath many friends" (Proverbs 14.20). Remembering, however, that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1st Timothy 6.10 R.V.), and that "One is his Master, even Christ" (Matthew 23.8), the servant of God must not "curry favour" with any man. Moreover, if his ministry is to promote unity amongst the saints he must see to it that he himself stands above, apart from, and uninfluenced by all parties. In a word, he must not be a party-man. The late James Campbell, that noble servant of Christ, used often to repeat the lines:

"All His are thine to serve; Christ's brethren here  
Are needing aid; in them thou servest Him.  
The least of all is still His member dear;  
The weakest cost His life-blood to redeem.  
Yield to no 'party' what He rightly claims,  
Who on His heart bears all His people's names.

Be not men's servant, think what costly price  
Was paid that thou mayest His own bondsman be,  
Whose service perfect freedom is. Let this  
Hold fast thy heart. His claim is great on thee;  
None should thy soul enthral to whom 'tis given  
To serve on earth, with liberty of Heaven."

## CHAPTER 14

### CAUSES

What now are some of the causes of unscriptural extremes? Why are we at times tempted to carry matters to such lengths, in one direction or the other? We suggest that this is usually due to one or more of the following reasons:

1. Basically it is the result of one-sided teaching. Teaching educates the mind and moulds the character, especially when we are young and impressionable; and teaching which is unbalanced naturally produces unbalanced views and one-sided qualities of character. Therefore "cease my son to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Prov. 19.27).

2. We fail to exercise personal discernment as to what is right. We allow someone else, usually a favourite preacher or elder, to think for us. We act without having any real conscience before God ourselves. The result is that prejudices develop, we become partial to a particular line of teaching and slavishly follow a party. "There is always need for caution," says W. G. Turner, in his biography of Mr. Darby, "lest admiration of a Christian leader's intellect and spiritual qualities should be allowed to pass (unconsciously perhaps at first) into an unwarranted and dangerous deference to his authority, or even into a passive acquiescence in all his teachings, as though it were impossible for such a man to err in any point of faith or practice." Preoccupation with men was a chief cause of failure at Corinth, and is one of the rocks upon which the Taylor party today has foundered. "Therefore let no man glory in men" (1 Cor. 3.21), and again, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils" (Is. 2.22).

3. Where differences among Christians are involved, we become influenced by hearing only one side of a story. We are like the old Negro judge who proceeded to sum up and pass sentence after hearing one side of a case. Then when his mistake was pointed out, he sighed, "Ah doan lack to hear both sides. It interfares wi ma judgment." It is to be feared that many of the Lord's dear people are like the old Negro. But if we are to "judge righteous judgment" and be fair to all, we must consider with an unbiased mind each side of every case. "We

have two ears," said Matthew Henry, "to hear each side before we give judgment." It is much to be regretted that in some cases good men have been shut out and their reputation seriously hurt, without even being afforded an opportunity of speaking for themselves. Such cruel and unjust treatment does not pass unnoticed by a righteous God.

4. Decisions, serious and far-reaching, are made by the young and inexperienced. Whatever knowledge such may possess, they have yet to learn the great lessons of life. The ability to view things from every angle is born of experience. God does not put old heads upon young shoulders. In the shepherding of an assembly caution and wisdom, and still more caution and wisdom, are indispensable. Hence, "not a novice", is one of the qualifications of a bishop. The wise elder in correcting lesser evils will guard against introducing an element of division, which may be more hurtful than the evils themselves. This does not mean that wrong will be condoned, but that there will be a waiting upon God, that matters may be handled with tactful, godly care. Rehoboam trusted in the young men. They were hot-headed, intemperate, and dogmatic, and they drove the kingdom to death. What a lesson for us today!

5. We evince more zeal than knowledge. Like Peter protecting the Lord's person, we are ready to smite with the sword. Little did the Apostle know how unwelcome his friendly act would prove, or the carnality that it manifested. It was this Peter who a short time after denied with oaths and curses that he even knew the Lord—another example of unscriptural extremes. Let us therefore beware of fleshly zeal in God's things, and remember that zeal for the right must ever be tempered with spiritual knowledge. Zeal may fire us to outdo our brethren in using the sword upon others, but it will not preserve us ourselves from a fall in the solemn hour of temptation.

6. We misinterpret or misapply Scripture. Thus, failing to distinguish between the Father's table and the Lord's table, some quote Luke 15.22, 23 as authority for receiving all professing Christians to the Remembrance Supper. We have also known such passages as 2 Cor. 6.17; 2 Thess. 3.6; 2 Tim. 2.21; and Tit. 3.10 being quoted as a justification for division amongst assemblies which were quite free from moral evil and fundamental error. Not for one moment would we wish to weaken the full force of these verses, but it is very wrong and dishonest to misinterpret or misapply them, or to wrest them out of their contexts in any such manner.

7. We fail to distinguish between things essential and things non-essential. All matters concerning which our Lord has legislated are absolutely essential. If not essential to salvation, they are to obedience and Christian fellowship. The New Birth, Baptism, Breaking Bread, Separation, Orthodoxy in the Faith, Orderly Reception, Commendation, and Godly living are all indispensably essential. How can there be happy fellowship where any one of these is wilfully set aside? It is impossible. There are other indifferent matters, however, concerning which we are expressly forbidden to judge one another. This applies where through human ignorance the clear light of Scripture is lacking, or in cases where God has not been pleased directly to legislate, and we must use our spiritual judgment, provided, of course, that we do so in consistency with the general tenor of the Word and a good conscience. Such is the plain teaching of Rom. 14, in connection with the eating of meats and observing of days. The "strong" must not despise the "weak", and the "weak" must not judge the "strong". We are to manifest forbearance and tolerance one with the other in these things, as being under 'the law of love'. Not a few matters today come under this category. God has not fixed the hour of our Lord's Day Remembrance meeting, for example, nor has He stated how long it must continue. The choice of a hymnal, as also the kind of building in which we meet (whether a drawing-room, a rented house, or purchased hall), must be ours. In some assemblies the receptacle for the Lord's offering is placed near the door, in others it is passed round the circle of saints. In meetings in certain districts the same brother who gives thanks for the bread always gives thanks for the cup, but in other districts this rule does not obtain. There are sisters who believe their heads should be covered when audible prayer is offered in the home, as well as in the assembly (1 Cor. 11), but there are other equally godly sisters who do not. In all such cases we are not to pronounce judgment upon our brethren. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" (v. 4). While all this is true, we must repeat that we are not to do or introduce anything, under the pretext of liberty, that is inconsistent with the general tenor or principles of Scripture, or which may stumble a brother (1 Cor. 8). Where saints fail to distinguish between things essential and things non-essential, however, and expect everyone to do just as they do, spiritual pride is engendered, differences become magnified, and a most uncharitable extreme of fault finding, disparagement, and hurtful criticism ensues,



which not infrequently ends in bitter quarrels over trivial matters which, as an esteemed servant of Christ was wont to say, are 'not worth the buttons on our coats'.

8. We become so wearied of a certain line of things which we believe to be wrong, that in our recoil from it, we fly to the very opposite extreme. The tendency to this is strongly characteristic of human nature, as we have already seen. Thus, to furnish another example, Moses had to be cured of self-sufficiency in Ex. 2, then of insufficiency in Ex. 4. Because of how we are constituted, one wrong extreme drives us to another. Many a brother has become so sick of the rigid, legal attitude of Exclusivism, that he has chosen to unite with a company notorious for Liberalism. How we require to be upon our guard against this dangerous human tendency! And how we require to guard against driving others to wrong extremes by our immoderate attitude and lack of brotherly consideration! Many a good man has been turned away from the truth by the demeanour of those that profess it. Let us rather try to win our beloved brethren.

9. The last reason we suggest is that we fail to learn from the garnered experience of saints in the past. And what a wealth of experience history affords us!—not only the past 130 years of assembly life in modern times, but the New Testament record of the churches in apostolic times as well. With its danger signs before us, there is no reason why we should miss the way as did earlier pilgrims. If we do, there is no telling how far we may wander from the right path, and certainly we shall be without excuse.

## CHAPTER 15

### THE REMEDY

The question that must be rising in my reader's mind is "Is there any sure and satisfactory cure for this disproportion and overbalance to which we are all so manifestly disposed and of which we all have been verily guilty?" An interesting statement appeared in a recent Christian periodical entitled "Don't go to extremes" and as it attempts an answer to that question I give it here in full.

"The quaintness of the presentation of a truth often arrests one, where otherwise it might pass as commonplace, and be easily forgotten."

Such a presentation of truth is seen in Ezekiel 44.20. Let me pass it on for your consideration: "Neither shall they (the priests) shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads."

A passage like this pulls one up. It says as plainly as it can be said: "Don't go to extremes!"

Here are two priests. One is altogether shaven; the other has long flowing locks. Here are extremes: they are one-sided and both are wrong."

Here are two brothers. One is all soul, heart, fire, zeal, earnestness. He is impatient of the restraint that association with his brethren imposes. Divine principles as to fellowship and service are nothing to him. He is all for the salvation of the sinner, and cares for nothing beyond this. We may admire his zeal, but we deplore his one-sidedness; in this he is wrong.

The other is well instructed in the Word, he is all for the Church, and knows how everything should be done. He does not understand the zeal of his brother, love for souls does not seem to move his heart, he is a wet blanket to those who are seeking to spread the gospel. We may be thankful for his intelligence, but we wish he had more warmth of heart; he is one-sided, and that is wrong.

The former is in danger of superficiality, indifference to principles and worldliness.

The latter will be dogmatic, cold, dry, formal and possibly legal

or worldly, for it is extraordinary how departure from the divine balance of things tends to the same practical result. They may be as far apart as the poles as to their attitude to things, and yet strangely united in practice. They may envy, despise, and anathematise each other day by day, and be bed-fellows at night.

We do not want less zeal in the gospel, or less intelligence in or love of the truth, or regard for divine principles. We want more of such things all around. But how shall the one rightly balance the other, so that we may be saved from extremes?

We answer in one word, CHRIST. It is by being kept in living touch with Him.

In touch with Christ, each will value the other's service, will esteem the other better than himself, will seek to profit by what the other has learned of Christ; and so zeal will be tempered by intelligence, and intelligence be of practical value because warmed by zeal.

In touch with Christ, the evangelist will learn in a practical way that he is a gift from the ascended Lord to His Church, he will learn that his converts are saved for the Church, the Church that is the body of Christ.

In such case the teacher will value deeply the evangelist's work, and the evangelist will esteem much the teacher's work. Love will be at work. Hearty co-operation will be seen. The evangelist will not lose his zeal in the gospel; rather, since he knows the great end for which it goes forth, will it be enhanced, and his presentation of this gospel have a positive tone about it that will bear abundant fruit for God's glory. The teacher will not lose his aptitude to teach, but there will be more fervour and unction in the presentation of truth.

May our zeal in the gospel, and our love for the truth grow exceedingly, but "Don't be one-sided!"

In thus avoiding wrong extremes, our great Exemplar is Christ Himself. "Grace and truth" came by Him—not grace without truth, not truth without grace, and not truth and grace—but "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ". He was the fine flour of the meal offering, in Whom was nothing uneven, in Whom every grace was in proper relation with other graces, and in Whom no quality protruded, no moral glory outshone others. Everything was in perfect proportion. As the various colours converge into one all-glorious rainbow, so all the moral beauties of the saints down the ages meet in Him in divine perfection. Assailed by all the craft of satanically inspired men,

He ever kept a true and even balance. One example must suffice. Thinking to entangle Him, they asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?" Had he replied, "Yes," He would have been accused of betraying Jewish aspirations. Had He replied, "No," that would have been trumped up as sedition against the Emperor. But with a wisdom which astonished and silenced His adversaries, He replied, "Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22.21).

He is more than our Exemplar, however, He is our Food—antitype of the roast lamb of Exodus 12. Israel was there enjoined to feed upon the whole lamb, for nothing was to be left over till the morning. Thank God, each believer has a whole Christ upon the throne for himself. The head of the lamb would suggest His wisdom; the legs, His spotless walk; the inwards, His holy affections. As we thus feed upon Him in the Word, we unconsciously become like Him. His life is reproduced in our lives, and in our little measure we reflect His spiritual intelligence, His practical holiness, and His love for God and man. In passing, we may notice how this corresponds with the threefold division of John's First Epistle. The great subject of chapters 1 and 2 is LIGHT, of chapters 3 and 4 LOVE, and of chapter 5 LIFE. May we all know what it is increasingly to feast upon Him, the blessed heavenly lamb. We must guard against our natural inclination, however, to dwell almost exclusively upon one aspect of His person. This tends to make us one-sided and extreme, whereas the fruit of a well-balanced spiritual diet is an all-round full-orbed appreciation of our Divine Lord in His many moral glories.

Regarding Scripture itself, nothing is more beautiful than this same trait—the perfect evenness and balance of its message and of all it inculcates. In it, for example, Bible Study and prayer go hand in hand. Both are absolutely requisite if our spiritual life is to be in balance. So too, worship and service must each have its proportionate place. In reading Scripture we must not pick and choose special portions. "All Scripture is . . . profitable." Only by reading and studying every part of the Word can the mind of God be fully known and the Christian maintain a proper equilibrium. It is the Divine Library, containing Biography, History, Poetry, Prophecy, and Precepts, that by its knowledge "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2nd Timothy 3.17).

In the Apostle's injunctions also the same feature may again and

again be noticed. Thus while a disorderly brother is to be withdrawn from, the writer is careful to add, “yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2nd Thessalonians 3.15). Or to give one more example, while the man of God is to “purge himself” from evil teaching and teachers, the context enjoins that he must be “patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves” (2nd Timothy 2.21, 24, 25). Thus would our God guard us against all wrong extremes.

Thus we see that the remedy lies where all true success and harmony and blessing are stored, and available to us. In the Christian’s thinking and reasoning, the Mind of Christ must prevail. In the Christian’s walk and ways the example of CHRIST must prevail. In the Christian’s assembly relations the FEAR OF GOD and the LORDSHIP OF CHRIST must prevail. In having thus clarified the extremes and pin-pointed their dangers we have gone a long way in reaching the solution to the problem. But it now remains for the Christian to personally investigate his own thoughts and motives, his own walk and behaviour, his own relations with his fellow-believers and to judge and adjust them according to the mind of Christ, the example of Christ and the Lordship of Christ.

Someone has well said: “The truth” is a very comprehensive term. Ecclesiastical separation is but one small aspect of it, though an important one. The man who buys the truth in its fulness is always careful that what he says of others is the truth. Really, Christ is the embodiment of the truth. He said: “I am the truth.” So that to buy the truth is to manifest Christlike character in one’s life and ways.

James S. Tait has left us beautiful and pertinent words in his little poem based on Exodus 28.34:

“O for the grace that knows to suit  
 The outward sound to inward fruit:  
 That knows how well the music blends  
 When lips confess and life commends;  
 That, though with boldness coming brings  
 No reckless touch to holy things,  
 But hems the priestly garment well  
 With a pomegranate and a bell,  
 A pomegranate and a bell.”

May we then have grace to bring everything to the test of Holy Scripture, and be prepared to lay aside every opinion, principle, and practice, however cherished, popular or long entertained, which is not in full accord with that infallible guide.

No part of God's truth should be held with a slack hand. But grasp it all—and it has many parts—with equal firmness. If we by God's enabling hold our rudder true, and keep an even keel, His richest benediction will be upon us and the beloved assemblies with which through grace we are associated.

May it be so, for His glory.