

CHRISTIAN. UNITY:

A TREATISE ON

“BRETHREN,” THE CHURCH OF GOD,
AND MINISTRY,

*SHOWING THE PRESENT STATE OF BELIEVERS,
GENERALLY DESIGNATED “BRETHREN,”
AND THEIR POSITION IN RELATION TO OTHER CHRISTIANS.*

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P R E F A C E.

THE following chapters are the result of much prayer, and exercise of heart ; they are written with, at least, the desire to help to more real and practical unity, brotherly feeling, and Christlike spirit among the children of God. All these things are pleasing to Christ, according to His word, and good and pleasant to us, being according to the desires of the new nature ; and hence are means of proving that we are of God. We are prone to the current thought that such things can only be exhibited among those who perfectly agree, and follow with each other. There is a continual tendency to shut out from our midst everything that calls for grace and forbearance with each other, instead of being ready to embrace every opportunity of exhibiting these Christlike virtues.

Yet some anxiety has been entertained for fear that this should be taken as supporting or sanctioning the spirit of federation, and desire for peace and union at any price, which are so prevalent in Christendom at the present time. Which spirit savours more of Babel than of true Christianity, for it is based upon all kinds of evil doctrine ; and has as its object the alliance of religious bodies, composed, for the most part, of avowedly unconverted people ; and is characterized by disloyalty to Christ and disregard for His truth. Hence I here emphasize what I have sought to maintain throughout, viz., that separation from evil is the only scriptural ground of unity for God's people.

But the children of God I more especially write for, all alike, agree with this.

At the same time it is important to understand what separation from evil really means. It is not separation *from* children of God as desirous of doing the will of God as ourselves, but separation OF the children of God, and from the evil that is in the world. And it certainly does not mean collective perfection, any more than individual holiness means perfection in the flesh. There are many mistakes and failures that the Lord bears with in us, and that we should bear with in each other ; many wrongs and faults that the Lord graciously brings home to our consciences, and which we may help to bring home to one another, if we have grace to go down to each other's feet.

Since therefore there are all kinds of mistakes, failures, and faults,

even in a separated company of God's children, to be borne and dealt with in and by each other, by the spirit and grace of Christ; the question arises, where are we to draw the line? This is indeed a difficult thing to do, at least, with any precision, for cases differ so very much, and grace has a place, and we have to make a difference according to different states of soul sincerity or wilfulness, leader or led, etc. Indeed it is more a question of spiritual condition and moral principles than of lines of rigid rules.

However, the word of God is clear enough as to this much, viz., that a man though he be called a brother, who is *proven* a wicked person on account of immoral conduct, or on account of any false teaching such as affects the foundations of Christian doctrine, was not allowed a place in the early church communion, and therefore should not be allowed among those who gather on the principles of the early church—which are the only scriptural principles—however feeble a remnant they may be.

All this is implied in the following pages by the terms, “sound in the faith,” “sound in doctrine,” “not fundamental,” etc, which recur continually.

I know some will object to the word “Brethren” being used in a restricted sense, and more especially the distinguishing terms, “Open Brethren,” “Exclusive Brethren,” etc. I can only say to such, that my sympathies are with them in their objection. But with the desire to be explicit, I found it impossible to find any other appellation, or round-about way, whereby to express myself intelligibly; hence I thought it best to speak of things as they were known. Nevertheless, I would not have done so if I had thought it wrong in the Lord's sight. The state of things treated of is such as cannot be discussed without *some* distinguishing appellations; and, as such is the case, I thought we should accept the reproach of it, and avoid anything like affectation. I hope, therefore, that none will allow their minds to be prejudiced by this matter.

The main point and general object of the book is to take a glance at the existing state of things, and to bring the light of Scripture principles and precepts to bear upon it, with a view to show how the lovers of truth and holiness may dwell together, worship together, and walk together in unity, in the midst of a confused and corrupted Christendom,—which in itself would be a most effectual testimony. It is hoped, therefore, that the reader will keep this general object before him, and not impatiently lay the book on one side because of disagreement with some side issue.

I did not willingly set about such a work, and would rather have

chosen some more pleasant task ; knowing that many whom I love and esteem will not agree with much that I have been bound to state as being my honest and firm conviction. The work was pressed upon me by a deeply-felt need of something of the kind ; not only in my own soul, but as expressed by others. It is some encouragement to know that many are exercised in the direction of the following pages ; and many others, also deeply exercised, are thoroughly perplexed over the state of things, knowing not what to do, nor where to go. If such are helped to view things from a scriptural standpoint, apart from prejudice and party spirit, and thus are led to cultivate a more Christlike spirit towards the Lord's dear people, who love Him and His truth, I shall not regret any little labour bestowed upon the subject.

That such a work should be criticised is quite natural, and all that is desired is that both the criticism and the statements criticised may be submitted to the light of Scripture, by minds free from prejudice in favour of either side. In this way that which is right will be attested, and that which is wrong be shown as such,—a result which is most desirable.

It has been my desire and study to avoid party spirit on all sides, and to show that believers—*all* believers—are so intimately related to Christ and to each other, that, when anything is seen to be wrong, or that we may think wrong, in a believer or company of believers, we should rather look upon it as in our own family, and so mourn over it, and not be found using it to vindicate ourselves and condemn them in a party way.

Conscious of its many imperfections, the writer submits the work to the consideration and judgment of the Lord's people, looking to the Lord to bless whatever is of Himself, to the help of His own redeemed people.

J. H. B.

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CHRISTIAN UNITY.



INTRODUCTION.

IN days like the present, it is well to make our soundings and take our bearings, that we may know where we are, so as not to be carried far away from the good old path of obedience to our Lord by any current of party feeling, or allow ourselves to be the slaves of a theory, instead of the willing and devoted servants of our adorable Lord and Master.

In view of this I want, in the meantime, to say a few words more especially for those known as "The Brethren," as to their present state and condition.

But as all believers are brethren, and all associated with Christ as members of His body, I desire to write in such a way as to be profitable to all; desiring, while pointing out the failure of Brethren, not to encourage the prejudice and false impressions that are commonly entertained against them by Christians not amongst them. Desiring, too, that while dwelling upon the different companies of Brethren and their relative attitudes, I may do so in such a way as to at least draw our hearts nearer to each other, by a Christlike spirit and love that should be cultivated in every redeemed soul, and

which is prolific of those practical graces and virtues that made up His own life here on the earth. I say my desire is to draw our hearts thus nearer to each other, if not to unite our lips in His praises and our hands in His service, knowing well that the former is the progenitor of the latter. At the same time, I have no thought of compromising any truth or principle, and wish to be very pronounced against the petty theories or party feelings that have from time to time been so productive of strife and divisions among the people of God, from which the servants and service of Christ have suffered so much, and the simple sheep of Christ perplexed to their wits end, and many driven out into straying paths.

I would therefore remind my reader that all the redeemed—*i.e.*, all true believers—are brought into indissoluble relationship with our blessed Lord and with each other.

The true apprehension of this will enable us to look at the failure of any other company of Christians as our own, as well as the failure of the company we may be more immediately connected with in worship and service, and will lead us to take the general sin of the Church, the sin of all the people of God, as our own in real confession before Him. As I was confessing my sin and the sin of my people, said Daniel. And thus, instead of the sinful exaggeration of, and glorying in, the failure of a party of children of God with whom we do not meet, and instead of using such failure to condemn them and vindicate ourselves, we shall be confessing it as our own, and humbled on account of it.

And so, too, everything that is good and lovely in the conduct, and successful in the service of any other company of Christians, will be matter for joy and thankfulness on our part.

I wish it to be understood, then, that I count upon at least a measure of this Christlike spirit in my readers, as I go on to tell out freely and explicitly my firm conviction as to the present state of Brethren and their position in relation to other Christians, as well as the relative attitudes of the different parties of themselves.

That which has been called by some a want of principle in me, viz. : going from one party to another, has been the result of exercise (and helped one in drawing conclusions) which has led me to see the failure of all parties in the sad divisions, and, as I believe, the secret of that failure, yet it has led to an increase of love to them all, and, I trust, entirely freed me from the party spirit of any.

Personally, it has been through much trial and suffering at the hands of Brethren, that I have had to learn lessons which I am now thankful for ; but I intend not to dwell upon this. I would rather dwell on all the kindness and real fellowship I have experienced at their hands, if it helped my purpose to dwell upon either, for this latter, after all, has out-weighed the former.

Much has been written against "Brethren" by denominational leaders, which is not at all to be wondered at. And now and then one of themselves who has not met, perhaps, with the attention from them that he looked for, or who, indeed, may have been positively illtreated by them, has left, and turned round on them with a bitter spirit. Such adversaries have not failed to make use of their many failures against them. With this sort of thing I desire to have nothing to do. It is not "The Brethren" as a party, but as children of God and members of the body of Christ, and so as related to all

other Christians, and the truth they have, that I desire to be more taken up with ; and if I point out their failures and divisions, it is with the object of leading to repentance before God, and to profit by them at the present time. Christian unity is the subject before us, and I would remember that this takes in all true Christians ; but I view it in relation to those known as Brethren, because they have had, as I believe, the scriptural basis of it, though the presence of extraneous elements, and a lack of power and grace among them, have hindered the expression of it. When I say this I am not comparing them with other Christians, but with Christ and the Scriptures ; a test that will show how short we all come.

Part I.

RECOVERY OF TRUTH AMONG BRETHREN.

It is not my purpose to go into church doctrine and principles in this part of our subject ; these will follow.

But here we will dwell a little upon the historical and practical state of things.

And let us go back to the time when Brethren began to meet in the simple and, as we believe, scriptural manner which they have, or should have, pursued ever since ; for we shall see that there has been more or less departure on all hands. We will not dwell so much upon their history as their principles, only making just the references to the former that are necessary to the pursuit of the latter.

The history of God's people at all times presents to our view two things, viz., the sin and failure of man and the grace and forbearance of God. Again and again did God come in and work deliverance for His people of old, giving them many a fresh start in His own ways, and exhortations to obedience. But they soon forgot both His deliverance and the exhortations of His servants, and wandered off in their own paths, and rebelled against Him.

For an account of the repeated deliverance and repeated failure of Israel, read especially the Books of Judges and Samuel, with the 78th Psalm ; and Neh. ix.

The Church, alas ! has been too much like Israel in this respect. God has wrought again and again in His delivering and reviving power and grace among His people, recovering His truth to them and giving them fresh starts in His ways, but they have soon turned from the reality of His truth to the formality of carnal religion, from the simplicity that is in

Christ to human schemes of some kind. And those Christians known as Brethren (though all children of God really are brethren) are no exception to this rule.

In the early part of this century many of God's children were growing tired of the cold, dead, and formal state of things around them, and had a deep longing to know more of the blessed Lord and His truth, and desire for real fellowship with each other. This led them to search the Scriptures in dependence upon the Spirit of God, both for instruction in His mind and food for their souls; in this the Lord richly blessed them as He always will.

Many of the Lord's people in different parts of the country and unknown to each other were thus exercised, and the want of reality, freshness, and power in the denominations around them, with the desire for real Christian fellowship, brought them together outside these denominations for the study of the Word of God and prayer, in private house or rooms rented for the purpose, and for proclaiming to others what they themselves thus gathered. The number grew rapidly, for many thirsty souls were drawn together to hear the word so freshly and powerfully preached from those who had got what they preached from the Lord Himself, and enjoyed it in their own souls.

Men of deep spirituality and great ability were among them, and there was no want of gift to deal out to others what they themselves gathered by their profound study of the Scriptures in the presence of God; and the whole Church has benefited by the results.

All true Christians have reason to be thankful for the clearness with which gospel truths have been set forth by them, as well as the rich unfoldings of God's wonderful counsels. Some things that these brethren learned from the Scriptures which has been shut out by a ceremonial and denominational religion from the practice of the Church, was that Christ Himself is the centre of gathering for His people, and the director of His servants, and that the Lord's

people in the early days of Christianity gathered around Him on the first day of every week to break bread in remembrance of His death ; and this they began to practise in the most simple and unpretending manner, as a few of the Lord's people who desired to follow what they saw to be the teaching of His own word.

Many blessed truths, which had long been neglected by the Church, through her want of interest in the word of God, were recovered by prayer and study of the Scriptures ; truths that have been proclaimed far and wide, and are at the present time most dear to the saints of God ; such as the true unity, nature, and calling of the Church, the dispensations of Scripture ; the coming of Christ, and especially His coming *for* the Church, as well as the difference between the hope of the Church, and the future of Israel, and other prophetic distinctions and applications.

The early writings of Brethren, as compared with the dates of others, will show how God was pleased to disclose some of these truths to Brethren, and to bring others out in a more clear light than they had been seen before.

SIMPLICITY AND POWER.

It is indeed refreshing to read the early writings of these dear brethren ; to see the way they felt the low condition of things, to trace the primitive simplicity, freshness and power that seems to have characterized them. There was in them a courage which led them to go unhesitatingly against all current thought, combined with a humility which was engendered by a deep sense of the failure around them and their own dependence upon the Lord. And with the desire to be loyal of heart to the Lord, and faithful to the truth He was teaching them, there was a deep love, and an enlargement of heart toward all His people, such as could only arise from a deep sense of the most intimate relationship that exists between them.

At first they seem to have had no intention of breaking entirely from the churches around them; for there were Christians from all denominations among them who nevertheless retained their denominational connections, even while thus meeting.

But as they became more enlightened they found it impossible to retain their connection with churches made up of believers and unbelievers together, and they saw too that the people of God generally were great losers by following a human instead of divine order of ministry.

These considerations led them to break their denominational connection with the churches, but not by any means their intercourse and fellowship with Christians.

Though this gave them more the aspect of a distinct community, and in the eyes of others, even another denomination, and hence exposed them to opposition from many quarters, yet they did not look upon themselves thus, for they were beginning to learn what the Church of God really is, viz.: that it is composed of all true believers—embraces all the brethren (*i.e.*, all the saved) of any and every denomination.

Hence their hearts were enlarged to all such and, more, their hands were extended towards them; for they looked upon themselves only as a very feeble remnant of God's Church on earth, which they knew was formed by all the children of God throughout the world, irrespective of the name by which they were known.

They saw the real and vital unity that existed between Christ and all redeemed by His precious blood. But they saw, too, that Christians had failed to own this in testimony before the world; that the Church was in utter ruin as to manifested unity.

They felt this as their own sin, and did not begin to attach any particular blame to any special party. But they gathered around Christ, simply and humbly, as a few among the many of God's children, and so far from despising other Christians

because they were not with them, the apprehension of these things enlarged their hearts towards all Christians; and so they found a way to reach them with the truth they had to preach to them, in their churches, mission rooms, and Bible classes. They were ready to give a helping hand in the proclamation of the truth, for they saw that the responsibility of the Lord's servant extended to all Christians, that if he is a gift of Christ, he is a gift to the whole Church.

Any *children of God* were welcomed to their meetings and their fellowship around the Lord's table, providing they were sound in the faith. For there were no sectarian walls of human tradition or conditions extraneous to the word of God. Their only conditions for fellowship were life and godliness, and these are scriptural.

Thus they took the place of humility in the midst of confessed failure and ruin, a place in which God could bless them and make them a blessing, and so He did, blessed be His name!

Oh, that they had kept this simple and unpretending place, and were in it now! Oh, that they had nourished and maintained this humble spirit and contrite heart!

But no, such has not been the case. The history of man's failure repeats itself in every economy, and after every fresh revival. So it has been with "Brethren." Do any of us question this? *Can* we question it? Should we not manifest our blindness in attempting to do so?

OCCUPATION WITH ECCLESIASTICAL POSITION.

Alas! we have soon to enter upon a different stage of this history; the scene changes much too soon; the enemy begins early to act successfully upon the flesh within our brethren—upon the evil tendencies of the human heart, to arrest progress in the ways of the Lord.

Having increased in numbers, and hence attracted the attention of the public to some extent, the enemy soon took

advantage of the occasion to make these believers think themselves of some importance, and thus to occupy them with themselves and their own position, which opened wide the door for party feeling and strife, these becoming more decided and strengthened by difference of judgment on certain matters and different interpretations of certain passages of Scripture. For when once party feeling is allowed, among the saints, to go unjudged, that which would otherwise be only an occasion for grace and forbearance with each other becomes the occasion of strife and division. There was thus soon a departing from the simplicity that is in Christ, and when error arose which called for the united action of Brethren against it, it became the means of division among them; they were not in a condition to deal with it unitedly. The development of this wrong doctrine found Brethren in a state of party feeling such as rendered unity of judgment almost impossible, and hence the very people that desired to give some expression to the unity of believers were themselves divided.

It would not serve my present purpose to go into the merits or demerits of the teaching and circumstance that occasioned this division in detail, let it suffice here to say that it certainly was error that should have been judged by the Assembly of God. At the same time I am convinced that it might have been judged by the Assembly without dividing the same, had it not been for the party spirit already existing.

This is proven by the fact that both parties have denounced the said error ever since; and whatever shades of difference in judgment and understanding may have existed, it is my firm conviction that the only real and substantial barrier to inter-communion between the two parties known as Exclusive Brethren and Open Brethren is strong party feeling; that there is nothing in what they own and teach, or in the principles of their gathering, that would form a scriptural reason for their refusal of fellowship with each other. Things that would call for the exercise of forbearance and

longsuffering with each other, such as nothing but the grace of Christ could sustain, there may be and always will be. Be it understood that I am not saying that there may not be misunderstanding and misapprehension of truth on either or both sides. What I want to make plain is, that not only have all the fundamental truths of Christianity been maintained by both parties, but the simple principle of gathering and the scriptural order of ministry are alike followed in the main by both.

But, alas! the failure and division does not stop here, though for some thirty years the Lord went on working amongst "Brethren" in a very special way,—and who would dare to say that the Lord was with one party and not with the other or that He owned the position of the one and not that of the other? That there was for some years more gift with the party known as Exclusives, I don't think even the other party will deny. But the gift has not kept them together, for they are now broken up into some half-dozen parties.

From the time of the division of which we have been speaking there seems to have been a lack of that simplicity, freshness, and power that characterised Brethren previous to it: ecclesiasticism occupied a larger place, relative claims and party vindication neutralised to a great extent the verdant freshness and brotherly love that were apparent before. One great object in the ministry of each party has been to establish its own claims to a right Church position, against those of the opposite party; and hence there has been a strong, bitter feeling between them, and an enmity much greater than that which exists between either side and the most unorthodox sect. How all this bespeaks the work of the enemy! How very much against the spirit and grace of Christ!

Nevertheless, a real love for the truth, and energy in the propagation of the same, remained with both these companies of Brethren in greater or less degree: and most refreshing it

is to such as are sound in the faith to trace the faithful testimony borne by them to truths that are so precious to us. The Lord has been graciously working with them, and has not treated them in the same way that they have each other. What a relief it is to the heart, after reviewing the history of our own failures, to turn to the gracious ways of our blessed Lord, with us in it!

THE PRESENT DIVIDED STATE OF BRETHREN.

As we have observed, divisions did not stop at the one we have been dwelling upon. There are now in existence five or six parties of Brethren who will have no fellowship with each other; and each arrogating to itself the exclusive right of being the true Assembly of God. In addition to these another party is just being formed by a secession of some few intelligent, and I believe sincere, but misguided brothers from among those known as "Open." Perhaps this last is the most pretentious in spirit and arrogant in claim. Their theories will pass under review further on.

Such is the existing state of things; such is the failure of "Brethren." Six or seven parties, and each party taking a self-vindicating course, and that in a spirit of self-complacency (I am here speaking of the parties and not individuals among them, for there are bright exceptions individually). What a state of things! thank God that His grace superabounds over all, and He is working out His purpose notwithstanding all, and let us magnify His grace!

But the all-important thing for us is how to act for God in the midst of the existing state of things. Some would take us back to this question and that question, or some other question that was the means of dividing the saints of God years ago; thus making use of such past difficulties to perplex the minds of saints and to perpetuate divisions. But the

great question to my mind is, what is the *present* state of things? I have to act in-the midst of these. I want to know what the Lord would have me to do in the circumstances in which I am found, and surely we should look at things in the light of Scripture for this, and not in the light of historical questions *and* Scripture. *No*, let the light of the word of God shine on the state of things around me and it will shew me my path in the midst of the same.

If I wish to form a godly judgment about a state of things that existed fifty years ago, I bring the Scripture to bear upon the historical account of the same and so form my judgment; but is it right or safe to commit myself to that judgment for guidance in the midst of the *present*, and very different state of things?

We find ourselves then in very perplexing circumstances. However clear we may be that Christ is the only centre of gathering for His people, that the simple way "The Brethren" meet (if they were only simple in it) as members of the body of Christ around Himself, leaving room for exercise of any gift the Lord may have given to any, and that only true believers should be in fellowship at the Lord's Table, and that even those should be sound in the faith and godly in life; I say, however clear we may be as to all this, we are thrown into great difficulty on account of the practical state of things that meets our eyes all around us, six or seven parties all professing the same principles and meeting in the same way, all sound in the fundamentals of the gospel, and scriptural in their mode of gathering.

If we can join one of these parties and share their party spirit, in denunciation of all the rest, the difficulty is obviated.

But the more clearly the unity of believers and the true ground of gathering is apprehended and desired, the less easy this becomes.

And where there is entire absence of party feeling, and

the presence of the spirit of Christ, with a love for His people, because they are His, it becomes practically impossible. It is this that causes the difficulty to one who cultivates the spirit of Christ toward all His people, and will not share in the party spirit of any.

Oh, for more of that real love for our brethren that is inseparable from love to Christ! and that real fellowship with them that is according to the desires of the new nature, such as will not allow anything to hinder it but persistence in real sin, proven such by the word of God, and then will do all possible to recover one's brother from it, which is done most effectually by making the sin my own in confession before God, and considering myself lest I also be tempted. In this case I shall not go to my brother or brethren in a censorious spirit, as if I were entirely proof myself against what has befallen him or them, but in the spirit of meekness and humiliation.

But a word of explanation is needed here. I do not believe one bit in that false charity which will make light of evil and go on with anything and anyone. This is as much unlike Christ as the hard Pharisaical spirit which we desire to avoid.

But because there is this exercise of false love let us not use that as an excuse for the want of true divine love. I believe the child of God should be most pronounced against evil, and yet with such a sense of his own proneness to it as will lead to a tenderness of manner and tone in dealing with his brother or brethren about it—a gentleness sustained only by the grace of Christ in the heart, such as must have a telling effect.

Yet I believe that the zeal of a Phineas is not out of place in a child of God, when sin, such as defileth God's holy heritage, is wilfully persisted in. And under certain circumstances we are to avoid some and not company with others.

I most certainly do not believe in that pandering, cowardly sort of spirit which talks about Christianity as if it tolerated anything and everything and had nothing of its own to maintain—as if a Christian was a man who had nothing to stand up for, nothing to require fixedness of purpose, stamina of character, or valour of soul. Let those who will, indulge such a cowardly spirit; but I desire to be “a good soldier of Jesus Christ” and stand up with courage and firmness for that which belongs to Him.

But, allowing all this, yet I am fully convinced that Brethren, among themselves, have been exercising a hard Pharisaical spirit under the plea of it. Party spirit and ill-feeling have been present and on the watch for a handle—some disagreement of interpretation or difference of judgment in discipline has afforded opportunity for such party spirit and ill-feeling to bring a charge of false doctrine, or allowance of evil, against the opposite party, in the most censorious and vindictive spirit, which has soon been retaliated, and hence resulted in strife and often ended in division.

The same Scriptures have been quoted by each party against the other. Each party has been “standing for the truth,” “zealous for the honour of the Lord,” and found it necessary to “avoid them which caused division!” This course has been pursued so far as to rend hearts by the breaking of most intimate friendships; and so alienating the hearts of those who had been in the most sweet fellowship from one another, as to cause them to pass each other in the street without recognition, and even to put members of the same family off speaking terms with each other. Thus the two parties go on, each professing to be on the right ground and denouncing the other as off it. But the absence of a Christlike spirit towards each other betrays the secret cause. While it cannot be doubted that there is a sincere desire on *both sides* to walk in the truth: which also helps to manifest the real cause, *i.e.*, they have committed themselves to party spirit, they have cherished

ill-feeling against each other till they can go on no longer together; this seems to be the real cause, whatever the occasion may be.

Thus it is that party spirit is always ready to lay hold of something to vindicate itself, as also ill-feeling is to avenge itself.

Yes! charges of false doctrine or allowance of sin are manufactured out of maybe a slight misinterpretation, through want of light, of some passage or passages; or some little difference of judgment, and all the Scripture which gives instruction in regard to true charges and real cases are brought forward to back up these fictitious cases and to justify the conduct of Brethren in their cutting off, or separating, when a small measure of the spirit of Christ and a little forbearance with each other would have put the whole matter right.

Is this not so? Cannot hundreds testify to the truth of it? Are there not standing witnesses to the truth of what I have said in the many different companies of Brethren, who are not in fellowship with each other, and yet all alike sound in fundamental truth and desirous of maintaining the *holiness* of the Assembly by excluding unbelievers and professed believers who can be proven guilty of wickedness, from their midst? and yet all kinds of charges of false doctrines, etc., have been brought against these parties by each other. I say is not this a standing witness to the truth of what I have said?

It is a melancholy thing to dwell upon; but surely it should be faced, in order for our humiliation before God and the amendment of our ways in relation to each other.

Shall we continue, dear brethren, to pursue a course so dishonouring to our Lord, and so discreditable to Christianity and so much to our own loss? May we learn a lesson from what has happened in the history of those known as "Brethren" that we may act more in the fear of God, the grace of Christ, and the spirit of self-judgment.

THE REMEDY FOR THE PRESENT DIVIDED STATE.

Many there are who mourn over the state of things, and agree with what has been said about the same, viz., that ill-feeling and party spirit have been the great factors, and not false doctrine, in bringing about the divisions among Brethren. These are praying that the Lord will graciously bring about healing; they long for it, they know it is according to His mind, they think of His prayer in John xvii. Others there are who feel and own the evil of such divisions, yet say that things must remain as they are; it is no use trying to put them right, that the Lord alone can do this, which is true; but is this not rather shirking our responsibility? The Lord alone can convert souls, but this is not used as a reason why we should not be exercised about them, or why we should not preach to them, and persuade them. While the Lord's express desire is that His people should be united, and His word exhorts us to seek and maintain that unity, surely we should be exercised about it, and feel our responsibility in connection with it.

But there are also others who think that there are just and scriptural reasons for the divisions, and hence have no desire for unity and fellowship outside their own party, which party is thought to be on the only ground of scriptural unity. These think that the only ground of scriptural unity is the ground which they already occupy. Or, perhaps, we should rather say that they think themselves the only people on that ground. Satisfied as they seem to be in this thought yet I am far from saying that they are hopeless, for the eyes of many of them have lately been opened to see differently.

But perhaps it will be well to say a few words about the different companies and their relations to the Lord and to each other.

When I say that each company is sound in the faith and desirous of maintaining the truth, I am far from meaning thereby that there is perfect agreement of interpretation of the whole of Scripture; and when I say that each company has a desire to maintain the holiness of the assembly, I don't mean that all have exactly the same mode of procedure in reception into their fellowship or exclusion from it, or that the position is viewed from the same standpoint by every company; for much that is not *in accordance* with the principles of truth has been brought in here on all sides, while the principles themselves have been held by all. No. What is meant is, that in the main the scriptural order of gathering and discipline is followed; the same zeal and earnestness in the maintenance of fundamental truth is observed. Indeed if Brethren as a whole would only cast aside their prejudice, party spirit, and ill-feeling, and meet each other in the spirit of Christ, they would find that their differences are not nearly so great as is imagined.

Party spirit and ill-feeling magnifies minor differences while the spirit of Christ minimizes them.

But what we have to face now is our *present* condition before God. Here are the divisions, here are the several companies. What should we do in the midst of this state of things?

Of all the parties of Brethren I have referred to as gathered to the Lord's name, I do not know one that I could not remember the Lord's death with, and I would do so with all if they would allow me, for I do not know of any fundamental error amongst them. It would matter not to me what they call themselves, or what others call them—Plymouth, Bethesda, Close or Open, etc., etc.—so long as they were saints of God, and gathered simply to Christ Himself. If they take a right place in relation to Christ and His word, this is all I should look for. If I begin to inquire as to their position in relation to other companies

of saints gathered in the same way, I am sure to be perplexed. The former and not the latter should determine my course.

I find that they all as companies value and love the truth. There may be difference of judgment on some, perhaps on many points, but not affecting the foundation.

I know this, by many, will be considered a great want of principle and of fidelity to Christ; but to me it is just carrying out what I believe to be Divine principles, and the only way to carry them out, as I seek to show in the following pages.

The principles of unity in worship, sympathy, and testimony, as taught in Scripture, take in "All who call on the Lord out of a pure heart," "All who love our Lord Jesus Christ." And all based upon, and springing out of a unity which God Himself has formed, which is most absolute in its character. If I would bear any testimony to the truth that "there is one body," I must own all the members of that body not only in the sympathy of my heart, but in the practical expression thereof in my life, as far as possibility will allow; and nothing but error of a fundamental character will justify me for the disavowal of fellowship with any few saints gathered simply to Christ, or with any individual who loves our Lord Jesus Christ and His truth—two things which always go together, though the latter may not be well known, yet what is known is loved.

In the sects around us it is well known that many of the different churches are composed largely of people who are avowedly not converted, and hence not members of Christ's body at all; this, I need not say, is a very different thing from a few saved people, children of God gathered together as members of the body of Christ. Nevertheless we must make a difference between the systems themselves and many of our brethren, members of the body of Christ, who are in them; as we must also between ecclesiastical association

with them, and the work of the Lord's servant among them.

But as regards the different parties of Brethren; they are not perfect by any means, and there may be things among them that many may not be able to approve. But we believe they are on the foundation, and are (as far as we can judge) lovers of the truth, gathering to Christ Himself in separation from evil doctrinally, and morally, by a scriptural discipline, and own the presence of the Holy Ghost dividing to every man severally as He will. This is not peculiar to any one company of Brethren, but common to all. The only way therefore to testify effectually against the sectarian barriers and party spirit we have been speaking of, is to be willing to have fellowship with *all*. And this does not say that one approves of everything that is done by all, or any one of them. If on account of having had fellowship with one gathering, others will not receive one, that is their responsibility.

If the unity of the Spirit be confounded with uniformity of knowledge, of judgment, of light, or of action, we shall never have either; but if we cultivate the spirit and grace of Christ in our dealing with each other, the unity of the Spirit will be manifested by our grace and forbearance one with the other when differences of judgment and individualities come in.

We need to remember that, as well as all the saints forming one body, we are individually members in particular, and all members have not the same office. Nothing is more foreign to the body of Christ, and contrary to the Scriptures, than that insipid sameness which is sometimes given as the meaning of the unity of the Spirit and oneness of mind. The very word unity implies a close combination of *different* parts brought into juxtaposition and correlative offices, and into harmony of operation. It "is not one member, but many members" making one body.

It must be wrong to set the unity of the Spirit and oneness of mind in opposition to that diversity of which God Himself is the Author. It is in acknowledgment of the individual differences of office, of gift, of word, of light, of knowledge, etc., that we are to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit.

If this is not seen we shall be still striving with each other about our individual differences of gift, of office, of work; and interfering with each other's individual responsibility and persuasions of mind before God; and by this means party spirit and divisions will still be increased and the state of things will become worse. We look around us already and see many companies of God's people standing aloof from each other; and each flattering itself that it is the only company that is faithful to Christ and His word—the only company on divine ground. Each party claims to be the antitype of the remnant who returned from Babylon, under Nehemiah, to build the wall; and so they—in each party—exhort one another to buckle up, and go on building with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other, and think themselves the only builders of the wall. But who are they fighting against? Is it Sanballat and Tobiah (Neh. iii. 4), those who were grieved to see the wall being built, and wilfully did all they could to hinder and oppose the work? This I believe is so. But they are also fighting against those who desire to see the wall built and are labouring for that purpose. Those known as Brethren all desire to build and maintain the wall of separation from evil; yet they fight against each other with greater energy than they do against the avowed enemies of the truth of God. The spectacle presented by Brethren as a whole would be better figured if we suppose Nehemiah and the remnant, instead of fighting against Sanballat and Tobiah, turning their swords against each other.

But what we have to face now is the present condition of things before God. To our sin and shame, we are in a divided

state; we have before our eyes the several companies who have cut each other off and still denounce each other as being no longer gathered on divine ground. Now, how does the Lord view all this? How do these several meetings stand in relation to Him?

We have seen what their relation to each other is practically, how entirely they disown and discard each other; so much so, that if a child of God goes from one party to another for fellowship, he is not allowed to return without repenting of his sin and agreeing that the said party has been rightly cut off.

These parties have most decidedly cut each other off, and, therefore, will have no fellowship with each other.

Now, then, the great question after all is, Can the Lord be committed to all this? Of course *each party* says it is standing for the truth against the others, and the conclusion is that, therefore, the Lord is with them and not the others; and this conclusion is arrived at by *each party!* And if an unprejudiced person, entirely free from the factious and party spirit on all sides, and a man of spiritual mind, well acquainted with the truth, was set to judge between them, he would have a difficulty to know which party was standing most purely and really for the truth.

He might find some little difference of understanding, perhaps some novel view is taken of some particular passage or passages, it may be denying nothing, but just failing to make distinctions where they should be made, or making them where they should not be made.

The judgment of such an one would doubtless be that the strife should cease; there is really nothing to contend for between them, though there may be much in regard to which they may, and should, help each other.

Those who disagree need not receive or help on the views they do not approve. It only requires the grace of Christ, and a little "lowliness and meekness with longsuffering, forbearing

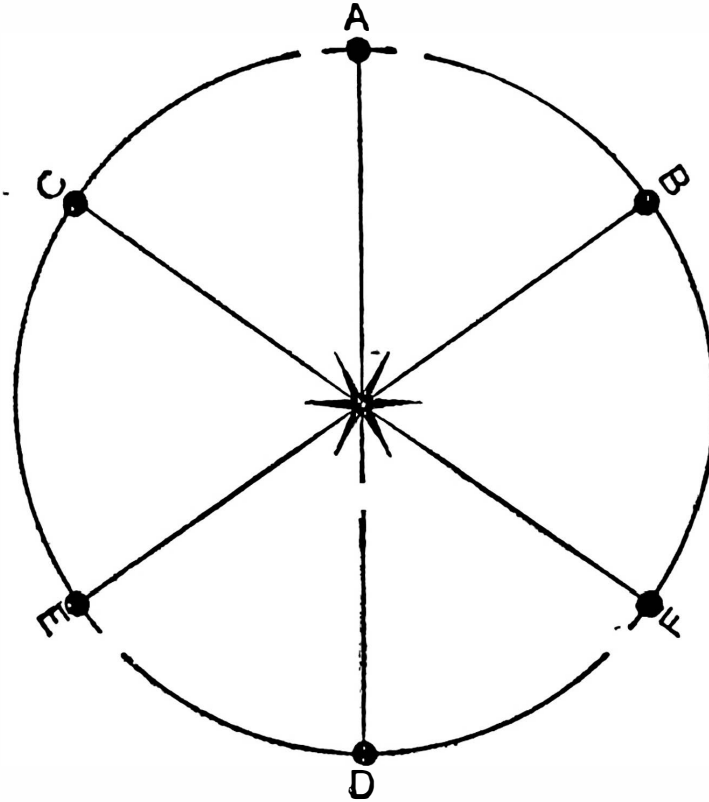
one another in love," and in a little while it will be seen that the views will come to nothing, no truth will be forfeited. And if there happens to be that in the views which is true, all will be benefited by them sooner or later; but to strive about them is only to give them such prominence as will strengthen the party feeling on each side.

It is just things that might be settled in this way that have led to most of the divisions among Brethren, especially the recent ones. I would not say this about the views that led to the divisions of 1848. The ground I take as to this is, that whatever confusion there may have been as to the way things were done, yet both parties judged the evil doctrine, and at the present time (and I maintain that I have to act in the midst of the present state of things) both parties discard the views that were then set forth. Some were slower to see the evil than others, but when seen both parties were willing to deal with it. The permanent disagreement was mainly over the way it should be dealt with, or more correctly, the way saints should be treated who took different attitudes towards it.

My experience in gatherings of the Lord's people teaches me that where real and proven evil doctrine or practice is in question, there has been little or no difference of judgment about it in any one of the different parties, and I think my experience as to this is a little wider than that of most Brethren, for I have been, as many would say, unprincipled enough (but, as I should say, free enough from party spirit) to go in and out among several companies of Brethren during the last few years. We must always remember that evil charged must be proven before saints are responsible to act against it.

But we come back to the important point, where is the Lord in relation to all? Will He commit Himself to what we have seen to be the conclusion of each several meeting? Will He cut off a meeting simply because another meeting does so?

And if when we have cut it off, He still owns it, the evil is with us. I will seek to give a geometrical illustration of what I mean here.



The star in the centre of the above diagram represents the Lord; the dots round the outer line represent the different gatherings; the lines connecting the dots and the star represent the link between the gathering and the Lord, around whom the saints meet; the line connecting the dots to each other represents the intercommunion of gatherings. It will be observed that the most important link is that which connects each gathering with the Lord, and this should be the basis of the link represented by the outer line, viz., intercommunion with each other, and while the former is intact, the latter ought not to be broken.

The break in the circle between A and B and A and C is supposed to represent the fact that A has cut B and C off by

the party spirit, and perhaps for the petty difference of which we have been speaking.

Still it will be observed that the lines shewing the link between the Lord and each gathering remain intact. A has cut off B and C, but the Lord has not, therefore A has done wrong, and the meetings are still connected with each other really by the lines which connect each with the Lord, which surely is the most important.

At the same time an assembly may, by the allowance of evil in doctrine or practice, get into such a state as will not only warrant other assemblies to separate from it, to allow no intercommunion with it, but will render it incumbent upon them to do so.

By the allowance of sin, which is fully proven by the denial of the doctrine of Christ, the course of other gatherings is made clear.

It is certain that when evil is manifested in a gathering and yet connived at by the same, that the Lord will not own such a meeting, even as a remnant gathering, though He will bear long with it and not give it up till it has become corrupt in doctrine or practice, and will even then go on appealing to individuals in it. The manifested yet unjudged sin in the gathering represented by D is a proof to F and E that the Lord has cut the line that represents communion with Him. He has disowned it, for it has ceased to hold fast His word and not deny His name ; therefore those gathered saints who desire to do so can go in with it no longer. They do not by a formal and judicial act cut it off, Scripture gives no authority for this, but they hold no communion and maintain a scriptural separation from it. The unjudged sin is their warrant for doing so.

I am conscious of the weakness of the above illustration, but I believe it sets forth a true principle, as far as it goes, and may help some to understand the same. It is difficult to show by illustration or by argument the basis of a fellowship

which to be real must be spontaneous. We cannot bring about real fellowship with each other, or with gatherings and practical unity, by rigid rules or divisive means. This can only be brought about by the cultivating of the spirit of Christ; the going on in communion with Himself; the feeding upon His word in His presence and thus entering into His thoughts about all His own, seen as they are engraven upon His heart before God. It is this that gives all a place in our hearts and deepens our desire towards them. This is very different from a cold formal recognition or paternal owning of each other. Alas! we have come to make a good deal more of our position than our condition of late, and hence a sectarian spirit has been imbibed, and we have drank pretty deeply into it.

“The place of separation,” “Divine ground,” “the ground of the one body,” “a called out company,” and similar phrases are all adapted to a sectarian use, and the word fellowship is used in such a party and conventional way that the secretness and reality of it is rarely known. Brethren talk about being “in the fellowship” and “out of the fellowship” in just the same way that sects around them speak of “in our fellowship,” or “out of our fellowship.”

No matter how dead, cold and formal a brother may be in his soul; no matter what want of personal devotedness in his every-day life, he is in “the fellowship,” and *therefore* we may have fellowship with him. But, on the other hand, it matters not how earnest, energetic, gifted and devoted in the cause of Christ a brother may be, if he is not “in the fellowship” “not with us,” we must have no fellowship with him. A brother said to me a few days ago concerning a devoted and faithful servant of Christ: “I thank God for such a man, but I could have no fellowship with him in his work!” That is, he would thank God for what he could have no fellowship with!! I know there may be certain ways of carrying on the Lord’s work adopted by some which others cannot conscientiously and happily associate themselves with, perhaps this is what is

meant; though this may be the case with those in the most intimate church fellowship with each other. But I will not anticipate another part of our subject. This sectarian use of fellowship is carried to an absurd, yea, a wicked extreme. It makes Christianity consist in regular attendance at one particular place of worship, with avoidance of all others, rather than being something which affects the whole life and conduct of a man in any and every relationship in respect to God and man.

There are at the present time different companies of Brethren gathered in the same way and propagating the same truths, yet because of party strife and contention about some point of difference that a little grace and forbearance with each other would have swept away, they have no fellowship with each other—not only as meetings but as individuals; brothers who have enjoyed sweet communion together in past times now pass each other in the street as if they were entire strangers to each other.

To stop and pass a word would be looked upon as very wrong, and to shake hands or eat with each other would be considered a sin for which the gathering would demand confession, in order for continuance in communion with it. Can anything be more sad than this?

Redeemed souls who love the Lord Jesus Christ alike, who are in their measure seeking to serve and follow Him; alike sound in the fundamentals of Christianity, yet allowing some little difference to come in and act upon them in this way, and become the occasion of the most un-Christlike spirit, the most bitter feeling, and the most despicable conduct! Is this Christianity, dear brethren? Away with such childish play, such pettishness, not to say wickedness!

Shall we fritter away our time in inventing and quarrelling over such petty differences, while there is so much *real* error and wickedness around us, the withstanding of which so urgently calls for our united effort and our manly courage?

Here is something to fight against, ye lovers of the truth ; ye who are zealous for the doctrine of Christ.

Why strive and fight over hairsplitting trifles that chiefly consist in misunderstandings of each other, while the foundations are attacked by the enemies of Christ and of the truth ?

If we want to show our zeal for the truth here is an opportunity ; but no, we seem to leave the enemies of the truth to do their devastating work while we quarrel with the lovers of it.

Now I want to say a few words about the place of blessing at the present time. No brother with his eyes open and his conscience exercised can deny that the church in her testimony here has failed, yea, has become a complete ruin. The place our brethren took at first recognised this general failure, but saw at the same time a resource for a feeble remnant who desired to do the will of God in such scriptures as Matthew xviii., "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst;" and Tim. ii., where the believer is exhorted to depart from iniquity, to purge himself from dishonourable vessels and call upon the Lord with all who do so out of a pure heart. So Brethren gathered together simply to the Lord's name, while confessing the general failure. They presumed nothing, but with a sense of dependence they met around the Lord, in humility before Him and love to all His. Thus they put themselves in a place where the Lord could and did bless them and made them a blessing.

But very soon, as we have before observed, ecclesiastical pretensions began to come in, and have gone on growing ever since Brethren got occupied with themselves, as being the only people in obedience, as bearing a unique testimony, and began to set other children of God at a great discount because they were "not with us."

Thus they seem to have lost sight of the fact that they were only a few of the many of God's people. And if a few who saw the truth and how the whole Church had come short

of it, surely they should have been of all the most humble. But no, the knowledge that should have humbled them they have used to exalt themselves, and for this cause no doubt, the Lord's chastening hand has been upon them: while the very truth that they boast most in is that in which they have most signally and grievously failed, viz., the unity of the Church! and therefore they become guilty of the worst form of sectarianism. So much is this the case that history records no one company of Christians who have divided into so many parties, and I am bold to say that at the present time you cannot find a more narrow and sectarian spirit anywhere than in some parties of Brethren. And yet in their principle and mode of gathering they are much nearer the scriptural order of things than any of the denominations around them.

But, after all, what is this if there is not the corresponding spiritual power, moral condition, and devotedness, love to the Lord's dear ones generally, and interest in the whole cause of Christ?

The Jews were following out the letter of the word of God in what is recorded about the feast of tabernacles in the seventh chapter of John's gospel. Had anyone asked them for their authority for keeping such a feast, they could have turned to chapter and verse for what they were doing, and the time and manner of doing it; yet at that very time they were rejecting the Lord Jesus, the only One who could bring about what the feast typified, they were seeking His life!

It is possible to be found following out the truth in form without knowing the spirit and power of it in our souls.

Another word as to the different companies of Brethren. It is sometimes asked, Can we not come together for general humiliation and get the breach healed? It is no doubt a right spirit that leads to this enquiry, and oh, that it could be so! but past experience teaches us that this generally ends in worse failure because of what we are.

What, then, is to be done? We have seen that the chief

barriers between the different companies of those gathered to Christ, in the main on scriptural principles, are composed of prejudice and party feeling. Take these barriers away, and let each company take its place as simply gathered to Christ, as a feeble remnant in the midst of general ruin; to receive in their midst all who are the Lord's—all who are sound in the faith and of godly conduct; and we shall find that the different companies *are* in fellowship with each other directly.

These are the principles we profess, and the only scriptural ones for the gathering of the Lord's people.

If we act, then, simply without prejudice or party feeling upon the scriptural principles which we believe, we shall find that these principles will bring us into fellowship with each other. I am not denying the fact that a meeting may go astray by receiving and teaching false doctrines. When such is the case, fellowship would be discontinued with that meeting in accordance with the same principles, *i.e.*, *all those who are sound in the faith* are received.

And there can be no doubt that the scriptural way to act to effect this is, that each meeting around should act for itself in responsibility to the Lord, and not that a general assembly should be called together to pronounce for or against such a gathering; which latter will be sure to create much ill-feeling and party spirit in many gatherings and, after all, perhaps be merely conventional.

There is no such thing taught in Scripture as the cutting off of a gathering by other gatherings. But it is incumbent upon each gathering to maintain truth and holiness in its midst, and therefore to shut out that which is false and wicked. In this way a gathering, which may have imbibed false doctrine, would be much more effectually left to itself, without dividing others.

The confusion is great, and the times are difficult; we need to be very humble before our God.

Any pretension the Lord will blow upon. But if we take a

low place before Him, as a feeble few gathered to Christ, and keep simple and dependent, I am sure we then take a place where He will be with us and bless us.

But it is sorrowfully necessary here to observe that probably the most intolerant pretension and sectarianism ever developed among Brethren, is that which is now manifesting itself in a small party now seceding from Open Brethren.

Those known as Exclusive Brethren used to say that they were the Philadelphian remnant on the ground of the Church of God. But the party I refer to here are far from being satisfied with that, but say *they are the Church* of God, and all outside them are outside the Church of God. But more about this in connection with another part of our subject.

I would here add, whenever there are a few believers gathered to Christ, though perhaps in much meekness, yet cleaving to Him and His truth, owning Him as the living Head of His Church, and recognizing the membership of His body as being the only true and scriptural unity, there the Lord will be. Let them go on in maintenance of truth and holiness, judging themselves, their position, and condition in relation to the Lord Himself, rather than in relation to other companies of Christians. The great thing is to be right in relation to Him. If others *will* make ecclesiastical claims and set up ecclesiastical boundaries which exclude such a company let them do it, only, let those thus excluded be all the more earnest in cleaving to the Lord and His word, and not to make other party barriers. I am sure we have no right to refuse fellowship with a company of believers because they may not have avowed themselves with us, or in our fellowship, as we say. If we go on scriptural lines we have fellowship with gatherings of believers because they *are* such, and gathered to Christ, and are in the unity which He is forming, not because they are gatherings avowedly in *our* Association, or "our Fellowship." We should look at

them in relation to the Lord and His truth, and not in relation to us and our set of recognized gatherings.

Finally, I have not one word more to say in favour of one party of the many among those known as Brethren, than I have for another ; party spirit prevails *all round*, and *each* party is on the look-out for something against the others. How un-Christlike! Is it not time that some one lifted up his voice without respect to any party ?

Part II.

THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY.

It is of all importance to distinguish between the *objective* and the *subjective* (in other words, the absolute and the practical) sides of truth. The one treats of our *position* and *relationship* in Christ, the other of our *condition* and *conduct* down here. One reveals what I am absolutely, the other shows what I ought therefore to be practically. I should own subjectively what is true objectively. I am a child of God absolutely, therefore I should be one practically, and thus give evidence of it before men; otherwise I practically deny what is really true. Alas! that such is so often the case with so many of the children of God.

These two sides of truth attach to us in whatever aspect or relationship we look at ourselves. We are not called, in Christianity, to make ourselves what we are not—to do something in order to be something; but to be, in our life and conduct, what grace has made us in standing and relationship. Life and relationship is not dependent upon our testimony—if so we should never get life; this has been abundantly proven in a past dispensation—but testimony is dependent upon life and relationship. As we have seen, we *are* children of God, therefore we should be such practically, *i.e.*, behave ourselves as such. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus, therefore we should be holy in our practical lives. We are clean every whit as washed in the precious blood of Christ, therefore we should be clean in our walk and actions. We are perfect in an objective sense, through the offering of the body of Jesus; therefore we should be perfect in all our ways. But are we?

The confounding of these two sides of truth is the cause of

much misunderstanding, error, and conflict among the Lord's people at the present time. The objective depends entirely upon what God is, and is based upon the work of Christ. But the subjective depends upon us and our obedience; therefore the former is perfect and stable for ever—

“Stable as His steadfast throne,
For evermore the same.”

The latter has become a complete failure, *i.e.*, we have failed to give any adequate idea subjectively of what God is doing consequent upon what Christ has done, to our great shame and humiliation be it said.

We see then that the objective is not dependent upon the subjective, but the subjective is based upon the objective.

What we have said about other relationships is true too in regard to the Church, as the object of the eternal purpose of God. She *is* the body of Christ, and the habitation of God through the Spirit; she is one in the most absolute sense, therefore she should be one practically; if she fails in this latter (as, alas! she has most grievously), the former nevertheless remains true, being based upon the work of Christ, and made sure by the faithful word and the sovereign grace of our blessed God. The Church remains one, though she fails to represent her unity in testimony.

We shall never get correct ideas of the Church of God while viewing it from a subject standpoint only. Looking at the Church thus as a visible body on earth—an outward organisation only—as only being the Church when organised, leads most surely to one of two errors, namely, on the one hand, a visible and divisive unity which embraces those who are not in the Church at all, in its objective and real aspect, as before God—not in the body of Christ. Yea, a unity that embraces all (irrespective of personal faith and virtue) who will acknowledge it and receive its dogmas: any kind of evil is connived at provided it does not affect the organisation itself.

The result, on the other hand, is a narrow, sectarian, and therefore unscriptural organisation, none the less divisive, which shuts out many who are really in the Church, as before God—in the body of Christ; and arrogates to itself, as a body in any given place, the claim to be the Church of God, exclusive of all other Christians, however devoted they may be in the cause of Christ, and in love to Himself. They are not in the same “called out company,” and therefore not in “Church of God,” as some say, for the Church of God for them is the called out company.

I believe that Cardinal Newman was led into the Church of Rome by looking at things in this way. He only knew the Church as an outward organization on the earth, so he looked after it as such; where could he find it? All his reasoning turned on this point; and the only logical conclusion he could come to was that Rome was the Church, for this he thought the most perfect outward Christian organization in this world. For it was outward organization that he had before him, hence he was blind to all the corruptions of that system. But he evidently knew nothing of the Church in an objective sense, or he would have seen that the Roman system is more a denial than a representation of it. But his premise was false, hence a false conclusion was inevitable.

But it is this same mistake of looking at the Church subjectively, without seeing that *there* all is ruin, that has led some more enlightened men to apply the term “Church of God” not only representatively but *exclusively* to certain meetings which are composed of only a very few of those who are really in the Church in its objective aspect. I am not going to compare the two evils; nevertheless both are evils, and it is easy for any unprejudiced and intelligent Christian to see that ecclesiastical pretension (in different degrees, and forms of manifestation, no doubt) characterizes both. But my only business here is to point out at least one cause of the evil.

It is no use to close our eyes to evil because it comes near to us, or is in our very midst doing its devastating work.

The above two errors (admitting a great difference in degree and character between them) arise from the viewing of an objective unity from a subjective standpoint, the one great feature of semblance being that each claims to be *exclusively* the Church of God on earth. Local distinctions make no material difference here, for what is claimed for one locality is claimed also for another. The latter is a very recent and restrained development, but contains the essential germs of the former. Is this saying too much? Do not the advocates of the theory in question say that they (*i.e.*, the meetings they approve) are the Church of God, and that any outside them are outside "Church of God" (they seem to have a great aversion to the article), and if not branded as heretics, yet they are considered as in such error as justifies the prohibition of all Christian fellowship with them, that is, they are treated as heretics only should be. Is this not so? And is this not one great essential of the Church of Rome, and would it not lead to the same pretensions if not restrained? And does it not arise from the mistake of forming a judgment from a subjective standpoint, instead of learning what the Church is objectively, and basing the judgment of the subjective state on that, which must lead to the conclusion that in the latter aspect all is ruin: and the question then is how a few, in the midst of such a state, can carry out the will of God, which will be done in a humility of mind commensurate with our sense of the general failure. I say, Is this not so? May the gracious Lord open our eyes!

I do not say that *all* who fall into this error do not understand what the Church is objectively, but that they do not form their judgment of the subjective state by it; the latter, instead of being representative of the former, and therefore governed by it, is made another thing altogether. Of course the moment we look at the thing in this way, *i.e.*,

that in our practical state we should have represented what is blessedly true absolutely, our sin and failure become apparent ; and we cease to look for the Church in *one* outward organization, and seek to act upon scriptural principles as a feeble remnant only.

In addition to these two extremes, which, as we see, meet at certain points and arise from the same error, there are numerous companies which make no such exclusive pretension, but avowedly take their place as sections of the Church only ; but without any more light as to what the Church really is. With such it is not so much a question of unity as an agreeable religious society or community.

I desire then, to say a few words about these two aspects of this most important subject. But before doing so, I will just say that I do not believe that the apprehension of what is true absolutely leads to carelessness of walk and practice, but rather to devotedness of life and consistency of conduct. The deeper my sense of the grace that has brought me into such relationships and secured such blessing to me in this absolute way, the deeper will be my desire to answer to that grace in my walk through this world ; and the more I fail to do so the deeper will be my sorrow before God on that account, and painfully conscious shall I be, too, of present loss to my own soul. The intelligent Christian knows that his present blessing and happiness depends upon his daily obedience and communion though his eternal blessing does not : and will he lightly incur present loss and unhappiness ? He also knows that he will suffer loss in the coming day in regard to reward, for unfaithfulness here ; but still the relationship remains intact.

But Scripture is most clear on this subject ; there we see that the absolute character of the salvation of God is given as the very reason why we should not continue in sin ; the objective is given as the reason for the subjective, and surely nothing could be more forcible. The sixth of Romans is a most practical chapter, but all the practical exhortations are based

upon absolute truth : we are dead to sin, therefore we should not continue in it ; we are alive to God, therefore we should live to Him. And so it will be found all through the teaching of Scripture concerning Christianity. We are children of light, therefore we should walk as children of light. We are made free by Christ, therefore we should stand fast in that liberty. The confusion of these two sides of truth is, at the same time, dishonouring to the work of Christ—derogatory of the grace of God, and a loss to our own souls.

Having thus cleared the way, we will now look at the Church of God in these two aspects.

We must know what the Church is before God, and in her relationship to Christ, before we can know what she ought to be in her conduct down here, while passing through this world. It is an immense thing to lay hold of the heavenly calling, character, relationship, and destiny of the Church as a whole, and as connected with the purpose of God, because, without this (especially in the present state of things) we are in danger of sectarianism and pretension.

In Matt. xvi. the Lord makes known His intention to build His Church, at the same time saying that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it ; in the Acts He is building it, and the second chapter tells us that “The Lord added daily such as should be saved.” And the epistle to the Ephesians tells us more definitely what the Church is. In chapter i. we are told that it is the body of Christ ; chapter ii. sets it before us as the habitation of God through the Spirit ; chapter iii. as the object of God’s eternal counsels, kept secret till this dispensation ; and chapter v. as the Bride of Christ—bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, as was Eve of Adam. This chapter also intimates the destiny of the Church : she is to be presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish. Rev. xix. to verse 11, and xxi. clearly make known her destiny. The Epistle to Col. gives us Christ as the head of His body, the Church. 1 Cor. xv. and 1 Thes. iv. give us the rapture to

glory of the saints who compose the Church. All this is most absolute.

What a Church! Built by Christ, built of *living* stones—all those who believe on Him, sinners saved by grace, redeemed by His own precious blood—built for Christ, to be His Bride, to dwell with Him throughout eternity in the Father's house above, and share His glory. And all this by the eternal purpose of our God, and according to the good pleasure of His will. Oh, what a revelation! what grace! May our hearts take it in in all its magnitude. All this, and much more, is objective; founded on the word of Christ; made ours by the sovereign grace of God, and insured to us by His immutable word. And all the instructions, exhortations, and precepts to practical unity, holiness, and fellowship throughout the Epistles are based upon these wonderful and absolute truths.

Now, then, for practical purposes, we may ask, What is the Church of God on earth at the present—or any given time, really as before Him—that is, looked at objectively? The answer is most apparent from what we have seen: it is composed of all true believers throughout the world; all who are called by the Gospel, for by this they are called out of the world, that is under the judgment of God, into His heavenly assembly; all who are united to Christ, for they are members of His body. And if we limit the question to the Church of God in England, or in Scotland, the answer is still simple; it is composed of all real believers in the country. And if we bring the question into still narrower limits, and ask, what is the Church of God in London, in Glasgow, or in the smallest town or village, the answer is not more difficult. It is composed of all true believers in the city, town, or village. Thus we see that the Church of God is truly one, as regards her absolute standing, in the world, the city, the town, or the village. This is what the Church is objectively, and really blessed it is to lay hold of such a truth: indeed, it is absolutely necessary to a right judgment of things.

THE CHURCH IN TESTIMONY.

All intelligent Bible students will admit that Scripture clearly teaches two aspects of the Kingdom in its present form. One showing it as in the hand of God for the working of His purpose, as presented by the treasure in the field, and the pearl of great price. This aspect of the Kingdom only includes the good—the children of the Kingdom. Hence, when the Lord introduced it, it was by sowing *good* seed in His field.

The other aspect looks at it as committed into the hands of man for testimony, and this includes the bad as well as the good—the tares (the children of the wicked one) as well as the wheat (the true children of the Kingdom) the leaven (which is always evil), etc. The parables of Matt. xiii., excepting the pearl and the treasure, represent the practical, and indeed mixed, state of things during the present dispensation, the time of the King's rejection. But that of the pearl and the treasure gives us what God has before Him, what He is doing. He is redeeming the treasure; He is gathering out the pearl from the depths of the sea of sin and wretchedness. Whatever aspect things may wear in our hands and before the eyes of man, He has the pearl and the treasure in His own hands; He is occupied with them; they are safe; there is no mixture there. But where the responsibility of man comes in, we get failure; note, "while men slept" the enemy sowed the tares among the wheat. This is the introduction of mere nominal Christians, who profess to own the rejected King, without any *real* faith in Him; who wish to make a mere earthly religion of Christianity, without necessarily having any personal contact of soul by faith with Christ Himself. Thus the Kingdom in this subjective sense becomes marred, while objectively God in sovereign grace overrules all for the accomplishment of His purpose, all concerning His design is

intact in His own hands; whatever things may have come to in ours.

But while many enlightened children of God understand these two aspects of the Kingdom, they do not see that the Church presents two corresponding aspects. One of these we have been dwelling upon, namely, the Church of God according to His own purpose and in His own hands. But is there not another aspect which presents the Church in her responsibility and testimony down here, as a light-bearer in this dark world? I think the reason that many will not admit this is, because they do not see the difference between the Church as the object of God's counsels—as built by Christ, when only good material finds a place in it—and its outward aspect in responsibility and testimony, as she appears the professed Church in this world, where all kinds of material are admitted. However, that the Church is presented in this aspect in Rev. ii. and iii. is obvious. There we find that all kinds of evil exists within the precincts of the Assembly: those who taught the doctrine of Balaam, and also that of the Nicolaitanes; the idolatry of Jezebel, and mere hollow profession—a name to live and yet dead; boastfulness and independence of Christ; and all this in the Assembly. But it is the Assembly in an aspect in which Christ can reject it—“I will spue thee out of My mouth.” Is it not clear that these chapters present the Church in an aspect altogether different from that which we have been considering as objective? There it is the Church in its absolute character, which the gates of hell shall not prevail against; here it is the Church in testimony in this world, where such failure and ruin has come in that Christ speaks of rejecting it. This latter view of the Church evidently embraces all Christendom, as does also the outward aspect of the Kingdom; it is what the Church has become in her visible aspect on the earth. Behind all God is working His purpose; Christ is building His Church; and He knows the stones that compose it in the midst of all the heaps of rubbish.

We have, then, on the one hand the Church as the object of God's counsels, where all is sure, absolute, and perfect, which includes only living stones: and on the other hand we have her in responsibility as a light-bearer, which gives us her outward aspect in this world, and here we have complete failure and ruin. We need to take both these into account for our guidance in studying the present position of those who seek to obey the word of God in the midst of the existing state. In the former we have the principles that should guide us, in the latter the state of things in the midst of which those principles are to be acted upon.

THE CHURCH IN A SUBJECTIVE ASPECT.

We have seen that the Church, in that aspect which views her as before God, and connects her with His purpose, is one in the world, the country, the city, town, or village. But what is she subjectively? Does she take this place? Does she own this truth? Does she bear a faithful testimony to this unity, and relationship that are so absolutely true of her? Alas! here, as we have observed, and as the sequel will show, nothing but the most sorrowful and humiliating ruin is seen. The tares are among the wheat, mere professors of religion without Christ as their personal Saviour are mixed with true believers. The Lord never added them, He never sowed them, but the enemy introduced them: still they are not really in the Kingdom as God is proceeding with it; only in its outward aspect do they have a place. So it is with the Church, though mere professors have a place in the outward aspect of the building, they are not *really* of it; God is not building them in, for all that He builds are *living* stones; nothing shall prevail against His building; though they do mar its appearance before the world, *i.e.*, spoil the testimony to the wonderful work that God is doing consequent upon what Christ has done. But they can never spoil or interfere with the work itself.

And so far from the Church owning the unity in the world, the country, city, town, or village, she is divided into dozens of sects. And yet God goes on with His gracious and glorious work; nothing can frustrate His grace, which superabounds over all, or hinders the work which His hand is accomplishing. Oh! the exceeding riches, the triumphs, and the glory of His grace! Thus securing blessing to a people who would certainly not possess it on any other ground.

Now I want to say a few words for such as know the truth objectively and desire to own it subjectively, so far as the ruined state of things will admit: for I need not say that we cannot in the existing state of things give a perfect expression in the country or town, of what the Church is; as the manifested unity of all believers in any given place would be necessary for this. A few gathered ones, so far from being a manifestation of the unity of the Church, are a standing witness to its failure, just as a faithful *remnant* implies general unfaithfulness. I repeat then, that we can only own this blessed truth subjectively in so far as it is compatible with the existing state of things. This the Scripture recognises, and provides for, when it calls upon the child of God *individually* to separate from many professing Christians, who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof; to purge himself from the vessels to dishonour, etc.

But it is possible to give some feeble remnant testimony to the blessed truth we have been noticing, if we are only obedient, humble, and unsectarian enough to do so. Let not my reader think that I undervalue the attempt at such a testimony, or the position it brings us into; my heart is in it.

To ignore the ruin shows blindness indeed, and to think that we are exempt from it is an indication of Pharisaism. Those who are guilty of the former have no real staid principles by which to judge of things, and suppose almost everything to be right that is called Christianity; while those who think the latter is the case with themselves, are characterised by a rigid

ecclesiasticism which is most sectarian, and the prejudice of which is only equalled by its pretension.

But though we cannot get out of the ruin, yet surely we should be exercised as to our conduct and association, both individually and collectively, in the midst of it, and the great question for us should be, What would the Lord have us to do? This can only be gathered from His own word; and here one thing is certain, viz., that separation from the world, separation from evil, moral and doctrinal, is the only path marked out in the Word of God for His child, and the only ground of practical unity for His children, while the real spring of, and reason for such unity, is the holy and absolute unity with the head, by the Holy Ghost, of all the members of the body.

For our guidance we begin with the truth that the Church of God *is* one objectively, therefore she should be one practically or subjectively, thus giving expression to the unity which already exists, not making another.

The Church of God in any given town is composed of all who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in the said town, and is before God really one, though we have failed to own it—so grievously failed that nothing but ruin exists all around. But we are led to ask, Is it possible, in such a mixed, ruined, and divided state of things, to give any feeble and remnant expression to this, to bear any effectual testimony to such a grand truth? Is it possible for a remnant to give a true idea of what the whole is? I believe it is, but it can only be by (1) understanding what the whole is, (2) making Christ the one centre of the whole, (3) taking our place as a remnant only of the whole, and (4) owning principles that take in the whole, and leave the door open to all, allowing them to take their place without any other conditions than life, health, and purity of soul; *i.e.*, the new birth, godliness of conduct, and soundness in the faith. No child of God can be excluded but for moral or doctrinal evil, and that of a

demonstrated character. But such evil must be judged, must be put away. Hence, another point must be added to the four already noticed—viz., a scriptural discipline, which is quite compatible with what we have been dwelling upon; for the character of the Church must be maintained at the same time as the unity of it, and though all children of God should be received, the workers of iniquity have no place there; and therefore if one who is looked upon as a brother falls into sin, the saints gathered to Christ are bound to put him from their midst.

But the danger is to put sectarian rules (under the influence of party spirit) for scriptural discipline. It is more by the former than the latter that divisions have been caused. The moment we impose other tests than those named, or bring in other obstacles, such as ignorance (for we must distinguish between ignorance of the truth and denial of it), denunciation of ecclesiasticism, or aught else, we deny the truth that we began with, viz., that the Church of God is one embracing every member of the body of Christ. How then can we own this blessed truth and yet refuse one such member, except for a cause given by our Lord Himself, in His Word?

I am not saying that all must be intelligent as to the four points I have observed, but that these are the truths that should be taught for the guidance of the Saints gathered thus to Christ.

There is always a great tendency to confound the subjective side of this blessed truth with the objective; and so we are told that God's purpose is to gather called-out companies; and those called-out companies are composed of only a very few of God's people; thus many saved ones are put outside of the purpose of God. Now, to speak, even in the very largest sense, of the subjective side of the Church (that is the Church in condition and testimony down here) as the object of God's purpose, even supposing her condition and testimony were just what they should be, gives, I think, a very poor idea

of what that purpose is (no one can have correct ideas of the Church of God, who has formed those ideas upon its subjective aspect only). It confounds the purpose of God concerning the Church with His ways with her. The calling out is truly in accordance with His purpose, and is the way He takes to accomplish it. And the separated and united state of the Church on the earth would be a testimony to that purpose, but not the object of it. The purpose itself is eternal, and its object is connected with eternity; it is to have the Church for and with Christ in glory for ever, which purpose shall never be frustrated. According to it the Church is one and without spot, and will soon be presented to Christ all glorious. Thus viewed, as it were from the top of the rocks (Num. xxiii. 21), we see the Church, according to the purpose of God, in all her purity, unity, and beauty, and it enlarges our hearts and increases our love toward every member of that body. To enter thus into God's thoughts about His Church has immense effect upon my life and conduct in relation to *all* His Saints; not that I shall think any more lightly of the sad state of things that actually exist, for I shall feel it all the more keenly by looking at it in this light. But I shall ever be seeking opportunity to own this unity in individual fellowship with my brother, or collective fellowship with my brethren, where it can be done without toleration of evil: and when there is this to hinder, even though it be in my brother or brethren, and not in myself, the sense of this unity will make me take it as my own in confession before God.

But if I am so preoccupied with a party, a "called-out company," that for me this becomes the "Church of God," and I am found saying that it is His purpose to gather these called-out companies, it is not to be wondered at if not only my practical fellowship, but my sympathies and heart as well as my theology, will all be narrowed up to the same.

At the same time it is quite true that God is calling out a people for Christ, but the ulterior object of His calling (*i.e.*,

the calling looked at in view of His *purpose*) is not that there should be a called-out company down here, but that there should be One Body, One Church, One Glorified Company in heaven (where she will be taken as soon as complete), to be Christ's companion for ever. So that the call embraces, not *only* those who designate themselves "called-out companies," for all who really believe in Christ are as truly called by this call as those, though they may not be answering practically to the call in their position here. Thus, we see that God's purpose is to call out the Church from the world, and not to call out a company *from the Church*; though separation as a remnant may be necessary on account of the condition of the whole. But, strictly speaking, *such* separation is not the purpose of God, though it is certainly the will of God for us, at the present time, as being *consistent with that purpose*. But this latter is consequent upon general failure, and has to do more with the ways of God than with His purpose, though very important in its place; but it is important, too, to see what place that is, that we may not be found putting a feeble remnant for the whole thing, but may ever remember that the purpose of God takes in all true believers, all who are washed in His precious blood. If this be so (and who will say it is not?), then no section of the Church, nor even a faithful remnant (if there be such) can truthfully say, "We are the Church that God is calling out." And yet *several* bodies of Christians—nominally, at least—on the earth at the present time do say so!

It is not, then, the fact that we gather to Christ that makes us the Church, but we gather to Him because we are already members of it in an objective sense; and as thus gathered, we become a feeble and subjective representation of the Church here in this world. If only part of the saints who compose the Church take this simple yet scriptural position, viz., that of gathering to Christ as the one centre of His people, and on apostolic principles, then the representation is

of a remnant character only, a remnant testimony is borne to what is true of the whole. But still it is the objective that governs the subjective. This is very important, because with a true apprehension of this, sectarian narrowness finds no place in our hearts. All the walls of sectarianism, no matter how numerous they may be around, will be abolished for the faith that lays hold of God's thoughts about His Church, and will have no other. The hearts of such will be enlarged to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and their arms, therefore, will be open to receive into their fellowship every member of the body of Christ (except for reasons already stated); yea, will desire to give expression to this truth by showing themselves to be one in worship with all the children of God who call on Him out of a pure heart, and one in service with any or all the servants of Christ who seek His interests and love His truth.

Nothing can be more displeasing to Christ, and indicative of our own selfish strife, than for those who love Him and His truth, though serving the same Master in a common cause and for the same end, yet judging and denouncing each other, instead of showing that sympathy and fellowship, and joining in that united effort which common interests should indicate and mutual love seek.

I believe it is the want of this entering into God's thoughts about the Church, and what she already is to Christ as purchased by His own blood, and united to Himself, and destined to share His glory: I say it is the want of this, copulated with preoccupation with the present subjective state, that keeps several companies of gathered saints from having fellowship with each other, while each several company is sound in the faith, owning Christ as the centre of His people and separation from evil as the only ground of unity. Yet each party is found claiming Divine ground, to the exclusion, nay, the denunciation of the others. For they are guided in their judgment by the subjective view of things. Once it is seen

that we have not to make a Church, or unity, or fellowship, but to own one that is already made, and most absolutely true to begin with ; then the judgment becomes more enlightened and less vindictive, more enlarged and less rigid. For it is seen that the truth we wish to own is true of *all* believers, and therefore *all* believers, or at least all who are sound in the faith, can give a more perfect expression to it. Hence it is a solemn thing to shut ourselves off from so many sound and devoted children of God. But apart from designed testimony, the heart becomes enlarged to all believers, and so fellowship and testimony become more spontaneous. And, in this condition, right sorry are we when sin comes in to hinder such fellowship.

I am aware that there are all kinds of difficulties. Nor would I allow my reader to think that I am giving any quarter to such as deny the doctrine of Christ, or those who are going on in sin. I wish this to be distinctly understood. But there are whole companies of believers, as we have observed, who are sound in the faith, and yet treat each other as heretics. Is not this a dishonour to Christ, and a great sin on our part? I am not speaking against separation from evil, and the judgment of it; but against that self-righteous and sectarian little company (wherever it may be, and by whomsoever it may be composed) which draws itself up into its own small corner, and fences itself round about by theories of its own, declaring itself to be right and everybody else to be wrong, which so far from being separation from evil is an evil in itself; and separation from, and denunciation of so much that is good. Has not the Lord's displeasure been manifest against this of late? Has not His chastening hand been upon us on account of it? Let us stamp our foot upon evil but let us do it for the sake of the whole Church of God, and not for mere party interests.

MORAL POWER AND CONDITION.

We see, then, that there are two great aspects in which we may view the Church, viz., the objective and the subjective, or the absolute and the practical, and it is the understanding of the objective, that is, the entering into God's purpose concerning the Church, her calling, unity, and destiny, that leads to and governs the subjective, *i.e.*, the practical condition, position, and unity down here, by way of testimony.

It is the apprehension, in simple faith, of the sublime truth itself, as a revelation from God, and of God, with a sense of the grace that designed such a scheme, involving, as it does, the glory of God and the eternal blessing of man; yes, it is laying hold thus of the truth and blessing in real power, for the present enjoyment of the soul, that leads to real practical unity; for it operates upon the new nature, quickening its instincts, and drawing out the desires both toward Christ and those who are His—our own beloved brethren. And no dry theology concerning "A Church" and its government on earth, with any amount of divisive schemes for unity, can bring this about. We are continually proving that no artifices (even though there may be a semblance of scriptural order in them as to the letter of the thing) can bring about *real* and practical fellowship and unity. To be real these must be natural and spontaneous.

It is possible to reduce even scriptural order to a mere form; but I do not believe it is possible to follow it out in a way acceptable to God without real moral condition. Apart from this latter the freshness and moral power of the truth are wanting, and the letter of it, sad to say, only becomes a source of strife and contention.

The same thing is true in individual relationship. I may have a certain outward legal form of life, and Christianity

which borrows sanction from the letter of the word, while the motive spring of all, and the moral power of the truth in the soul, which make the life suited to Christ, may be sadly wanting. It is the abiding in Him that is the first and most important thing; if there is this there will surely be fruit; and fruit, whether in the individual or the Church, is produced not by legal effort or divisive means, but by a spontaneity dependent upon certain conditions. Two things at least are essential for its production, viz., a congenial soil and a pure air softened by and permeated with the fructifying rays of the sun; these being present the fruit is spontaneous. There must be the abiding in Christ, and the living in the atmosphere of His presence, brightened by the sunshine of His love, for the production of fruit for God. There must be the taking root downward before there can be the bearing fruit upward.

In view of what we have said it will be seen that the most important thing to be concerned about is our moral condition, for we cannot expect any position, however correct it may be in itself, to be held in simplicity, or for God without this.

And let it not be thought that the being in a right position outwardly—and even the being clear in our apprehensions of such position, so that, as it is often put, “We see our place”—is a proof of a good and right condition of soul before God, No, it is the spirit,—meekness and gentleness of Christ, resulting in a deep desire for the good of my brethren and the conversion of souls. It is that grace that leads to an unselfish consideration of others; and a forbearance with them which is quite the opposite of that selfish pertinacity and conceit that leads to the pressing of our peculiar and pet views against the consciences and understandings of others, and even making the acceptance of such views the ground of reception to fellowship; which, when expressed in plain words, means, “If you will not accept my views, I will have no fellowship with you.” It is that desire to find all the good I can in my brethren and acknowledge it (at the same time seeking graci-

ously to show that which is clearly wrong) which is manifest in the Lord Himself (see Rev. ii. and iii.), and which the apostle exhorts us to (Phil. iv. 8; see also Gal. v. 22, etc.), and not such a *desire* to condemn all who do not agree with one as leads to a wholesale judgment on all they do, condemning the good (perhaps earnest devoted service to Christ, such as puts oneself to shame) with the evil. It is the spirit, grace, and desire of Christ, manifested in practical Christianity, such as makes one a channel of blessing to all around. I say it is these that are the evident fruits of a good condition, such as others will know us by. The flesh cannot produce these. It may produce a Pharisaical adherence to certain dogmas, whether they be right or wrong, and a bad spirit towards those who do not agree with such dogmas; but it will never produce those practical graces and virtues of Christ which should adorn the Christian's life, and cause him to send forth the savour of Christ's good ointment wherever he goes; and which will make the Assembly a garden of the Lord, into which He may come and gather His pleasant fruits. May the gracious Lord exercise our hearts about these things.

What is correct ecclesiastical position without real moral condition and separatedness of heart to Christ (such as is attended by spiritual power), without real love to Him and His people, without devotedness to His cause and real interest in His work? What does the position become where these are wanting? But, alas! this is just the time when the position is boasted in; and even used to allay all exercise about lack of heart and interest in the things of Christ, which is always the case when the moral condition is low; for then the position is made much of. For proof of this just look around us at the present time. We see assemblies in the most sad condition, with very little but strife and contention among themselves; unity is known in word only, and fellowship is only known in a conventional and formal way, such as becomes the most sectarian party: the attempt at united worship in

the light of Matt. v. 23, 24, is mockery—if not hypocrisy. Instead of magnifying the name of the Lord together, with joyful heart and contrite spirit, the Lord's people are found hurling passages of Scripture at each other with a bitter heart and a vindictive spirit. Such is the state of things often before our eyes; which would be bad enough, indeed, even if the saints were exercised about it, and humbled before God, in shame and confusion of face because of it; but no, even in the face of such a state of things, they are found talking loudly about their position, and the only ministry they seem to take pleasure in is one that justifies their position and condemns all outside themselves; and a preacher is considered faithful, in proportion as he exalts such position and condemns all others. For such Christianity apparently consists in the maintenance of their own position and the condemnation of every other.

Is this not so, brethren? Is this picture overdrawn? In the very district in which I am writing, what I say is, alas! abundantly verified,—yea, a much more terrible picture might be justly drawn. I am ashamed to say it, and humbled before God as I do so, in common confession of our sin. But I am sure it is better made known, and brought home to our consciences. May be it will lead us to exercise of heart and humiliation before our God; then, and not till then, He will bless and use us in a testimony that shall be helpful to all the saints, and honouring to the blessed Lord who has redeemed them all, and will soon have all with Himself.

May we, my brethren, awake to a sense of our common sin, our wretchedly low condition, spiritually; our divided state and absence of that Christlike spirit and grace that should characterize those redeemed by His precious blood; and such as would abolish the bitter feeling and party spirit which separate those who equally love the Lord Jesus and His truth.

I speak for all Christians by whatever name called, for as

I have sought to show we are all one in Christ. O let us own our sin, and unitedly humble ourselves before Him! And to those known as Brethren I would say, What is the use of flattering ourselves that we are gathered to His name, and owning His lordship, while we are in such a terrible condition? What we want is not only to *say* we are gathered to Christ, and He is in our midst, but *to be* really gathered to Him, and to have *signs* of His presence. Where are such signs? Is the evident lack of power and grace a sign of His presence? Is the deplorable strife and contention among ourselves a mark of fidelity to Christ? Is the republic spirit, so common in our midst, a sign of our owning the lordship of Christ? Is the fact of our taking the opportunity to read passages of Scripture at each other when gathered together a proof that we are led by the Spirit? Is the sad confusion that prevails in our midst the outcome of the Lord's presence there? Is the attitude we take in relation to the Lord's people who "follow not with us" a proof of true testimony for God? Do we not well to face these things? May the Lord bring them home to us; for if this is to be done I know He must do it.

At the same time, the only ecclesiastical position set forth in the Scripture is that of gathering to Christ, in subjection to Himself and under the guidance and teaching of the Holy Ghost, in maintenance of truth and holiness, for which a scriptural discipline is necessary.

Therefore, I hope it will not be thought that I am speaking against a path of separation, and the only ground of gathering that I know in the Word for the Lord's people. Yes, the only ground of gathering is simply to the Lord's name as members of His body, in separation from evil. In this I am as tenacious as any one. But this, in the present state of the Church, is only known and held by a few, which in itself is a testimony to the ruin. And then what becomes of this position if those who take it are so wanting in real

moral separation and condition? And not only so, but after having presented such a spectacle of sad failure to their brethren around them, such as has hindered and stumbled many, still to be ringing in their ears the words, "We are right and you are wrong." Much better would it be to manifest a humble spirit before our brethren, such as would convince them that we have a sense of the failure of the Church, and to take a humble place before the Lord, so that (instead of *our saying* His presence is with us and no one else) He would *manifest* His presence in our midst in such a way as to elicit the confession from those outside, "God is in you of a truth." Oh! let it not be thought that I am speaking against *such* a place *thus* occupied; I am not.

But, as I have sought to show, this should not be made a sectarian position. It is determined by a centre of attraction (*i.e.*, Christ Himself), more than by a circumference of rigid rules. Hence the preaching of Christ, and the glories of His Person and work, will draw souls to it much more effectually than the preaching up of the place itself. It is maintained by an inward power, grace, and holiness, under the direction of the Word of the Lord, and not by the dogmas and customs of a party. When such power and grace are known in our midst, instead of judging others we shall each be judging himself; instead of setting our brethren at naught, we shall be found preferring one another; instead of condemning others for things in them with which we do not agree (and things that may not be exactly right, yet not fundamental), we shall exercise a Christlike forbearance towards each other; instead of undervaluing other servants of Christ because they are not with us, we shall seek all the more to exhibit the grace of Christ to them, and to profit by their gifts, for such are gifts in and to the Church. The gifts outside our gatherings are the gifts of Christ to the Church. They are ours, and we cannot ignore them without loss to ourselves. This is what makes the presumption of those who speak of the few gathered ones as being

exclusively the Church of God all the greater, and shows, too, that we are but a remnant.

And not only so, but instead of attempting to monopolize the presence of the Lord in our midst by saying that none but those gathered as we are have it, it should be enough for us, as far as we ourselves are concerned, to make sure that we have His blessed presence at all; and we should be quite willing surely to allow Him to be with others of His people, in His grace, wherever and in whatsoever He pleases, and delight in the grace in which He condescends to be with any of us. Surely it is not for us to prescribe the limits of His presence and working. If His being with us always depended upon our merit and obedience, we may ask, would He be with any of us at any time?

The Church is in a state of ruin, and wherever there are a few in simplicity before Him, and with real love and desire towards Him, even though ecclesiastical order may not be strictly observed, there He may be; and who will dare to say He will not? At the same time, where a right ecclesiastical position may be outwardly observed, and yet the inward moral condition, love to Christ, desire towards Him, and that simplicity of heart that attends such a state are wanting, who will say that the Lord will be there merely because of the position? But I believe it is impossible to maintain a scriptural position in simplicity before the Lord, unless there is a corresponding condition, such as keeps the heart exercised before God and consciously dependent upon Him. When this latter is wanting we begin to make the position sectarian in some way or other directly. Some rules and customs of our own must be brought in to make up for the lack of spiritual power; and, of course, a poor make up they prove.

But there is something which we are prone to forget in occupation with ourselves and our position, viz., that God is no respecter of persons, and that all in every place that fear Him and worketh righteousness are accepted of Him.

What I say here does not interfere with our responsibility to walk according to the light that God has given to us.

Though I am far from thinking that I have exaggerated things in the slightest degree, yet I should be afraid of giving a wrong impression to any not well acquainted with the different companies of the Lord's people I am speaking of, as well as making light of the superabounding grace of God, if I did not say a few words about the brighter side.

Therefore I wish it to be distinctly understood that I do not know of a better state of things anywhere else than that existing among the people now under review. I am not judging of the state of things as compared with other Christians and their denominations, but as compared with Scripture and the light the Lord has been pleased to give Brethren, which is fast becoming darkness. He has used them as a whole in the exposition of His truth, and the maintenance of the same, more than any others of His people during the present century; and nearly all other Christians have profited by their teaching; and this is just what should be, for the gifts are given for the profit of the whole Church. And it cannot be doubted, thank God, that they are as a company, including the many sections of them, still more sound in the faith than any other body of Christians. This is much to be thankful for in days when "men will not endure sound doctrine." But this very thing is being used by the enemy to occupy us with ourselves and puff us up with conceit and pride; and leading us to set other Christians at a great discount because they are not with us, and to ignore some most excellent servants of God for the same reason. For myself, I repudiate such sectarian pride and ecclesiastical pretension. I speak of myself as one of them in no partisan sense whatever, but in the same sense as which I am one with all God's people.

I wish also to say, that as to their meetings, especially that for the remembrance of the Lord's death, I can say from

experience that they are most healthful and profitable to the soul, and I would not give up the meeting for the remembrance of our blessed Lord in death in the simple and scriptural way in which it is carried out among them, for any meeting of another kind however right and proper in its place.

But this applies only when the simplicity and reality of the thing is known, and where there is some freshness, power, and unity among the saints; for I am thankful to say that there are meetings where such is the case, and that among all the *different parties* of Brethren. But when such a happy state of things is displaced by the strife and contention of which we have been speaking, the very best meeting becomes the very worst; and all that I have said of such is true.

I repeat then, that though I am speaking so plainly about what I believe to be obviously wrong amongst us, I know nothing better elsewhere; that is, ecclesiastically. But this very thing is my reason for seeking to bring home to our consciences the wrong principles and theories that are intruding themselves amongst us, and for pointing out our divergence from the truth, and the dangers into which we are drifting; with a deep desire that we should go back to the simplicity in which our Brethren first came out to Christ.

The Lord, blessed be His name, in His grace still acknowledges and uses whatever truth and simplicity there may be amongst us. But what will become of us if the leaven of Pharisaism, and of malice and wickedness, that is spreading so rapidly, with the party and sectarian spirit that is so manifest, be not arrested?

My desire is, then, that our eyes should be open to the working of such leaven and party spirit, with the mischief resulting from them, and not to justify our position in spite of these. At the same time I am delighted to acknowledge the working of the grace of Christ amongst us, and His goodness to us, as well as His designing to use us. Blessed be His gracious name! it has pleased Him to make us His people,

and He will not give us up ; but He will soon *take* us up to be with Himself for ever. But this is true of all His people.

A REMNANT TESTIMONY.

As we have before seen, the Church, viewed generally as in testimony here, has become a complete, an irrecoverable ruin, and what testimony there is now is of a fragmentary character; hence it is a remnant testimony we need to be concerned about.

True testimony, in any dispensation, is a testimony to what God is, and what He is doing. In the present dispensation it bears witness to God as displayed in Christ, and to what He is doing, as gathering out the Church from among all nations—consequent upon the accomplishment of redemption by Christ—to be a companion, a bride for His Son. The Scripture shows most clearly that this Church is one body, but many members ; that Christ is its Head, and all are united to Him ; that the Holy Ghost indwells all, and so, “*There is one Body,*” and “*There is one Spirit.*” The unity is formed by the sovereign grace of God and consequent upon the work of Christ, and therefore in the most absolute manner.

Now God would have us bear a testimony to this, to keep this unity, not to make another ; to testify to the fact that all true Christians have not only one Saviour who died for them on the cross, but one Head exalted in heaven ; and that therefore they are one Body on earth. This Body is also called the Church, which Christ loved and gave Himself for, and the “*Church of God,*” as distinct from the Jew and the Gentile.

It is this blessed truth then that God would have us to own, yet, by the riches of His grace, its existence does not depend upon our giving a correct outward expression of it. How could such a truth be maintained if it did ? For have we owned it ? Has the Church borne a faithful testimony to the perfect unity into the which she is brought, and the

heavenly character of her calling? Alas! we know she has not. Here sad failure has come in, yea, utter ruin. The enemy could not spoil the thing itself, so his object has been to spoil the testimony to it; and all his tactics are directed for the accomplishment of this. And who would say that it has not been spoiled; much to our shame and humiliation it must be admitted, and yet to the praise of the grace of God; for the truth remains intact before Him; and grace shall certainly triumph, and be magnified by everything that seems to oppose the accomplishment of its object. For God is now making known the riches of, and working for the glory of, His grace.

But while we look in vain for any adequate testimony to the true unity of God's people, yet on the one hand we see in the Roman Church a spurious unity which is nothing more than a human confederacy with a religious garb; a corrupt system which denies the unity that God is forming, by making a compact with the world, and embracing all men and nations who will own her dogmas: a system embodying the most corrupt doctrine and superstitious ritual which calls itself the Church, but is nothing more than a repetition of Babel, seeking to be something great in this world.

On the other hand we see numerous sects, each with its own sectarian wall shutting out many who are in God's unity, and enclosing many who are not, but are still unconverted; yet the particular method is subscribed to, and this is all that is required. And these are now characterisèd, for the most part, by a rationalism that reasons away the gospel of God.

In the midst of this state of things God was pleased, some years ago, to open the eyes of a few of His people to what the Church really is before Him; this led them to see what a ruined state it was in practically, and their hearts were stirred in real love to the Lord, His word, His people, and His work, and they desired to own that truth (what the Church is before God) as far as was possible in the existing

state of things ; and began to revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish, and there was a remnant testimony to what the whole should be. A corporate testimony there could not be in a true sense, while the whole body was so scattered and divided ; but the way was open for the few to do what the whole should do. For if we cannot have an apostolic Church (*i.e.*, all believers united), those who see apostolic principles may act upon them for themselves, and thus bear a remnant testimony to them.

But even this testimony soon became the object of attack by the enemy and was spoiled by division after division, caused, for the most part, by the want of grace and forbearance with each other, which is always followed by strife and party spirit. There have been some grave questions, truly, that should not lightly be passed over, or connived at ; but grace and forbearance with each other, as to difference of judgment, with prayerful waiting, would doubtless have prevented division without compromising the truth. The fact that in the first great division among them both parties repudiated the error, is a proof of this. But other, more recent, divisions have been occasioned by questions much less grave ; indeed sometimes by nothing more or less than hair-splitting differences ; such as never could have been but for party spirit, which latter has been the *real* cause, “ the question ” has only been the occasion.

But still, after the first great division, God went on working among them, and they were comparatively happy together for some years—*i.e.*, each party in itself. But during the last twelve years the most humiliating strife, contentions, and divisions have taken place ; till now, as we have before observed, we could count seven or eight parties, who say respectively that they are gathered to the name of the Lord ; each party to the exclusion of all the others ! Nor is there any great difference to be observed in their meetings respectively.

And the sad part of it is, that all these divisions have taken place, and are still excused, under the plea of contending for the truth; each party flattering itself that this was the noble object for which they were fighting; and by this same plea excusing themselves for their un-Christlike conduct towards each other. And those who have watched these several divisions with an unprejudiced eye, can but accredit each with the utmost sincerity. But it is an easy matter to adopt the cause of truth as a banner under which to fight for the accomplishment of our own desires and purposes, that these may have the full authority and influence of that cause in their support; and this not only in the eyes of others, but more especially in our own minds; and to do so till we become most sincere in our persuasion that we are fighting for such a cause, while *really* we are only using its influence as an aid in fighting our own battles. This is immensely solemn; but alas! what poor things we are. Who can trust his own heart? Happy is the man who has learnt to mistrust his own heart, and to rely more fully and simply upon the Lord Himself.

But what a state of confusion! What a Babel of tongues! The only thing to do in the midst of such a state of things is to turn to the Lord in real humiliation and confession; seeking to cleave to His truth as a feeble remnant, in simplicity and dependence. And I am sure that if we take this low place before Him and before our brethren, manifesting a deep interest in all His people—such as is pleasing to Christ and becometh brotherly love—He will bless us. But if we go on still pretending to ecclesiastical greatness, and a positional holiness such as leads to the ignoring all the Lord's dear people and their work of faith, and labour of love, simply because they are not with us—which is virtually saying, "Stand thou by me, for I am holier than thou;" I say, if we act thus in a state of ruin, can we wonder at the Lord's chastening hand being upon us? Indeed, where should we be without it?

But the Scripture makes provision for the ruinous state of things, in the midst of which we find ourselves.

After what we have been considering, we need say but little about the latest and most pretentious theory among those known as Brethren, a theory which makes the gathering (*i.e.*, those gathered in *acknowledged* fellowship) in any place, however few, and whatever their state may be, the "Church of God" in the place, exclusive of all other Christians, no matter what their individual devotedness to Christ, or personal worth may be. This is exclusive enough indeed. Those holding this view admit this readily enough, and seem to glory in it. To be with their party is to be holy; and a brother is faithful in proportion as he advocates this theory! a theory which has greatly led to the state of things upon which we have been dwelling.

All who have watched the outcome of this with a mind free from bias, can testify to the fact that it carries sorrow and breeds difficulties, and is the progenitor of sad division. This idea of the Church of God in any given place is, that it is an outward organisation; or as would be said, "A called out company;" in any case, the "Church of God" is, for them, the company, or the gathering that they themselves form. According to such teaching, God has no Church in a place if there is no gathering *in their fellowship!*

All who have theories of their own to maintain seek the sanction of Scripture for such theories, and this leads to at most serious perversion of some passages, and a very subtle and strained use of others, as the natural teaching of Scripture on the subject will not yield to their peculiar views. All errorists try to make much out of words, while ignoring the general bearing of passages; and impose much upon the English reader by talking so much about "the original," and making translations of their own; for they seem conscious of the fact that no translation in the hands of the English reader will support their views; and by these means

the confidence of simple Christians in our excellent translations of the Bible is shaken, and then they are so perplexed that the only course open seems to be to commit themselves to the theories of such teachers, for they think they are great scholars; and on what ground can they judge for themselves? or how can they question what is based, by their pedantic teachers, upon a language of which they know not a word? Their only choice can be between their teachers and their English Bible. All this is extremely solemn. Are English readers to be committed to the translations of everyone who learns to read a few lines of Greek? And is it not as easy to pervert the original as it is the translated text? though perhaps it is not as easy to detect the perversion! I confess I have no confidence in those who are for ever translating the Scriptures before unlettered audiences. Christians might be imposed upon to any extent if this were allowed.

In accordance with what we have said there are those who make a difference between the terms "Church of God" and "the Church" (without the possessive), and "the Church which is His (Christ's) body." And so when in the possessive, "Church of God," they say the local Church only is meant, and that, in the present day, this means only those who are gathered to His name, meaning those who gather as they do, and are in fellowship with them—in *the* fellowship, as is said. That is, there may be, say 1,000 true Christians in a town and 50 thus gathered; the 50 are the "Church of God," the other 950 are outside of it!! We might concede that the 50 only were acting on simple scriptural principles, *i.e.*, supposing there is no other gathering in the place acting on the same principles, and yet with whom these will not have fellowship (for, as we have observed, there are many such parties in some places who will not have fellowship with each other). And we allow that the whole Church in the place should be acting on the same principles, because of the same

body, the same calling, and the same unity ; but the fact that they are not, proves the 50 to be but a remnant of such Church ; *i.e.*, taking for granted that the 50 are right. But this will not satisfy those to whom we refer ; in their eyes the 50 are the “ Church of God ” in the place.

But supposing that the term “ Church of God ” was only used locally in Scripture, we see that their limitations of it would not be true, for it would embrace all believers in the locality. But it is clear to anyone who has not a special theory to support, that it is used both locally and generally in the word ; though our brethren in question will not allow that such is the case.

It is no use to remind them of such passages as Acts xx. 28, “ Feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased by His own blood ; ” or, “ by the blood of His own,” as some translators render it. Yet surely this is general ? Is it not the same Church as He loved and gave Himself for ? Doth “ the Church of God, which He hath *purchased by the blood of His own,* ” include only those few gathered in the fellowship ? Of course our behaviour and ministry in it must be limited to the locality in which we may be at any given time ; but the Church of God is the Church of God, whether viewed locally or generally. Albeit, let it not be forgotten, that the term is not only applied *exclusively* to the saints of God, members of the body of Christ, in any particular place, but is made to embrace only a very few of them, *viz.*, those who are “ in the fellowship ! ” So that we need not be surprised to find that they are concerned about feeding no others but those “ in the fellowship ; ” for in doing this they are feeding what, to them, is the “ Church of God.” And we only do them justice by remarking that they are exceedingly careful to feed them well with their own theory ; they consider that the food most convenient for them is that they should bē thoroughly confirmed in the fact that they are the “ Church of God ! ” The “ Temple of the Lord are we ! ” Though we do not think

that the endeavour to convince a flock that it is a flock, is very satisfying food; however, the flock will certainly not grow very fat upon such pasture.

Another passage that is often noted is found in 1 Cor. x. 32—"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." Is it not clear that this is the Church universally? Could anything but the exigence of a theory lead us to think otherwise? Is it not the same Church as is called His Body in another place? Is not the application of this passage universal, as far as the Jews and the Gentiles named in it are concerned? And if so, surely the Church is too. It makes known the fact that there are three classes of people in this world, as before God, composed respectively of Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of God. Of course if there are these three classes in the world, they may be found in any or every place, and my responsibility towards them is in measure, however limited in its immediate exercise to the locality in which I live.

Another passage, to which nothing but a general application can be given, is found in 1 Cor. xv. 9—"I persecuted the Church of God." Was this a local church only—a church in one locality—which the Apostle persecuted? Does he not tell us in another place that he persecuted the saints even to strange cities? See Acts xxii. 1-9, and xxvi. 9-13.

But all these passages, clear and conclusive as they are to the simple and unbiassed reader, as against the theory I am combating, yet they are nothing in the way of the teachers we speak of. They can give explanations in favour of their own theory, and to the satisfaction of their own party, but such as only proves to others the truth of that with which I have charged them, viz., the perverting some passages, and straining others to suit their own views.

They say the "Church of God" is not the same as "the Church which is His Body." The Church, as the body of Christ, may be viewed in different aspects. In one sense it

embraces all the saints, from the beginning to the end of the dispensation—from the first coming to the second coming of Christ. This has been called by some “the Church triumphant.” It is the objective aspect of the body of Christ, as connected with the purpose of God, and looks on to the time when we shall all have “come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

There is also a militant aspect in which it may be viewed, which looks at the body of Christ as embracing all the saints living on the earth at any given time. This is connected more with the accomplishing of God’s purpose. And though it may not be considered strictly correct to speak of the body of Christ in any given country or town, yet we may say at least that God looks for the saints in any given place to act as members of that body, and thus bear a local testimony to its existence. See 1 Cor. xii. Indeed, speaking figuratively, it is quite correct to say the body of Christ in London, Glasgow, Manchester, etc. This is a very common metaphor, which speaks of a part for the whole, or the whole for a part. “YE are the body of Christ,” said the Apostle to the Corinthians.

And we may further ask, Do our brethren mean to say that “the Church, which is His body,” is not God’s church, or the “Church of God?” And if the term Church of God only applies to those who are gathered in the way in which we are now gathered, then where was the “Church of God” during the dark ages? According to this theory, as far as we can tell, there was no “Church of God;” nor is there now in many towns, where there are hundreds of true children of God members of the body of Christ. And are they not God’s Church? They may not be gathered as such, on the principles of Scripture, and thus bearing a testimony to the blessed fact; but does the fact of our being the Church of God depend upon our bearing a faithful testimony to it? No, certainly not; no more than my being a child of God depends upon my bearing

a faithful testimony to that fact. I repeat, those who know their own hearts, will readily admit that there would never be a Church of God, or a child of God in a real sense, if such were the terms of relationship. This would be, as we have sought to show, confounding the subjective with the objective. (The importance of this point affords sufficient excuse for the repetition of an illustration I have given before.) I should walk as a child of God, not in order to become one, but because I am one. The relationship already exists, and is most absolute, and the responsibility comes out of it. I should be a child of God practically, because I am one absolutely. I may, and do fail in my responsibility, but that does not alter the relationship. Just so it is with the Church of God. She is in that relationship absolutely, and her responsibility comes out of it. She should be the Church subjectively, because she *is* the Church objectively. Do we make ourselves the Church of God by our gathering together to Christ? The party we are speaking of say, "Yes;" it is the simple and logical conclusion of their theory. But we believe that it is in answer to a responsibility that already exists—because we are the Church of God already—that we thus gather. But it is said we do make ourselves the "Church of God," in any place, by being gathered as such.

Something else remains to be noticed, which goes to prove what we have observed about the use of words, to strain the natural sense of passages.

It is really painful to watch the effort that is made to bring the Greek idioms into the English language, in a way that is most distasteful to the ear and sickening to the mind. We are led again and again to ask, Is it not possible to convey in the English language the thought expressed in the Greek? It is taught that wherever the article does not appear in Greek, then it must be left out in English; and so in various writings we continually find "Church of God," "House of God," and "Temple of God" used without

the article. And so the natural enquiry is, Have all our translators done wrong in using the article in English where it does not occur in Greek? or, Is it required in our language to give the Greek equivalent? It is well known that the latter is the case. According to this the introduction to each of the Epistles to the Thessalonians should be rendered, "Unto the Church of the Thessalonians, in God, Father, and Lord Jesus Christ;" for no article is used in the Greek here.

And on the same principle these teachers ought to be as anxious to put in the article in every place where it does occur. Why do they not do this? Surely consistency requires it—in which case we should hear them using such phrases as "The Peter," "The Paul," "The John," etc., etc. These nouns require no article in English; the equivalent sense is fully conveyed without it. The idioms of the language will not admit it, nor does the sense require it. But it is only in connection with their theory that they are so careful to omit the article; they do not make a uniform rule of it.

Their new (for it is new) theory is more extreme than anything else that has yet appeared. Our Exclusive brethren, as they are called, never went so far as this. They went astray, not in owning and teaching the blessed truth of the one body—this we may be thankful for—but in making it a ground of gathering, and a pretext for a divisive unity which resulted in separating many true to the Lord and each other in heart. To make the owning of the one Head the ground of gathering would be more likely to lead to unity, for the Head controls the members, and not the members each other: the acknowledgment of one Head and subjection to Him and His word alone can lead to a unity suited to Himself. But whatever has been their failure, they have never said that they were the "Church of God," to the exclusion of other believers. They have too much light, if not love, for this; and they always taught that the "Church of God," in

an objective sense, included all believers, whether used generally or locally. Moreover, as to the expression itself—"the ground of the one body"—little could be said against it, if what was meant thereby was simply that believers were received on the ground of their being members of that body, which doubtless is what our brethren meant by it at first. But when it became a sectarian test and a pretext for one gathering settling difficulties for another, or for a central assembly of Brethren to rule and decide matters generally, instead of "the ground of gathering," it soon became the ground of scattering.

I am sure wherever the theory in question is received, it will lead to trouble and division. It lacks that grace towards, and forbearance with, each other, that are essential to unity and fellowship; and it begets such conceit in those who advocate it, that those who question it are looked upon as opposing the truth and going astray.

THE HOUSE OF GOD.

An address (delivered in London, and now printed) on "The House of God, past and present," affords abundant proof of what we have said about these teachers and their theory, and shows that we are not misunderstanding or exaggerating them one bit.

We do no injustice to the lecturer by saying that, generally speaking, he derives his conclusions from, and bases them upon, Old Testament types, and seeks sanction for such conclusions in the New Testament, oblivious of the fact that there are always points of contrast between types and anti-types as well as points of comparison. It is always a mistake to found doctrine on types. Surely when the antitype is present we are not dependent upon the type to know what it is. We do not look at it in view of the type, but we look at the type in view of it. I need not stop to prove this, as every

intelligent reader of the Epistle to the Hebrews is fully aware of it: a reference to that epistle is sufficient proof.

The whole of the reasoning of this lecture is directed to show that as the children of Israel prepared an habitation for God—which truly, He forsook—so we should prepare an habitation, a house for God, which He can and will forsake if we are not obedient; that therefore we are only the house of God, “if we hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end;” which is, in the speaker’s eyes, holding fast to the collective company gathered to His name: but if we do not do this, “we cease to be God’s house!” Thus our being God’s house at all depends upon our being gathered practically to the name of Christ; which is, by these teachers, limited to their own circle of fellowship.

I don’t know what my reader thinks of all this, but it is far too pretentious for me. I would rather magnify the sovereign grace of God in owning with adoring heart the place and relationships He has brought us into, and what He has made us in the most absolute way consequent upon the work of Christ; and be humbled in confession before Him, because we have so failed to own this practically. This, to my mind, is more becoming the state of things. But who can tell where religious pretension and prejudice will carry us when once we get under their influence?

As to Old Testament types, we will just notice the fallacy of one comparison and then pass on to consider the conclusion, as this latter has more to do with our subject.

The lecturer teaches that as the Israelites brought the materials and the skilful workman worked them according to the pattern for the building of the Tabernacle, so we should prepare God a house. Do Christians bring the material for the present house of God? and material, moreover, that is an *offering* from them to Him? Is the building of God’s house left to the skilful workman among Christians? If this be the case then we are the house of God on the ground of

good works, and in no absolute sense whatsoever; in which case God would indeed have to forsake His house.

But this brings me to a serious point which I have seen for some time in the teaching before us. It is another form of self-righteousness. It makes something of man and his works. It is by our good works that we become the house of God! Is this not another effort of Satan's to exalt man and his works at the expense of Christ and His work? Is it not also derogatory of the glory and grace of God? Does not God Himself prepare the material for His house? Are they not living stones of which that house is built? And are not all who are born again living stones? And are not all living stones in the building as before God? Is HE not building them up a spiritual house? Does not the Lord say, Upon this rock *I will build* My Church? (and be it remembered that these teachers apply the same theory to church, house, and temple, viz., it is the collective company, in any given place, in their fellowship). Are not all the saints in the household of God, which is "growing unto an holy temple in the Lord?"

I want my reader to see that there is an absolute side to the blessed truth—that it is a truth—a fact that we have to own and not to make. There is plenty of room for our obedience and devotedness in owning the blessed truth and making it of practical effect. The lesson we should draw from the words, "See that thou make all things according to the pattern," is that we should own and order everything in practical obedience, that God in grace, and consequent upon the work of Christ, has made true of us absolutely. In Christianity, good works and devotedness spring out of the different relationships into which we are brought, but do not lead to them. They are the fruits of the tree which God Himself has planted, and every other tree shall be "plucked up by the roots." Hence the fruit is to His glory, and not to ours. And so, too, we may add, "Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it." This has been abundantly proven in the Old

Testament. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool: *Where is the house that YE will build Me, and where is the place of My rest?* For all those things hath Mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but *to this man will I look*, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word."

I will now give a quotation from the lecture already referred to, which teaches most explicitly the theory we are dealing with:—

"Turn with me to the 3rd of Hebrews, first—4th verse. 'For every house is builded by some man,' but 'He that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all God's house'—not 'his house'—he was God's servant in God's house. (This you will find by a reference in the 12th of Numbers, verse 7.) 'But Christ as a Son over His (not "own" but "God's") house.' For Christ as a Son has no house of His own. He is there in the place of authority for God, over God's house. Christ as a Son over God's house. What is God's house? 'He dwelleth not in temples made with hands.' You Hebrew believers, what is the House? There is a form going on at Jerusalem, but the veil of the temple is rent. God has come out. There is nothing left but the hollow shell—dead formality. God has quitted it. 'Christ as a Son over His house. Whose house are we *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.'

"There is that *if* in connection with God's house; the *if* that we have been seeking to call attention to; the *if so long as they abide in a certain condition before Him*, but *if* they give up His word and disown His Lordship He must come out. He must leave them. He can never disown an individual, His spirit indwells every saint, and it is true of each, that he or she is the temple of the Holy Ghost. But there is a collective capacity, there is a something which takes a separate place and form on earth, separate and distinct from

the religions of man, from the forms and ceremonies which are evolved from the human will, a something which God speaks of as His house if they hold fast ; but *if they do not hold fast they are broken up and disowned of God,* each one, it may be, a living member of the body of Christ, but not keeping collectively a place where God's rule can be exercised, casting His word aside, *they cease to be His house.*

“Now, *over that sphere*, or circle, or community, in whatever way you may care to speak of it, Christ is Son. God has placed Him in the highest place of authority, not as a servant but as a Son, and Christ in the midst of His gathered people is Son over God's house, Whose house are we, ‘*if.*’” (The italics are my own.)

Here notice we are distinctly told that the gathered company are God's house, “so long as they abide in a certain condition before Him !”

This gathered company—“a something which God speaks of as His house *if they hold fast* ; but if they do not hold fast they are broken up and disowned of God—they cease to be His house.” At the same time, “each one, it may be, a living member of the body of Christ ;” and if so, are they not living *stones* in God's house ? And “*over that sphere or circle,*” viz., the gathered company, Christ is Son, and that only with a conditional “*if.*” And the going back from that “collective position”—this “called-out company”—is departing from the living God ! “The going back from that collective position into which God has called us—for He has called us out to the name of the Lord into the place where Christ is owned in all His authority ; the *going back from that* God calls ‘departing from the living God.’ Where you get that expression, ‘living God,’ it is usually in connection with a collective testimony, with the house of God, or Church of God, in some sense or other.” So, departing from the collective company is departing from the living God !

This seems to me a most solemn thing to say. Certainly

the speaker cannot know what he is really saying. It is too glaring to need much comment; but I will just ask: Does the being in a collective position ensure one against "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God?" Are there none in such a position who depart in heart from the living God while remaining in it? And will the lecturer dare to stand by the logical sequence of his argument, and say that all the children of God outside such gathered companies (*i.e.*, to be explicit, outside the same fellowship as the lecturer) have departed from the living God?

What is here said about the expression "living God" as being usually in connection with the House of God, or Church of God, in testimony, gives very poor support to such a monstrous statement; but I suppose no other could be found. The word occurs three times in connection with the Church or Temple of God. The first time is certainly in the most absolute sense possible, where there is no question of testimony raised at all—Matt. xvi. 16-18. The second time is in 2 Cor. vi. 16; and the last time is in 1 Tim. iii. 15. I may safely leave my reader to judge for himself what foundation such a statement finds in these passages. The passages themselves will come under our consideration in other connections.

But how fully this corroborates what we have said concerning this party—viz., that they teach that we are only the "Temple of God," "Church of God," or "House of God," on condition that we are gathered as such to the name of Christ. But is it not clear that it is because we are the "Church of God" or "House of God" that we should gather as such? And has not the "if" of Heb. iii. 6 a different meaning altogether from that which the lecturer here gives it? "Whose house are ye *if* ye hold fast," etc., does not mean that their holding fast made them His house, but gave evidence to the fact that they *were* such; and in the absence of such evidence, there was no reason to suppose that they were.

And so in verse 14 the "holding fast their confidence steadfast unto the end," proved that they were partakers of Christ, but did not make them such. Moreover, the holding fast is holding fast our confidence in a personal Saviour, and the hope of seeing Him soon, not the holding on to a "Church" or "House of God." (Though we have our responsibility in relation to these.) Here it is holding fast to the Gospel in its purity, and not to an ecclesiastical theory; and it seems to me a very solemn thing to make it such. Would our author dare to say that all the saints who are not in the gathered companies *which he has before him*—for there are many other companies gathered just in the same way—have ceased to "hold fast their confidence and the rejoicing of their hope?" And yet this is what his theory requires.

Nor does his different rendering of verse 14 alter the sense. Whether the word be rendered partakers or companions it is clearly something we are *positively made*, "if we hold fast our confidence," etc., which is not saying we become something by holding fast, *i.e.*, the holding fast does not make us companions (if he will have this word), but shows that we *are* such. A verse in the Epistle to the Colossians (chap. i. 23) uses the "if" just in the same way. We are to be "presented holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight; *if* we continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel." No such distinction as our brother makes between partakers and companions would do here. Our presentation thus before God is not *based upon* our continuing in the faith, and being not moved from the Gospel, but is evidenced by it. The difference is obvious and immense; but if there is not such evidence, it may be doubted if the blessing is possessed. Just so it is here in Heb. iii. It does not encourage the doubt and uncertainty of the Wesleyan Christian one bit. The solemn warnings against going back, against losing our hold and our confidence, are intended to arrest the living and prevent their doing so, while

the merely nominal Christian despises the warning and perishes. The fact that he goes back, does not hold fast, etc., proves that he has not the life within him, and therefore does not deprive him of it. Hence the Apostle says, in chap. x.: "But we are not of them that draw back into perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Here was something more than a merely nominal faith, which might be abandoned at any moment. The profession may be, and, alas! often is made without the possession of the life; but the life is necessary to the supporting of the confidence and faith, outwardly conveyed by the profession, firm unto the end. The dry, flickering wick of the lamp of profession may burn for a little while, when the light of Gospel is applied, but the oil in the vessel, with the lamp, is necessary to its continuance. If our brother, the writer of "The House of God, past and present," got over this one "if" (Heb. iii. 14) in the way he attempts, there are many others which would not submit to the same interpretation.

At the same time, the children of God may wander, but He will chastise them in view of restoration. This is always the case where there is life.

Albeit as to the word itself, whether it be "partakers" or "companions," it is a mistake to make the meaning of the text entirely depend upon it; the context must be taken into consideration. Truly the word in chapter i. 9, rendered "fellows," is the same. But who are His fellows according to this text? Are they not *all* the saved? Are they not the same company as those spoken of in chap. ii. 11, 12—"For both He who sanctified and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren?" I say, are not His fellows those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren? And are not these *all* the saints? And so here (iii. 14), whether you render the word "partakers" or "companions," it is the same; it is those He is not ashamed to call His brethren. But why not refer to the first verse of the

same chapter for the same word? It occurs there—partakers of the heavenly calling. It is very certain that this would not help the altered rendering: “*companions* of the heavenly calling” does not sound at all right, nor would its use in chap. vi. 4, for we could not there say, “*companions* of the Holy Ghost.” Its only other use in this epistle, which is in chap. xii. 8, would give no more support to such a rendering: “But if ye be without chastisement whereof all are *partakers*”—the word “*companions*” would not fit here at all. The word occurs also in Luke v. 7, where it is rendered “partners.”

After making these comparisons, one is a little surprised to meet the unqualified statement, “the word happens to be companions.” We might at least look for some special reason for such an alteration, since the word is *nowhere* else thus rendered, and in most places where it occurs *would* not be so rendered. However, it is right to say that I have found the same rendering of the word in one translation in this case only; but not without a note on the part of the author, who thinks it has special reference to chap. i. 9, and gives this as his reason for thus rendering it. The very fact that such reason had to be given for the rendering shows that the word itself, when alone, would not warrant it. Yet our author tells us that “the word happens to be companions,” and proceeds to build up his own construction upon it. But I must leave my reader to judge for himself, after what has been observed, if we have the same truth here as is presented in John xiii. in the words, “part with Me.”

What has been remarked about those two texts (Heb. iii. 6 and 14) is in accordance with the whole of the New Testament teaching on the subject. The tree *is known* by its fruits. The nature of the tree is not dependent on the fruit, but it is proven by it.

See also in this lecture a most clear instance of what we have already observed about the unwarrantable use of the absence,

or presence, of the article: "God speaks of the entire building as *the* house of God, and any given part of it as 'house of God.' Just in the same way when the word temple is used and applied to a given company, it is 'Temple of God,' not *the* temple of God. That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in house of God, which is Church of the living God, the pillar and ground (or stay) of the truth." Is this really so? Let any one, who can, take the Greek Testament and look up the passages where the article does, and where it does not occur, and it will be found that it will not stand for one moment. The statement is a most flagrant gratuity, supposed to favour the theory in question, for I do not see that it would really favour it, even if the remark were correct. For "Church of God," or "House of God," may embrace all believers in any place, as well as "*the* Church of God," or "*the* House of God," both in an objective sense, and in a subjective sense. The latter might be limited to "the gathered company" in any given place, just as consistently as the former, so long as it be qualified by the naming of the place: "The Church of God *at Liverpool*, or "the Church of God *at Greenock*." If our brethren will insist upon limiting the application to "the gathered company" they need not dispose of the article to do it. They might say "*the* Church at," as well as "*the* gathered company," for they say that "the gathered company" is the "Church of God" in the place, and all outside it are outside "Church of God," in which case it would be "*the* Church of God" *in any certain place*, for there is no other Church of God with them in the same place.

However, the Scripture uses the article in connection with the Church locally, as well as generally, as "*the* Church of God which is *at Corinth*," "*the* Church of *the Thessalonians*," and in the case of the seven addresses to the seven Churches in Asia—"the Church at Ephesus," "*the* Church in Smyrna," etc. Here, then, we see as opposed to the theory of our brethren, that the article does occur in connection with a local Church.

As we are reminded by our brother that the term "House of God" occurs three times in the epistles, and his theory claims that when the article is used it embraces "every gathered company"—mark, not all the saints, but every *gathered company*—but when the article is not used only part of the house is meant, *i.e.*, any given company.

Twice out of the three times the article *is* used—1 Peter iv. 17, and Heb. x. 21. In 1 Tim. iii. 15, it does not occur in the original; nevertheless is it not clear that the passage is of general application, and that the article is needed in English? Who would say that what is said here of the Church of God is not applicable to the whole Church; yes, the Church which is His body, namely, that it is the Church of the living God, the pillar and stay of the truth? And hence it will apply in a general sense to the whole Church upon earth, at any given time, and locally to any given place, for what the Church is as a whole in the world she is in any particular place or locality. Our author acknowledges this when he says, "Every little company is, or ought to be, a miniature of the whole building, which includes every company gathered by the spirit and word of God to the name of Jesus," only he limits it to the gathered out company or companies: thus, as we have sought to show, clearly making the blessed truth conditional upon the place we take, and our obedience the basis of it, instead of the outcome of it. This is consistent with the whole theory, for according to it we prepare God a place of rest! We prepare Him a habitation! We build Him a house! See Isaiah lxvi. 1. 2.

I do not like to bring any charge against the writer of the pamphlet in question, but I will just give his rendering of the following, and leave the unprejudiced reader to judge for himself how conveniently and unfairly he adapts it to his own theory, as is the case all through: "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in house of God,

which is Church of *the* living God, *the* pillar and ground of the truth." (The italics are mine.)

Now on turning to the Greek Testament we find that the article occurs *before one* of these nouns only. Our brother eliminates it from the English rendering in the first two cases because it favours his theory; but in the other three he allows it to remain. To be consistent he should quote the whole verse as follows: "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in house of God, which is Church of living God, pillar and ground of the truth." But those who know most about the idioms of the two languages tell us that this falls short of the equivalent sense. An article is needed, whether the definite or indefinite may be a matter for criticism and the context to decide; but the indefinite does not fit in with "living God," and not at all well with "pillar and ground, or base," and more awkwardly still with truth. Thus we see that neither of the three instances at all favours his theory.

Nor does the text he is dwelling upon in Hebrews give him any more solid basis: For "whose house are ye?" would apply to *all believers*, at least in any given place, and generally to all believers everywhere. But it really is "Whose house are we?" and thus the revised version and another known as the "new translation" render it.

It is admitted by the lecturer that the epistle to the Hebrews is not, so to speak, written to a church," but he wrongly adds, "though doubtless it was," for it was professedly written to Hebrew Christians as such, and has for its object the helping them thoroughly out of Judaism into Christianity proper. If he means that these Hebrews doubtless formed a church, or churches, it is agreed, though the epistle was not addressed to them as such, but simply as Hebrew Christians. Hence, "whose house are ye?" includes in its first and most limited application *all* Hebrew believers to whom it was addressed, and secondly, in its general application, *all* believers everywhere, they being brought into the same relationship.

We shall find that the theory finds no more support in the passages that speak of the Church as the "Temple of God," in which connection the word "temple" occurs six times. Three of these are found in 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." We are told that "God speaks of the entire building as *the* house of God; and any given part of it as "House of God." Just in the same way when the word temple is used and applied to a given company it is "Temple of God," not "*the* Temple of God."

Now, the article appears in Greek twice out of the three times that the word "temple" occurs in our text. It is omitted in the first case. As to renderings, some give the definite article each time, others the indefinite in the first case and the definite in the other two. What we have first to enquire then is, Does the first mention here apply only to a "given part" of the "entire building," and the two others to the whole of it, or do they all three bear the same application? I desire that my reader should understand that I have nothing at issue, as far as my own views are concerned, in the answer to this question. For I quite agree that there is a general and local aspect given to the Church. But whether it be "*the* Church of God" or "Church of God," it includes *all* believers in the place, and is objective in its character, and therefore not dependent upon the subjective state, and hence both here and in the second epistle (vi. 16, 17) the objective part is given as a reason for the subjective state. "Ye *are* the Temple of God. The Temple of God *is* holy. What agreement hath the Temple of God with idols, for *ye are* the Temple of the living God." There is no *if* here. It is not *if* ye are gathered, *if* ye are in the called out company!

The difference between such views and my own as to this point are, that in applying the term to any given

place our brother limits that application to the "gathered out"—the collective "company," and makes the fact—the truth—depend upon their thus being "gathered out;" but I apply the term to *all* the saints in such given place, and urge the absolute fact as a reason for consistent collective conduct. We "are the Temple of God," therefore we should take a place consistent with this blessed truth. But the local aspect is determined by some qualification such as "The Church at Corinth," "The Church of the Thessalonians," etc.

As to the first case here, "Ye are temple of God," of course it meant the Church at Corinth; but did it mean them exclusively? It is agreed, I think, that it would apply to any other local Church as well; and would it not apply to the Church in any country, too? Indeed, would it not apply to the Church in general—*i.e.*, in the whole world—the "entire building," the absence of the article does not make this impossible. Might it not be said from God's point of view (from which view this verse evidently speaks), concerning all the saints on earth, "Ye are Church of God," or "Ye are God's Church," which is the same thing. Is it not as true of all the saints thus, as it is of those in any one place? The speaker says no, and his reason for it is that the article is not used. Now, will this stand? Does he not know that in the next two instances here given it *does* occur? And while, as we are told, the first applies only to the local Church, do the following two apply to the entire building? This is what the theory teaches. But now, see, "if any man defile *the* Temple of God." Would not this be the local assembly, as far as the man's action at any given time was concerned, that he would defile; and, therefore, the same in application as the foregoing, "Ye are temple of God?" Albeit, the article appears also in the next case, where there can be no such question: "For the Temple of God is] holy, which Temple YE *are*." This needs no comment. That this applies locally is obvious, and yet the article is present; thus in

one text the theory, as far as this part of it is concerned, is entirely refuted.

Now, without denying the force of the article in some places, we may ask: Do not these comparisons show that the absence or presence of the article, in itself, does not determine the local or the general aspect of the Church; that, used without or with the article, it may be applied to either aspect? It is simply "the Church" or "Church" in any place, or generally.

The term occurs twice also in 2 Cor. vi. 16. Here no article is used, but it is clear that the term would apply to the Church of God generally, to all among whom God would dwell and walk, who should be His people, and to whom He would be God. The revised version renders the second case here: "We are the Temple of God." But I do not defend this; it is not needed to refute the idea in question.

The other mention of the word Temple in connection with the Church, is in Eph. ii. 21, where we have no article in the original, and yet the entire building is spoken of.

Thus we see the said theory left without the slightest ground; the very passages that are called upon to support it, when looked at in their true and unstrained meaning, turn against it.

THE CHURCH: GODWARD AND MANWARD.

We will now just glance at some published notes of a lecture delivered at Blackstock Hall, Finsbury Park, on 24th November, 1886, where we shall find the same theory taught. Though much more developed since, I choose this to show the germs.

The words "Godward" and "Manward" are here substituted for the absolute and the practical, or what we have been dwelling upon as the objective and subjective aspects of the Church. The body aspect is the Godward, and the man-

ward aspect is limited to the called-out company. I quite agree with what the lecturer says about the Church in its Godward aspect, that it "is beyond the power of man or the devil to disturb or mar in anywise." But, certainly, when we speak of the Church in its manward aspect, it is that aspect of the whole Church as presented to man, as seen by him, as having to do with our responsibility, that we have before us, and not merely a gathered remnant. "The Church, which is His (Christ's) body," as we have seen, and as author of the lecture above referred to owns, and I believe is glad to own, embraces *all* true believers, and is intact before God as in His own hands. But this same Church appears, alas! to the world as a striving and divided people. This is an axiom. This, therefore, is what she has become in her manward aspect—which we have called the subjective—where all is ruin. There can be no gainsaying this. The manward aspect is that which presents itself to man, and is connected with his responsibility, where sad failure has come in. It is the endeavour to deny this, on the part of our brethren, that is the real cause of all the wrong teaching among them. They ignore that the Church, in its manward aspect, is a complete ruin. This becomes all the more easy and natural to them, because they limit this aspect to the gathered company that they themselves are with.

I believe in different aspects of the Church, and more than I can go into in these short papers, but I do not believe in a theory that makes, of a different aspect, another Church altogether, so much more narrow than the Church of God, which shuts out thousands of those who are in the true Church. I believe, too, in the Lord's people gathering to Himself, and seeking to act upon Church principles, and that such a gathering, in an indefinite sense, may be called an Assembly or Church of God, but it is the presumption, on the part of such a gathering, to be the Church of God in the place, to the exclusion of all others who are not with them, and that

even when there are companies gathered just in the same way, and as sound in the faith as themselves; it is this that I believe to be pretension before God and before men.

And surely the only conditions of fellowship with such an assembly should be that a man be a child of God and therefore truly in His Church, and that his life testifies to this as well as his lips; any other conditions would be unscriptural.

“The Churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus,” were simply composed of those, in different localities, who had been converted to God—who were baptised into the body of Christ; then they were all together, but now those who compose the Church of God in different localities are scattered and divided among themselves, to our shame surely be it said; but such is the fact, and it must be taken into account; we cannot ignore it without falling into a snare, without getting into confusion.

Christ is building a Church: were not the Churches which were in Judea of that building? Were they not the manifestation of Christ's work in that part of the world? And is it not so in any given locality? Is not “a Church in Christ Jesus” anywhere of that building? There is no other building that is of God; we may take a general or a local view of it, but it is the same building, *i.e.*, if it is the Church of God at all that we have before us. Now the lecturer says that “a Church of God” in any given place is formed only of those who are gathered to Christ, and he owns that this takes in hand a very few of those who are in the Church that Christ is building; it becomes obvious that such a Church is then but a remnant of the Church of God in the place. Such remnant must be viewed in relation to all the members of the body of Christ; we cannot sever ourselves. Every truly converted soul is in the Church that Christ is building. We have failed to own this blessed unity in testimony before the world, but we are wrong in trying to make another unity independent of this; this is

God's; and if we make another it cannot be of God, it is a denial of His. In principle and spirit, in confession and prayer, in worship and in service, we should take in nothing less than the whole Church of God—the whole body of Christ; even though practically we are not expressing this blessed truth: just as Elijah took the twelve stones—representing the unity of the twelve tribes of Israel—to build his altar to Jehovah, even when those tribes were a striving and divided people. But if testimony for God is to be given, it must be to what He is doing and not to what we are doing, to what is true before Him and not what appears amongst us. Thus we see (even to take our author's two aspects) that the manward is to be governed by the Godward; *i.e.*, what is true before God is what we should seek to own and express before men. Everything must be looked at, and the state of things judged of, therefore, in relation to the whole Church.

Will my reader study carefully 1 Cor. xii.? There we see, in accordance with what we have been saying, that even what our brother calls the Godward, or body aspect of the Church, has a local meaning, and is given as that which should govern the whole order of the Assembly, and the conduct of the saints in relation to each other. Both the general and local applications of *this* aspect are clearly taught in this chapter. The Apostle says (ver. 13), "For by one spirit are *we all* baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit." And in verse 27 he says, "Now YE are the body of Christ, and members in particular," and immediately adds, evidently speaking of the same thing, "and God hath set some in the *Church*"—then proceeds to give the different gifts, following up and applying the truth he has been dwelling upon. God hath set the members in the body; all the members have not the same office. God also hath set the gifts in the Church, but all have not the same gift. The words "body" and "church" here are clearly used interchangeably, and the general and local

applications of these are seen in this chapter, and both the Church and the body have a practical as well as an absolute aspect. Hence the relation and conduct of the different members to each other—"not all the same office," "the same care one for another, suffering one with another," etc., apply to the practical condition of things in the assembly, and become a testimony to the unity of the body.

From page 17 of this address the author seeks to apply his theory in a practical way. And the way he labours to make Mat. xviii. 18-20 support it is, to my mind, most solemn. For a Scripture otherwise comparatively simple and clear, and which makes provision for the people of God in the midst of the ruined state of things, is thoroughly mystified. Why destroy the simplicity of the text, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Is it not a very solemn thing to surround such a blessed portion of God's word with the mist of party ecclesiasticisms; and to daringly *limit* its application to the few with whom we are meeting? Surely such a spirit of selfishness and pretension is foreign to Christianity. It should be enough for us to have the blessed consciousness of His presence for ourselves; and we should be the last to deny the same blessing to others of our brethren gathered to Him; indeed we should only be too glad to think that any few true and simple Christians coming together around the blessed Lord (even though, perhaps, strict ecclesiastical order, externally, may not be observed) might have, in some measure at least, His presence and blessing in this way. To think so is, however, more in accordance with the Christian spirit; and is it not more in accordance with the grace of Christ too?

Albeit we have often been reminded of the fact that it is possible to be gathered externally according to the letter of the word—to form one of these "called-out companies"; and yet *not*

to have the Lord's presence and blessing thus ; because of the bad moral condition.

And so the case brought forward on pages 24 to 27 is rather amusing, and yet sadly so, to those who know the subsequent history of the lecturer, in connection with "Church of God," into which he was brought out of his kirk. I will quote the whole passage:—

"How shall we know what heaven hath bound, and what heaven hath loosed? We are shut up to the revelation of its will given us in the holy Scriptures, which completely furnish the man of God unto every good work. Is it a question of being together as believers? We must have the call of the Lord Christ bringing us together where we are. An illustration here will help some. In a certain town in Scotland, I have known this: A number of persons in a God-gathered church. For years these individuals acknowledged that this company was God-gathered. Some were brought out from this religious association, and some from that religious association (and when God separates from religious association He separates from, to keep us in the separated position and never to go back. If Jeremiah would go back, God said, I will fetch thee again, and in 2 Cor. vi. His word is, 'Come ye out and BE YE SEPARATE, and touch not the unclean, and I will receive you.' But it is vain to come out and not be separated. It is an utter delusion of Satan prevailing with far too many saints to-day who have come out and go back betimes to see, and thus, alas! some have encouraged, not only with their presence but with their pence, the unholy things from which, professedly at the call of the Lord Christ, they came out). In that town they had come out at the call of the Lord in order that they might have Christian fellowship, in order that they might practise Christian baptism, in order that they might have Christian ministry, in order that they might be in a position where the word and will of the Lord Christ was absolute from within to without in every circle of daily life of

each member that was found together there. Several of these persons, however, found they could not get their own way, they could not do things as they would like to do, for this reason; the bulk of those with whom they were, said, 'Brethren, we will gladly give in to what you wish us to do, provided you can give us to see such is the mind of the Lord.' They failed to satisfy us, we failed to satisfy them. We brought in accredited helps from sister assemblies, some from near, others from far. Patiently we laboured for their deliverance, seeking too that if we were wrong, we might be delivered. At length they got weary and said, 'It is no good waiting here, we will go out,' and out they went. They took a hall, they got a table, put on it a white cloth, and with other Christians came together on the first day of the week to remember the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread, determined to have Christian baptism, and Christian ministry, and they said; 'Is not the Lord in our midst?' We said, firmly, yet humbly, 'No, no!' 'But how is that?' For this simple reason. 'Had you the word of the Lord for being in the assembly from which you went out?' 'Yes, of course we had,' one said, 'or I would never have left Dr. B.'s kirk;' 'Nor I this,' 'Nor I that,' said others, 'if I had not the word of the Lord for being there.' 'Then, brethren, where is the word of the Lord that took you out, that gathered you in that place in opposition to this?' You may, like as in the days of Micah, lean back and say while you are keeping Ahab's statutes and Omri's judgments, the wicked, the self-ruling ones, you may lean back and say, 'Is the Lord not among us?' and the answer of the Lord will be 'No!' What! All Christians, meeting to break bread on the first day of the week, and the Lord not in their midst? Not in their midst, one whit; no more than He is in the rankest thing that is opposed to His mind, [! !] for He is only in the midst of such as have a sanctuary builded according to the pattern given through Paul, the Moses of the present

dispensation.” [!!] This is what the author says in a case where others were the seceders.

Now, compare what has recently taken place with the author among the seceders. He had also known “in a certain town in Scotland, a number of persons in a God-gathered Church. For years these individuals [to wit, himself and many others] acknowledged that this company was God-gathered,” that is, the company they were in. “Several of these persons, however, found they could not get their own way ; they could not do things as they would like to do ;” and the brethren with whom they could not agree said to them : “Brethren, we will gladly give in to what you wish us to, provided you can give us to see such is the mind of the Lord.” Something to this effect, I understand, was often said in the case I here allude to. “Patiently the brethren,” with whom the author and his party could not have their own way, “laboured for their deliverance,” seeking, too, if they were wrong, that they might be delivered.

“At length they [our author and those with him] got weary, and said : ‘It is no good waiting here, we will go out ;’ and out they went.” Only I think that he, and those with him, in this case gave a little more trouble than those in the case he relates, that is, judging from what he here says, and from what I know of the case I am comparing. However, they went out. “They took a hall, they got a table, put on it a white cloth, and, with other Christians [but perhaps there were no others in this case], came together on the first day of the week to remember the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread, determined to have Christian baptism and Christian ministry ;” and they did not say : “Is not the Lord in our midst ?” but positively affirmed that He was. And, moreover, they “said firmly,” if not “humbly,” that He was not with those they had seceded from. If you ask these seceders, “Had you the word of the Lord for being in the Assembly from which you went out ?” they say, “Yes ; of

course we had." And these brethren whom they left might have said: "Then, brethren, where is the word of the Lord that took you out; that gathered you in that place in opposition to this?"

What the reply of our brother and those with him would be now to all this I know not.

But here I have sought to show how the recent conduct of the lecturer, and those with him, "in a certain town in Scotland," is condemned by his own theory as here illustrated.

Without attempting to judge between parties, we may ask if it be thought that circumstances justifies secession in the one case (that in which our author is concerned), is not this also possible in the other? I know nothing about the case here brought forward as an illustration, and therefore can say nothing. It is the principle I apply here. As far as the merits of the matter go, in one it may have been right, and in the other wrong, or in both cases the seceders may have been right or wrong. Everything as to this depends upon the merits of the cases themselves. But our brother leaves the illustration without point, as he does not give the merits of the case.

No more need be said on this address. We see it advocates the same theory as we have been dealing with, therefore, whatever we have before brought forward in refutation of it, will be of use to the reader here.

I will just add that our brother is clear enough about the absolute character of the Church before God, and one delights to see the way it is maintained in this lecture. His wrong is in making a *new thing* entirely of the subjective aspect. There are different aspects, nevertheless they are aspects of the same thing. He rightly teaches that the Church, in what he calls its "Godward aspect," is perfect and secure for ever, and embraces all true believers. This is the Church which Christ is building—His body. But, then, he wrongly teaches that we have to build another Church, with which he connects our

responsibility, to which he here applies the term "A Church which is in Christ Jesus;" in some other places, "Church of God." A sister who follows this teaching most consistently said, a little more than a year ago: "I am in two Churches; God put me in one when I was converted, and I put myself into another when I came into fellowship."

But is this so? Have we not rather to own that which God is building, and bear testimony to that? Is it not the unity that God is forming—that we have to keep—which is given as a reason for *practical* unity? Is it not the membership of the body of Christ that is given as the only membership to be owned by us, and as that with which our responsibility is connected? Do we not make a sect by forming any other? Truly, indeed, when we see this, it is impossible to close our eyes to the general failure.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

We have seen that it is impossible to have, in the present state of things, an apostolic Church, in a subjective sense, for the Church in the apostles' days was composed of *all* true believers, and so there was, for the time, a correspondence or consistency between the objective and the subjective aspects thereof. The line was more distinctly drawn between the Church, as a whole, and the world. The unity of the Church was not more true absolutely, but more manifested; she was seen by the world more distinctly as one.

But still, even then the great difference between these two aspects of the Church very soon appeared, and it was seen that sad failure might enter and spoil the Church in her subjective aspect. One man has to be put out on account of the practice of sin; he may be a member of the Church of God in its absolute character, or he may not, this remained to be seen in

the effect of the discipline, as far, however, as the saints themselves were concerned ; of course God knew.

Others, we read, were cast out of the Church, that is, in its subjective aspect ; for those cast out were really in the Church of God as before Himself, and it was the ascendancy of evil inside that led to their being cast out. Thus we see the difference between the absolute and the practical character of the Church soon appeared, and, as we know, went on getting wider and wider until scarcely a point of resemblance remained, and the Church in her subjective aspect became an utter ruin—a corrupt system. And the Lord's people who wished to be faithful to Himself had to come out from her as an unclean thing. But those who have come out from this corrupt system of error, and spurious unity that professes to be the Church of God on the earth, are broken up into smaller systems, all characterised little or much by sectarianism, and many of them permeated with false doctrine. Such is the state of things presented to our view at the present time ; and truly redeemed souls, and therefore members of the Church of God in its absolute character, are scattered up and down among these systems. Hence I say it is impossible, in the existing state of things, to have an apostolic Church in an unqualified sense ; though we can act upon apostolic principles and precepts.

Here then is the resource for those who wish to be faithful to their Lord and Master, who wish to go on in obedience to the word of God. For I am far from saying that it is not possible to obey the word of God in the circumstances. But I do say emphatically that if a few only of all the saints of God return to those principles, that they occupy the place of a remnant only in the world, the country, or the town, and not *the* Church of God, in the town, or the country, or the world. And the assuming to be such is the greatest ecclesiastical pretension, and diametrically opposed to the principles to which we profess to return ; for those principles show that the

saints of God are one, and therefore the understanding of such principles should enlarge our hearts toward all redeemed souls and bow us in humility before God, because those whom He has made one absolutely should be so scattered and divided practically. The fact that Christ should be owned the centre of *all* His people, and yet only a few are gathered simply to Himself, should be a cause of humbling and a matter of confession to those who apprehend it: and yet a reason for thankfulness that such a few are thus able to gather; indeed that this is our resource in days of evil. For though the Church as a whole is scattered and divided, here is a resource for "two or three." So that none can say it is not possible to follow the instructions of Scripture.

Even two or three thus gathered, or two or three dozen, in a town where there may be many hundred saints, have all the instructions of Scripture given to the Church, for their guidance. The principles laid down in the word of God for the Church, the instructions thereof as to order and government, are as great an authority for such a remnant as for the whole Church; and such a remnant have as much authority to put out a wicked person as the Church at Corinth had, or as they would have if the whole Church in the place were gathered in obedience to the word of God, because the authority is not in the Church, but in the word of God which is given for the direction of the Church, hence that word must be produced to give what is done any power over the consciences of the saints. Thus we see that a remnant may act upon the principles of the Church, even when the Church itself is in a state of ruin as to testimony. At the same time, let us remember that it is in the midst of general failure, such as should keep us humble and dependent, that we do so. But the having recourse to assembly discipline for the vindication of a party, or to gratify some ill-feeling, as is, alas! sometimes the case, is extremely wicked. Albeit, the state of things should make us all the more careful to have the word of God

most clearly before us as our authority ; for the effect of the discipline is nullified to some extent, in the soul of the one subjected to it, by his being able to turn to other companies of Christians, but not as an act before God, if in obedience to His word. Let us therefore see to it that we have unmistakable direction in the Scripture for any case of excommunication. To have a *desire* to put any person out from among us is un-Christlike ; but to seek to conjure up a charge for that purpose I repeat is wickedness. The object of discipline is not to maintain any way or to support any theory of our own, but to maintain the truth of God among His people and consistency of walk.

CUTTING OFF ASSEMBLIES.

Scripture gives no jurisdiction whatever to one Assembly, or to a number of Assemblies, to cut off another. There is a certain line of reasoning which may seem to render it right and necessary, but Scripture gives no direction concerning such a thing, and a line of reasoning is certainly no authority in the matter. Notwithstanding the silence of Scripture on the subject, and therefore the want of its authority, yet it has been freely practised of late years, and, as we might expect, with disastrous results. Can we imagine any greater presumption than for a meeting, or number of meetings, to come together and by one judicial act cut off another meeting, or set of meetings, without any scriptural authority whatever ?

It may be asked then, What are we to do when there is manifest evil in a meeting ? Is it not wrong to have intercommunion with it ? It is wrong ; and we *have* Scripture to *refuse* any fellowship or intercommunion with it. But that is a different thing from cutting it off by an act of discipline. Each meeting has its own local responsibility in relation to the said gathering, and should refuse intercommunion. Some

may say that this amounts to the same thing in effect. Be it so, but it is arriving at it in a scriptural way, and therefore not so presumptuous in appearance nor disastrous in result. And be it observed that what is here said concerning intercommunion applies only when there is the allowance of *positive* and *proven* evil. But most of the cutting off we refer to has been merely a party thing. There has been a quarrel in some place that has resulted in a division, and the gatherings around have begun some to take one side, and some the other, and then each begins to cut off the other; and not only is the opposite party in the locality of the division cut off, but all in other places who take sides with that party; and this is done respectively! and the result is division right through the country. But here it is asked again, with some appearance of reason, "Well, what are we to do; both cannot be right?" The answer is, act under the directions of the word of God. If there is evil of a fundamental character on either side, refuse intercommunion with that side. But if the division is caused merely by some misunderstanding or petty quarrel among the brethren, which is mostly the case, receive any of them as children of God, and help them in prayer and counsel to get right with each other, but do not take sides. There are, and will be, difficulties, but let us be cast upon the Lord in them, and not seek help from our own schemes. If in this matter we go where the light of Scripture does not show the way, we shall be thrown into utter darkness and confusion.

But let me add here, that I believe it is impossible to carry out divine principles effectually, to the honour of Christ and the blessing of His people, without a corresponding moral condition of soul, without the spirit and grace of Christ; without the spirit of dependence, prayer, and contrition of heart; that we shall soon get into confusion and trouble, if we seek to do so, merely in a legal or formal way. It is better to be exercised before the Lord in a difficulty, than to seek to avoid it by rules or plans of our own.

OCCASIONAL FELLOWSHIP.

Great difference of judgment exists in the minds of brethren as to whether or not a child of God should be allowed to remember the Lord's death in the breaking of bread with us, without coming, as we say, into fellowship—in other words, without avowedly breaking connection with all denominations around, and taking his or her place as one in our regular fellowship.

Now I do not propose to clear away all the difficulties that attend this question by laying down any rigid rules. I believe we make a mistake when we attempt this; it is like seeking to dispense with all need of exercise before the Lord and patient waiting upon Him, which are so healthful to our souls.

At the same time there are general principles in the word of God which should, in the main, be our guide. When we see that all believers *are* members of the Church of God—all members of the body of Christ, of which body He Himself is the only Head, and that all should be gathered to and directed by Himself—then the difficulty is, not how can we receive such members, when known to us as such, but how can we refuse them? They are members of the body of Christ as we are, and as dear to Him, and if we are in a scriptural place before the Lord it is also their place; and if they are sound in the faith, and of good moral character, and yet our principles will not admit them, it is certain that they are not divine principles.

A unity that shuts out any that are God's people, or admits such as are not His, is not God's unity. A person is put out because he is a wicked person, *i.e.*, is guilty of such sin as makes his Christianity doubtful; hence the words, "Let him be unto thee as an *heathen man and a publican*," that is, like an unconverted man. The only scriptural and unsectarian principles for the saints of God are such as takes in the whole

Church, and extends to every member thereof. We gather to Christ because we are members of His body ; our brethren around us, who may not be with us, are members of the same body. In the very act of remembering our blessed Lord, we give expression to this truth : " For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread. In partaking of the one bread we give expression to the fact that we are one body, therefore all the members of the body should be allowed to do so, and if we put unscriptural barriers in the way of their doing so, do we not become sectarian ? We know that there are many of our dear brethren in the denominations around us who are sound in the faith and devoted in life, who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. Is it right, then, to say that these cannot be allowed to remember the Lord with us unless they disavow their connection with such denominations and come into our fellowship ? This is like saying you must leave all other denominations and join us, for our fellowship is composed only of those who join us. This is sectarian enough. Divine principles and Christlike practice would lead us rather to say, " We know you to be a child of God, you are a member of the true Church, and we own no other ; the Church we own takes in all the redeemed, hence you *are* one of us ; therefore we cannot refuse you, but welcome you to the Lord's Table."

It remains with the brother himself as to whether he comes again or not ; he is responsible to the Lord in this.

In connection with this question difficulties are often supposed and anticipated, which would never arise if the Assembly simply acted before the Lord, and was in a good condition before Him. The saints of God are attracted and kept by simplicity and power. The power of God manifest in the midst of His people, in real helpful ministry, and a continuing in the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus, and love towards each other as brethren, will be more effectual in

keeping the saints together, than any amount of rigid rules and legal impositions.

Another difficulty appears in the way of commendation. We reasonably enough say, that if one has a right to bring a child of God to the Table another has the same, and the same liberty must be granted to all. But it is not so much a question of the right of individuals as the satisfaction of the Assembly. The Assembly must be satisfied that the brother or sister commended for fellowship is sound in the faith and of moral character. Whether it be by letter or by personal introduction, this is necessary. A good deal then depends upon the confidence of the meeting in the brother or brothers that commend. Some brothers, though personally devoted, may not have, or may not be thought to have, that intelligence and discernment that are required in these days to form a judgment as to a man's soundness in the faith. I do not think it right, therefore, for any brother to press another upon the meeting. He introduces to the meeting; if the meeting has confidence in his judgment they are decidedly wrong in refusing to allow the brother introduced to break bread, but after the brother has been received, the responsibility as an individual of the one who introduces him is at an end in the matter.

I am well aware that there are questions of details in connection with this subject that can only be dealt with by wisdom and grace when they arise. But we ought to be clear as to principles.

We conclude, then, that a number of saints gathered to the Lord Jesus Christ, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit, and to act upon Apostolic principles, cannot consistently refuse any known to them as children of God and sound in the faith; and that if they will only receive them on conditions that they avowedly "come into *our* fellowship," they take a party and sectarian place.

FORMALITY IN THE CHURCH.

I have already said a little about the importance of moral condition and spiritual power for the carrying out of the Lord's mind in the assembly of his people; but wish now to say a few words about the dead, formal, and confused state, as well as the difficulties, that result from such a state. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." There must be something more than the letter of the word, than the mere theory of the truth, in order to a condition suited to God, and the enjoyment of the presence of our Lord in united worship and service; in order to our comforting ourselves after a godly sort, and in a way worthy of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our relations with each other. Alas! here is where we so grievously fail. Our relations with each other are founded upon, and should be controlled by, our mutual relations to the blessed Lord, whether it be as redeemed by Him, members of His body, or His servants. If, therefore, we are not behaving ourselves in a way comfortable with our relations to Christ, it is not to be wondered at if we are all in confusion as to our relations with and conduct towards each other. And by reversing the argument, which is quite consistent with truth (for the tree that brings forth the fruit is known by the fruit it brings forth), we may say that, if in our relations with each other we are all in confusion, and uncharitable in our conduct towards each other, we are not conducting ourselves in a way becoming our relations with Christ, we are not right in heart with Him. Our pretensions to fidelity to Christ, to the carrying out of His mind, the doing of His will, and the maintaining of His truth, may be loud enough. But this is nothing more or less than hypocrisy while we are so un-Christlike in our conduct toward one another—so far astray as to our relations with each other that we are continually found biting, devouring, and speaking evil of each other. And yet the moment we get a little out with

each other these are the very things we are apt to resort to. Now there are very few of the Lord's people concerning whom something that is not exactly right cannot be said, when such is searched for; but let us remember that "he that diggeth up evil loveth strife," and again, "for all the law is fulfilled in this one word, even in this:" "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And let us study more the epistles of John, also parts of his gospel, and the sermon on the mount on this subject; nor let us forget that the truth contained therein applies to *all* the children of God, and therefore should regulate our' conduct, not only towards those with whom we are in fellowship, but any or all of the Lord's dear people.

Even if our brother or brethren should go wrong, and treat us badly, such conduct as we have just described is most unjustifiable and unchristianlike; weeping over them, and praying for them would be more in accordance with the word of God and the spirit of Christ, and would also show that we were somewhat near to the heart of Christ.

What I have said shows the necessity for reality and power in our souls. Even the Lord's supper, the partaking of it on the first day of the week, and the gathering to Christ as our one centre for this purpose, scriptural as these things are in themselves, may be reduced to a mere powerless form by anything that separates them from their great signification, whether it be the bad condition of the saints, sectarian rules, or anything else. The moment we make the Lord's supper anything but the commemoration of and the showing forth of His death, it becomes a mere rite; and it is easier to do this than we think. It is the wondrous truth shown forth in, and brought home by the ordinance, and not the ordinance itself, or the mode of observing it (though, of course, we should have regard to these), that is of the greatest importance. Therefore, all who love the Lord who died for them, all who can truthfully say "The Lamb was slain for me," and whose life does

not deny the fact, should be allowed to remember the Lord's death with His gathered saints. The great and blessed truth shown forth by the ordinance, and the One remembered therein, are dear to them; hence, if the gathered saints refuse such the privilege of partaking in the ordinance because they are not nominally in fellowship, do they not thereby make the ordinance itself of greater importance than the truth shown forth therein, and yet reduce it merely to a sectarian test?

Just so, too, with Baptism. This latter is a figure of the blessed Gospel truth, that the believer has died with Christ, been buried, and raised again with Him. All this is absolutely true before God, by the death and resurrection of Christ, apart from baptism altogether; but the Lord, in the Gospel, gives baptism as the sign of this in public confession before men. But, surely, we ought not to attach more importance to the figure than we do to that which is figured. We know that baptism may be used apart from the presence of the reality, *i.e.*, by unconverted persons, in which case there is nothing but a false profession in it, the reality is not there. We know, also, that there may be the reality even where the figure is ignored, or rather, misunderstood or misapplied. It is a figure of a great and glorious reality. Now, then, if we say to one of whom we are assured that the reality is true—who is saved through the death and resurrection of Christ, but does not understand the true application of baptism—"We cannot allow you to break bread till you are baptised," are we not also here making the figure of more importance than the reality, than that figured, as well as reducing it, too, to a sectarian test? For, when we attempt to honour any part of the truth by giving it a place which God has not given it, we really degrade it.

If we make these two ordinances—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—a test of fellowship, we are more taken up with the ordinances than we are with the great truth they both figure,

and we are in danger of becoming mere ritualists. I believe that this very thing has led to much of the trouble and error that exists in the Church over these two simple institutions to-day.

But I will say a few more words about baptism, with the desire to give some little help to the Lord's people, on a subject which is the cause of so much difference of judgment. The fact that there is often so much trouble and difficulty over such a simple ordinance does indeed show what we are. Brothers who alike love the truth, love the Gospel, and love souls, yet if there happens to be a difference of judgment on this subject, their hearts are alienated from each other by it; indeed, sometimes they look upon one another almost as heretics. Is not this making baptism of more importance than all the real and essential Gospel truths, yea, and Church truths too? Surely this ought not to be. On the one hand there is a tendency to connect it with the Kingdom in such a way as to make it applicable to unconverted people, and on the other hand there is a tendency to give it such undue prominence above all fundamental and vital truths, as to make it an initiative sacrament to Church fellowship, and to look upon a believer as scarcely saved if not baptised, at least, as not eligible for fellowship with those who are.

It is certainly wrong to make baptism a door to fellowship at the Lord's Table; as wrong as it would be to single out the doctrine of election, or of the responsibility of man, or any other single doctrine, whether it be the one body or anything else, and make it the ground, or a test of fellowship, which in reality is making such doctrine a sectarian wall. The moment we make any particular truth the ground of gathering, or test of fellowship, in such a way as to denominate us Calvinists, Arminians, Baptists, etc., we become a sect. Christ is the centre of gathering, not doctrine, and redemption or relationship, the ground, if we may speak of ground at all. The doctrine of Christ, including all the great truths of Christi-

anity, are taught *in* the gathering, not as initiative steps to it.

Another reason why baptism should not be made a test of fellowship at the Lord's Table is, because it is not a Church matter at all. We are brought into the Church by conversion, not by baptism. Baptism is more connected with the responsibility of the evangelist and the believer than with the Church; and the teaching the observance of all things whatsoever the Lord has made known, is what goes on *in* the Church, not something that must be perfected before souls are brought there.

But here, again, I fall back upon that which I have sought to keep prominent all along, viz., that which *is* absolutely true, they are in the Church if saved, converted into it; the Lord brings them there, He adds daily such as should be saved. If we, therefore, refuse to receive any real and sound child of God, we give a practical denial, as far as we are concerned, to what is absolutely true.

Baptism is no more essential to Church fellowship than it is to salvation. If it be said that it is essential to the obedience of the one who has believed the Gospel, I quite agree; and so is every command and precept of Scripture. Love to brethren is as essential to obedience as is baptism, and, indeed, more so, if we may be allowed to draw comparisons at all where all is of the Lord. However, it is a more sure evidence of the new life, for one may be baptised under a false profession—and hundreds are—but it is not very likely that there will be any ardent love to brethren under a false profession. Alas! that there is so little where the profession is true. It is the outcome of the new nature, and the essence of practical Christian life, and so a sure evidence of relationship. Yet how many of us are wanting in obedience to this repeated command of our blessed Lord, and His disciples, while we are extremely exacting upon others as to obedience to baptism; even to an extent that stumbles many a soul.

And surely we must take into account, at least in our dealings with others, with a desire to help them, in which case tender consideration is needed; I say surely here we should take into account the wrong teaching on this subject on all hands, and from different points of view, and its effect upon hundreds of souls. None of us can unlearn things that have been instilled into us from childhood in a moment.

And, finally, another reason why we should not make baptism a test of fellowship at the Lord's Table is, that it would lead to many being baptised for no other reason; it would be just a form with them necessary for fellowship, to regret perhaps afterwards that they missed a blessing by not knowing the reality of it at the time, that it was only a form with them.

I only need add that I think it is clear enough that baptism is scripturally applicable to believers only, and it is a figure of what is true of no others. And I believe there will be very few souls go unbaptised among the Lord's people who give it its place in their teaching; while trouble of some kind will be the result of giving it a place which it has not scripturally.

Part III.

MINISTRY.

We now come to the most interesting and important part of our subject, viz., Christian ministry, and the responsibility of the Lord's servant, a subject which should be clearly understood by all who are in any measure occupied in public service.

The importance of the constitution, sphere, and object of the Christian ministry cannot be exaggerated; as a misunderstanding of this on the part of those who are called to the ministry can only add to the confused state of things around, which is almost sure to be the case if we view it from our own standpoint; for then its sphere will become for us the sect or the company of Christians we happen to be with, the ministry will be made sectarian to fit in with our sectarian ideas, and its object, too, will be the propagation of these ideas and the interests of a party. We will, therefore, first look at the constitution of Christian ministry, then its object, and afterwards consider its practical bearings, sectarian uses, and objections to a scriptural liberty on the part of the Lord's servant.

CONSTITUTION OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

What constitutes a man a minister of Christ? This is the first and primary question; the character, manner, and sphere of his ministry are based upon this. If a man is not chosen and ordained of Christ he, in reality, has no part or lot in this matter, whatever other credentials he may show. If I wished a situation in a certain large and important firm I should not

go to some other firm, however influential and important, and even perhaps dealing in the same commodities, for the appointment, but to the head of the firm itself in which I wished to serve. And so with Christian Ministry, I must get the call to it by Christ Himself.

Conversion is the first essential. No unconverted man can be a true minister of Jesus Christ. How can a man preach the gospel of salvation to others, while he himself is not saved? He may repeat texts and words that contain the Gospel; and as there is a power in the truth of God independent of the one who handles it, souls may even be blest by its repetition; but this is more to the condemnation than the commendation of the one who thus handles the word of God; for the blessing it bears to others he himself has not received.

But with the true minister of Christ it is different; he has first felt his need of the Gospel, and appropriated the salvation that it brings, knows its power and joy; and then conceives a deep and heart stirring desire that others should know the same joy and have the same blessing.

And the next essential after conversion, is the gift from the Lord Himself for whatever part of the ministry the converted person may be called—it may be as Teacher, Pastor, or Evangelist, for these gifts are all different. More than one gift may be given to one person, and often is; but whatever the gift or gifts are that a brother possesses will soon be manifested. The Lord will own the gift as from Himself; though moral condition of soul, on the part of the one who has the gift, is requisite to a godly and effectual use thereof. Education may be, and indeed is, helpful to the one who has the gift, but no amount of education and human training can make up for the lack of such gift.

Christian ministry deals not only with the mind but with the heart and the conscience, and is intended to bring the soul into contact by faith with the Lord; hence elements are needed which education cannot supply. A power above man, and

which men cannot impart to each other, such as will penetrate the inmost part of our moral being, is needed.

The reception of the Spirit of God, therefore, is another essential to the true ministry of Christ; and the Spirit of God is only given to those who believe, those who are saved. In 1 Cor. xii. we learn that Christ the Lord gives the gifts, that they are in the body, and that it is by the same Spirit they are dispensed and used; the power of this same Spirit is manifested in each and all the gifts, however they may differ in character from each other. The Spirit of God is the power which renders the use of the gift effectual to the blessing of others; and divine love—as the next chapter shows—is the motive power in the soul of the minister, while chapter xiv. gives us his responsibility to study the edification of his hearers (and not merely the display of the gift for his own exaltation) in his use of it.

I need scarcely say how contrary to all this is a humanly appointed or ordained ministry. In the latter the first essential is the choice of the individual—he chooses it as his profession through life. But with the scriptural constitution, as we have seen, the first thing is conversion. The next thing for the man appointed minister is a college training, while the next thing with the scripturally constituted minister is the gift of Christ. The third thing required by the humanly appointed ministry is human ordination, while the third thing required by the Scripture is the possession of the Holy Ghost. It will be understood that I am here speaking of the right *constitution* of the ministry itself. It may be, and doubtless is, that some of the most able ministers of Christ have been ordained of men. However, I feel sure that such believe that it is the things of which we have spoken as making the true minister of Christ, that constitute them such, and not their ordination at the hands of man.

There are also those who are called and gifted by Christ for His service, who think this quite a sufficient warrant for

Christian ministry, and rightly ignore the ordination of man ; who nevertheless are hampered by the fear of ' man and sectarian influence, and work away for the interests of a party. Doubtless God uses them, blesses them, and makes them a blessing, but still their object is short of that presented in the Scripture. These own that Christ has given them the gifts, but seem to forget that He has set them "in the body," and not in a party, for the use of those gifts. Then is it not strange that those of the Lord's people who have been learning of late years what the body of Christ really is, are becoming the most sectarian in the use of those gifts which Christ has given for the use of the whole body? But this brings us to another part of our subject.

THE OBJECT OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

In the carrying out any great enterprise among men the ultimate object must be kept in view ; everything is ordered, arranged, and worked in view of the object to be attained ; this controls the workmen in all they do, and in the way they do it. The whole design and object must be kept before the mind in the arrangement of every detail ; for to be taken up with the detail, irrespective of the general design, might lead the workmen far astray from the design itself, and set them working against the desired object, with just as much zeal and energy as they mean to employ for it. It has been said, "Some persons are so intent upon the details that they lose all idea of the whole, and for want of grasp of the whole, they lose the benefit of the very details with which they so energetically busy themselves." Just so, I am persuaded, it is with many of us in regard to the subject before us.

The comprehensive and sublime object of the Christian ministry is given to us in Eph. iv. 11-17. When our blessed Lord ascended up on high, "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors

and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the *body of Christ*." "Till we *all* come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the *whole body* fitly joined together and compacted by that which *every joint* supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of *every part*, maketh *increase of the body* unto the edifying of itself in love."

Here then we have, in the most precise and clear manner, the object of all Christian ministry, first in connection with the ulterior purpose of God, and then in its bearing upon the present condition of the saints. The ultimate object is the bringing all saints into a glorious unity according to the purpose of God. "The unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Until the time that this is accomplished the ministry is to go on. Its present object is to keep the saints from being tossed and carried about by the doctrines, craftiness, and deceit of men, and to ensure our growing up into Christ in all things, and is the means of increase and edification of *the body*. Love is here—as also in 1 Cor. xiii.—an important element in this ministry; the truth is to be spoken in love, and the edifying of the body is carried on in love.

It is perfectly clear, then, that in both the future and the present bearings of this blessed ministry the whole body is in question, with this difference only, that the future bearing takes in the whole of the saints, from Pentecost till the coming of Christ; but its present takes in all that are living on the

earth. So, too, in the constitution of this ministry, we have seen that it relates to the whole Church—the body.

Thus, it is clear that the servant of Christ has a responsibility toward all saints ; and according to the gift and ability the Lord gives for ministry his responsibility is increased. Is it not, therefore, manifestly wrong for a servant of Christ to confine the use of his gift to one denomination, or company of Christians only, as so many are doing at the present time? The fact that I believe the company of Christians I am with, ecclesiastically, are the nearest to the truth, and, to my mind, give the most attention to scriptural order, though it may justify me for being thus with them, is no valid excuse for limiting my ministry to them, for becoming *their* minister exclusively. This is a sectarian use of the gift that the Lord has *set in the body*. Nor does the fact that many Christians around may be associated ecclesiastically with that which is unscriptural relieve me of my responsibility toward them. The need of the ministry of Christ, and the truth, is all the greater on account of their ignorance of it; therefore the reason some servants of Christ give for *not* going to them with the truth, viz., that their association is unscriptural, is the very reason why they *should* go. That is, if they could go in the grace of Christ; for we must never expect to help the Lord's people apart from this. It is the love of Christ in His servant, yearning after the saints, that will enable him to find a way, and a godly way, to reach them, and to help them when reached. But we may conclude that those who raise sectarian excuses for not going, are not in a condition to help if they did go. Some brothers are only able to minister among those who thoroughly agree with what they have to minister ; but it takes a little more grace and wisdom to minister effectually among those who do not agree with, or understand the truth I have to give out. It might be easy enough to stumble them, and close their ears by a denunciatory and reprehensive kind of ministry, coupled

with an ungracious and censorious manner ; but it requires a little more faith, grace, patience, and wisdom so to minister the truth as to touch their hearts, win their confidence, exercise their consciences, and convince their minds.

A sectarian use of the gifts that Christ has given will always result in the formation and perpetuation of sects. The object of Christian ministry is the preservation and building up of the body of Christ, and all in view of the absolute, final, and manifested unity of the Church in glory, according to the purpose of God. May the servants of Christ keep this before them.

THE COMMISSION.

It is one thing to *go* forth into the Lord's work, it is quite another to be sent. If I go without the consciousness of being sent, I am left to my own resources, and shall, sooner or later, make shipwreck of the whole thing, bringing dishonour upon the Lord, and damage upon my own soul. A messenger sent by a great King to a hostile nation has all the power of that King at his back ; but if he simply runs off without receiving a commission from the King, he is left to his own resources. He may even make known the sentiments of the King, whose loyal subject he owns himself to be ; but he has not the power of the King to support him in the face of opposition, not having received a commission. Just so with the servant of Christ. It is of all importance in this world, which is so hostile to our Lord and Master, to make sure that we are sent by Him, then we may be sure of His help and presence ; He will support us against all opposition. Thus we can go forth with confidence and courage when we hear Him saying : " Go in this thy might, have not I sent thee ? " It is true that all the Lord's dear ones may serve Him in some part of His harvest-field ; the thing is to find out what He would have

us to do, and do it as unto Himself. In another sense, *all* that we do, even our daily duties, should take the character of service to the Lord, by being done unto Him.

But the public preacher and teacher receive their gift and commission from the Lord Himself for the special work He has called them to. And this is their authority; surely there can be no greater:—"As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so send I them," said our Lord, in that well-known prayer (John xvii.) to His Father. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you," said the same blessed One to His disciples. Yes, it is He, the Lord of the harvest who sends forth labourers into His harvest field. Let us pray that He will send forth more at the present time; there is great need for them. How blessed to be consciously sent of Him! If it be asked, How are others to know that one is sent? the answer is that the Lord does not send any one of His servants forth for public work without fitting him for it, which will be seen by "the Lord working with him, and confirming the word with signs following;" for He says to such, "Lo, I am with you always." There will be the signs following; it will be seen that the Lord is working with him, the Word will be confirmed in real convincing power to souls, and in real blessing to His own people, drawing them nearer to Himself and instructing them in His ways, and producing "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" in the unconverted. What mighty signs are these! And what are all the human credentials with which many professed ministers of the Gospel invest themselves, and on which they pride themselves, worth, if there are not these signs following?

The One who gives the commission also assigns the sphere of labour. The One who says "Go" also tells those whom He sends where and to whom to go and what to teach. We find the commission itself given at the end of each gospel, and its continuance through the epistles, by the Lord giving gifts and holding the recipients responsible for the use of them.

It has been said that the last two verses of Matthew's Gospel apply in their dispensational bearing more especially to the Jewish evangelist, who will evangelise the nations after the rapture of the Church. Be it so, yet all admit that it is of general application, and this is enough for our present purpose.

The sphere, then, of the evangelist is "all nations," "the whole world," and he has a message for "every creature." The commission is great, the message is immensely important. What a solemn trust, then, has the evangelist! How necessary that he should be true to it! How important that he should thoroughly understand his commission. Yet it appears that more than one half the evangelists do not understand it.

Is it not strange, with such a commission, that so many evangelists should confine themselves to one small circle of Christians, with whom perhaps they have most in common—should become ministers to a sect or party? Is this being true to the commission? Christ says, "Go out into *all the world* and preach the Gospel to *every creature*." The evangelist practically says, "No, I am most at home with this or that company of Christians; I will go forth among them and preach to them." This confining the use of one's gift to one particular company of Christians—even supposing the most strict scriptural order is observed among them—is failing to fulfil one's mission, disloyalty to the Lord of the harvest, and unworthy of the trust committed to the Lord's servant.

It may be objected that one cannot get out to all the world, and to every creature; and as one's work must be limited to what is possible to one, it is not wrong to choose a limited sphere. This is a vain excuse; for though the commission extends to every creature, the responsibility of any evangelist ends when he has gone to all he can reach, but the commission certainly makes him responsible for this. But is this done? Are there not many thousands of souls in the same town as

the sectarian evangelist to whom he would never think of going because they are outside the denomination, or the party he is minister to, or working with? Perhaps he contents himself with the fact that they can go to his chapel, church, or gospel hall. But the commission makes him responsible to go to them—"Go ye out." And does not the love for souls that every evangelist should have impel him to do so?

The difficulties may be great, for there are very few of the Lord's people at the present time who are really free from that party and sectarian spirit that is so dishonouring to the Lord and hindering to His work among us. We need that faith and courage, with fixedness of purpose, which will enable us to carry out the commission that the Lord has given us, at all cost, without conferring with flesh and blood. The gospel we preach is not after man; we did not receive it of man; nor do we receive the commission to preach it from men, but from the Lord Himself. The preaching of the gospel was *His* mission to this world. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel, etc." Yes, it was His mission, but now, having ascended up on high, He sends His servants forth to preach it *in His stead*, so that they can say, "We pray you in Christ's stead." No ecclesiasticism should be allowed to interfere with this mission. The Lord, and not the Church, gives the commission. Therefore the evangelist is responsible to the Lord only, and the Church has no right to dictate to him how and where he shall exercise his gift.

Thank God that this is so; or what should we do in days of ecclesiastical corruption such as the present. May all true evangelists know, in reality, what it is to be sent by the Lord, and to be accompanied by His presence and power; and may every one who serves Him know the blessedness of being His servant, and not the servant of man. "The fear of man bringeth a snare." "For God hath not given to us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

THE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LORD'S SERVANT.

We have seen (1) That what constitutes a man a true minister of Christ is the gift given by Christ Himself, that it is given only to those who are truly saved, and that it is in relation to the *body*, and as a member of the same, that this gift is given ; (2) That the object of true Christian ministry is the gathering out a people for the heavens, from among all nations, to form the body and bride of Christ, and for the building up of those who are already brought into the body ; (3) That the commission is received from the Lord Himself, and is to the whole Church, or the whole world, according to the character of the gift itself ; if for the edification of the saints, it is *all* saints, the whole Church ; if for the preaching of the Gospel, it is the whole world. We are not saying that the preacher is *bound* to preach the whole world over. Our question is not one of impossibility or possibility, but of the *sphere* of responsibility. There is no ambiguity whatever about the commission of the evangelist, nor is there any qualification added to the words in which it is conveyed ; it is the "*whole world*" and "*every creature.*"

We must be clear on these fundamental points of our subject, in order to understand it in its practical working, and to meet the absurd arguments that are brought forth on every hand against an unsectarian use of gift.

We are now in a position to consider the responsibility of a true servant of Jesus Christ.

Great misunderstanding and perplexity, in connection with our subject, arises from the confounding of ecclesiastical and individual responsibility.

Many assemblies of the gathered saints, as well as the denominations around, seem to think that it comes within their jurisdiction to direct the movements of, and lay down lines for, the Lord's servants, and if one who serves the Lord

among them will not yield to their party prejudice, and wear their shackles, and go upon lines laid down by them, he must be subjected to their censure and pass under their judgment. This may not trouble him much (while he is sure that he is discharging a responsibility which the Lord has laid upon him, not to say, availing himself of a blessed privilege which the Lord has put within his reach); if it only stopped here but little mischief would be done, but not a stone is left unturned by some to injure his reputation and character if possible. I have known many to descend to means, for this object, that would be scorned as the most mean actions in a worldly society or club. Is this Christianity? Is this the spirit of Christ? May those around us be able to attribute it to its true source, and not take their ideas of Christianity from such conduct!

On the other hand, many evangelists are to blame by thinking that they *must* work exclusively under the auspices of some particular church, denomination, or party. Is not this unworthy of the one who has been called to, and gifted for, the ministry by the Lord Jesus Christ? Should he not rather seek to work under the direction of the Lord Christ, and the influence of the Holy Ghost, and study the design of Christ in the Christian ministry, rather than that of a sect or party? I confess that, for myself, I have lost all respect for that party as a party, company of Christians, church, or whatever you may call them, who say in effect, if not in plain words, "Unless you minister *exclusively* among us you cannot be allowed to minister among us at all!" And that such is the case with many parties is too apparent to require other proof.

But it may be well here to remark that practical holiness and personal separation from evil must be maintained in its true character, which character is not always understood. For to take for granted that a person is holy and devoted, simply because he occupies a certain ecclesiastical position, is

to come far short; in our thoughts, of true and scriptural separation; and to think that a servant of Christ is not separate because he goes to preach Christ wherever he can get an open door, irrespective of party, creed, or custom (though under law himself to Christ), shows that our thoughts of holiness are monastic and positional, instead of spiritual and moral.

This in no wise weakens the truth of assembly holiness, for this latter is composed of a gathering of holy ones around the Lord Himself. An assembly position without real moral condition and spiritual separatedness of heart to Christ is worth nothing to Him, and, as we have seen, only becomes a boast to those who occupy it. As an illustration of what we are here considering, I will refer my reader to a business or working man who has to go forth to his labour among unconverted and wicked men. Does the wickedness of his fellow labourers, which is continually before his eyes, render it impossible for him to lead a holy life? May he not be spiritually and morally separate from, though right in the midst of it all, and even shine all the brighter for Christ because of the darkness around him? Just so with the servant of Christ. His going to preach the truth where it is not owned, yea even where it is denied, need not affect his personal separatedness of heart and faithfulness to Christ and His truth, though such separation and faithfulness are necessary for such ministry.

For I can have no power to testify against evil unless I am personally separate from it. But does separation from evil hinder me from carrying out the commission the Lord has given, or necessitate a limiting of the sphere He has assigned? Surely not. It gives me more power in it. Separation from evil is not shutting oneself up in a monastery, or something akin to it, nor is the withdrawing from the conflict against evil the way to overcome it; if it were, victory would be comparatively easy.

It requires more spiritual power to go into the midst of those in error and testify the truth, than it does to withdraw oneself into some ecclesiastical corner or clique, and refrain from going, under the plea of separation from evil. This latter is easy, if not valiant; and it is still easier, from such a Pharisaical standpoint, to sit in judgment upon those who do go, and charge them with looseness, association with evil, etc., though all this may mean to the accused is that he is loose enough to break through the narrow limits, and throw off the pretensions of an ecclesiastical clique to do the bidding of his Lord. But I will not anticipate.

It is evident, from what we have seen, that the Christian minister is directly responsible to the Lord Himself, from whom he received his gift and commission, and not to the Church, unless it be, indeed, to deliver the message which the Lord has given him. He has in this respect, if a teacher, a responsibility to *all* the saints (*i.e.*, of course all that he can reach). To confine the use of his gift, therefore, to one denomination of the Lord's people, or even to a few whom he may consider no denomination at all, is not only sectarian, but disloyalty to his Lord and Master. And much worse it is for an evangelist thus to become the servant of a party or denomination.

Most evangelists seem to think it absolutely necessary to work under some particular and party auspices; and in order to do so they find that it *is really* necessary to pander to their sectarian tenets and party prejudice. And, if the company of Christians under whose auspices I work happen to be in a scriptural position, this does not justify me in limiting my work to such auspices, and in thinking that I must not do anything outside such auspices.

Is it not much better to study more the protection and the direction of the Lord Himself, and the influence of the Holy Ghost, and go forth under *such* auspices, looking to the Lord, too, to commend one to His people, and give that co-operation

and fellowship which are so desirable and helpful? I know, in the present day of division and strife, difficulties would be increased in such a path; but he who does that only which is attended by no difficulties, will do nothing at all. But, is not the Lord more than a match for the difficulties? and do they not become such a means of exercise of heart and of faith before Him, as gives one to know the reality of having to do with Him, and thus makes one more fit for the work; and is not His influence better than that of any sectarian company of saints?

Nothing is an absolute necessity to the true Christian minister but the presence of his Lord and Master. This he cannot do without. He may have the auspices of the most influential body of Christians on the earth, yet, if he has not the presence of his Lord he is equal to nothing; but if he is left without the auspices of any sect or company of Christians, and has the presence of Christ Himself, he is equal to the circumstances, yea, above them, and so able to act for God in them.

Evangelists, you have a mission to the whole world, to every creature. Lost men and women are all around you; you have a message of salvation from God for them. Tremendous responsibility! yet inestimable privilege. Will ye, O ye servants of God, become slaves to the party spirit of the age? Will ye yield to any party what your Lord rightly claims? He has bought you with a price, will ye become the servants of men? Ye have received your gifts from the Lord Himself, will ye, then, stop to confer with flesh and blood as to the use of them? In this respect ye are as much debtors to "the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise," in your measure, as the Apostle Paul himself. Yes, ye are debtors both to the Baptists and the Methodists, both to the Independents and the Episcopalians. No name or party can release you of your responsibility. Wherever there are lost souls, be they religious or irreligious, your responsibility extends. I say, with such a responsibility, with such a charge, will ye pander to the party prejudices and crotchets of even

your beloved brethren, or will ye be fettered by pretentious ecclesiasticisms? Would ye not rather know the blessedness of being the Lord's servant?

Surely, then, it is immensely solemn for the Church to attempt to interfere with the evangelist in his work. As a child of God in the assembly he is amenable to the discipline of the same, if he should commit sin or receive false doctrine. But it is the greatest possible presumption on the part of an assembly of God's people to prescribe limits for a servant of God, much more to censure him if he does not regard them. This presumption of an assembly of believers is rendered less excusable by the ruined state in which the Church is found at the present time ; any testimony being of a very fragmentary character.

Nevertheless it is incumbent upon the saints gathered to Christ, to exclude all who are not sound in the faith from their midst, as well as those who are morally wicked. The word of God is their authority for doing so. But this is a very different thing from excluding a servant of Christ because he goes, in obedience to the Lord's command, to proclaim the truth, perhaps right in the very midst of those who are in the grossest error. In the former case the gathered saints are acting under the instruction of the word of God ; but in the latter case they not only have no such instruction, but are condemning a brother for following the instruction of that same word for himself. This surely is very serious. Any child of God is right in not only ignoring it, but protesting against it as sin. The assembly has no authority apart from the word of God, and the servant of God individually has the same for his own path, and he should acknowledge this both for individual and collective guidance.

But in all this we must take into account the state of things as they exist, such as the prejudice and presumption of parties who seek to vie with each other in their claims to be "the people" on the one hand, and the carelessness as to doctrine

on the other, such as amounts to utter indifference to the truth of God. It is in the midst of such a state of things that the servant's path has to be trodden.

O, that the blessed Lord will send forth such labourers into His harvest field as shall, in the power of faith, be above all these things, contented in being the Lord's servant; and with courage enough to go on as such even though left without a human supporter. Though I do not believe that such will ever be the case, for there are those among the children of God who are free enough from party spirit to see and value that simple faith, moral courage, stamina, and fixedness of purpose which will keep a man alone, and carry him above all merely human and carnal influences. Yea, even unconverted men are able to appreciate this; it is in itself a testimony to them. But the party strife and contention of existing parties for ecclesiastical ascendancy is an offence both to God and to man. Let us away with such ignoble work, brethren, and cleave tenaciously yet humbly to the Lord and His word; and own the unity and relationship into which all the children of God are brought.

The man of faith is the most invincible of men when he is sure he is doing his Lord's bidding. He may be left to a solitary path in the world, in the family, or even in the church. However much he desires the help and fellowship of his brethren, he will not make what he does dependent upon it. But he knows he can do nothing without the Lord, yet if left alone with him in the doing of that which He has given him to do, he is content. His presence is enough; "all men forsook me and fled, but the Lord stood by me."

As I have said elsewhere, we need, in these days of coldness and half-heartedness, to find out by our ministry the very springs of Divine life in the soul, and stir up the affections thereof; and no merely theological exposition or discourse on ecclesiastical precision can do this, however important these may be in their place.

For Paul, Christianity was "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," to "be found in Him," to "know Him, and the power of His resurrection," and to make Him known to others. O what a power there is in a man's life when Christ Himself is the great object of his heart, subject of his knowledge, and theme of his ministry. He does not stop to quibble about questions to no profit, but seeks to put a more noble object before those who raise them ; though he will earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. He will not become the servant of a party, nor will he adopt any one of the petty causes of men ; but he will earnestly seek the interests of the great cause of Christ, to make known the savour of His knowledge and stand firm for His truth. He will not stand committed to the crotchets and prejudices of his brethren ; though he will treat them all with the most tender consideration, and with as much deference as is possible without compromising his position as the Lord's servant. He will not be a slave to the applause of men, nor will he fear their censure ; though he will desire and seek the fellowship of his brethren. He is firm in his convictions before God, and most tenacious of the truth known to him ; yet he will be most yielding where he is not quite clear in his apprehension of the truth, or where he himself or his own personal affairs only are in question. He will listen most patiently to those who have opposite views to himself on any subject, and seek most graciously to correct or adjust those views by the one standard of truth, and subject in a fair way his own views to the same standard. Though fearless in his proclamation of what he knows to be the truth, yet he will be most fearful of stumbling one of the little ones that believe in Jesus. Such is the man whose life, character, and conduct are moulded and governed by habitual communion with Christ Jesus the Lord. Is there not great need for such men of God at the present time? Where are they?

Is such acting upon one's individual responsibility as the

Lord's servant a compromise of a right collective position? Certainly not. Otherwise we should have to say that a right position collectively renders it impossible to carry out the Lord's will, as set forth in His word, individually—renders it impossible to carry out the commission that the Lord has given to His servant. Yet among those who take a right position collectively there are not wanting brothers who affirm that it is wrong for Evangelists to enter the Churches around them for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the multitudes that resort thither. Of course they cannot keep the Evangelist who feels his responsibility, and is true to his Lord and Master, from doing so, but many a time have they driven such a one out from their midst for this very thing.

It is no use to tell a man who has a burning love for souls that he must not go to this, or that, people to preach. If the way is open he must go, it is his work to go, he is sent; yea, it is his joy to go. Others may judge him, and doubtless will do so; but this is a small thing with him, when conscious that he is doing a work that the Lord has given him to do. If true to Christ, and filled with divine love, he cares neither for the censure nor the applause of men. Happy indeed is the man who is in such a case. Can there be a more blessed man in the whole world than he who serves the Lord Jesus Christ under the impelling power of His own love, and the direction of His own word, above mere human influences and prejudices, and free from the fear of man, yet with a deep sense of his dependence upon the Lord whom he serves?

Is it not much better to be *thus* occupied in spreading the truth among God's people, and preaching the gospel to perishing souls around us, than to be striving and dividing amongst ourselves?

The Evangelist has the authority of direct command, the doctrine, example, and precept of Scripture to support him in breaking through all party prejudices and sectarian barriers to proclaim the gospel to lost souls. We have seen the authority

of direct command in those passages which treat of the commission ; of doctrine in those that treat of the constitution of the ministry ; we have the example in the life and work of the apostles ; and such scriptures as the sermon on the mount, from chapters xi. to xvi. of Romans, abound in perceptive instruction as to individual responsibility and our conduct in relation to each other therein.

True, indeed, a servant of Christ may act in self-will and with wrong motives, even in doing that which is right in itself, instead of under the power of divine love, and out of a sense of responsibility. But we are here speaking of what is right in itself and of principles. Such a one is also exposed to all kinds of temptations and has a tendency to all kinds of mistakes, and therefore should be much in prayer before the Lord, or he may unwittingly find himself implicated in the evil that he desires to testify against. Personal separation from evil must precede and go with a testimony against it. But certainly a servant of God is not associated with error by preaching to those who hold it. But the subject of association will receive special attention presently.

The one great thing for the servant of Christ to secure for his path is the direction of the word of God. Along with this and quite as important, he should be deeply concerned to have the Lord with Him in that path ; making sure of these, which are indispensable to such a path, all other things he may safely leave with the Lord—they shall be added.

BUILDING AGAIN THE THINGS ONCE DESTROYED.

The charge of building again the things he once destroyed (by going back, as it is said, to that which he had left), is continually preferred against the evangelist by some because he goes to preach the gospel to sinners in a church or a chapel. We will therefore inquire as to the justice of such a charge.

And as there is such a thing as making ourselves transgressors in this way, we will first see what it is, that the force of the much needed passage may be in no wise weakened. On turning to Gal. ii. my reader will see what is meant by the expression, "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." It is, in its first and primary application, a turning back to Judaism and the law, and that for justification, after having left it and embraced the gospel, which says that I am justified by faith.

In turning from Judaism to Christ for justification I thereby confessed the insufficiency of—destroyed according to this text—the former; if I, therefore, turn back again to it I became a transgressor. I must be wrong somewhere, either in turning from it to Christ—to the gospel, or in going back from the gospel to it. This was just the position of the Galatians. Peter was doing the same thing, to some extent, at Antioch, by going back to Jewish forms and ceremonies after having abandoned the same and embraced Christianity; he had destroyed Jewish ceremonies, but he began to build them up again at Antioch, for which Paul rebuked him. Thus we see that building again the things once destroyed, in its first application is going back to Judaism after having left it and embraced the gospel of the grace of God; for the two cannot go together.

On the same principle we may say that if I leave a religious association—sever my ecclesiastical connection therewith—as being unscriptural, and then go back and renew my connection with it afterwards, I make myself a transgressor. It is obvious that I must be either wrong in leaving it or in going back to it. At the same time, it is necessary to remark, that though it is the same thing in principle, it may not be accompanied with the same serious results. In the case of the Galatians it was justification—salvation, yea the whole truth of the gospel of the grace of God, that was in question. In the present day and among the different

systems of Christianity it may be only—I use the word only in a comparative sense—a question of ecclesiastical order while gospel truth is held fast. The same principle applies, but in a less serious case. He who cannot see this must be void of judgment indeed.

But there are also systems in nominal Christianity where the question at issue might be quite as serious, if not more so: systems that make the grace of God of none effect, more wilfully than the Galatians. But I believe it is right to look at the different communities in their relation to the truth, and judge of them accordingly, and not to put them all under the same unqualified condemnation. This is quite in accordance with the Lord's ways, as seen in His judgment of the seven churches in Asia. Thus much as to the nature of the principle itself. I will now say a few words about its application in its case before us.

Building again the things I destroyed is going back to something I once, either in word or action, condemned. If, having severed my membership with a church, I afterwards renew it, the principle applies. But does it apply if, after having severed my membership with the system, I go back to preach the gospel to the people still in it? This is what is said. This is where the charge comes in. But will it stand? I unhesitatingly say, No. In no sense whatever can it be justly applied. What have I judged as wrong and thus destroyed? The system itself and my association in membership with it, and not the preaching the gospel to the people who are in it surely. If this latter be given up and afterwards resumed and the principle be applied, it is certain that the transgression comes in in the giving up and not in the resuming, therefore the sooner it is resumed the better. This must be so, for, as we have seen, the word of the Lord is most imperative as to the preaching of the gospel, that it should be preached to all people. So that it is true the principle applies in a certain sense to the preaching question, If a brother not

only sever his membership with the system, but condemn the preaching of the gospel to the people in it; and afterwards goes and does so. But where is the transgression? It is in that which was against the word of the Lord, to be sure. Is it against the word of the Lord for him to go and preach to men in systems? No; it is in obedience to that word that he goes, as we have seen in previous chapters. Then he disobeyed in giving it up, and herein is the transgression.

And will any say that in going into a church *to preach the gospel* I am building up an unscriptural system? Can it be that the preaching of the truth builds up error? If I go and preach up their creed, and their human order of things, then I build up the system. But surely the preaching the truth does not build up that which is contrary to it!! It may be, indeed, that in preaching the simple gospel I am preaching no more than what the Christians in the community hold tenaciously as the truth themselves; so much the better for this.

But now take an example from Scripture of what we have been saying. In Peter's case, mentioned in Gal. ii., he was going back to the ceremonies of Judaism, and thus building them up. But Paul, the very one who withstood Peter to the face for building up again the things which he had destroyed, *after this* was in the *habit* of going into the Synagogue to preach the gospel, and even into the Temple, till he was shut out by the people themselves. Was he then, by this, doing the very thing he accused Peter of? Certainly not; no one surely would say so. But it has been said, in this connection: that was a transitional period; granted, but that does not affect the comparison here given, or the principle under consideration. The transitory character of the period did not mitigate Peter's transgression; and why should it do so in Paul's case, *if the same principle applied?*

And, moreover, if it was right for the Apostles to break through all the prejudices of the people, and to go even within

the precincts of their own religious order of things for the founding of Christianity, is it wrong to do the same now for its promotion? Circumstances may alter certainly; Apostles in their day may be shut out of the Temple or the Synagogue, and we may be shut out of the Churches; and thus the truth may be rejected; but this does not alter the principle we are dwelling upon.

Is it not quite clear, therefore, that the passage and the principle under consideration have no application whatever to a servant of God in his going to the different religious communities to preach the gospel; while he is not ecclesiastically associated therewith; and keeps to the truth? Indeed, to attempt thus to apply it is to use this one passage against many others, which show the responsibility of the Evangelist, and command him to go forth to all the world, proclaiming to every creature the glad tidings of the grace of God.

This, in itself, surely is enough to make brethren hesitate before making such an application.

WHAT IS ASSOCIATION?

Another thing charged upon the Evangelist, by such as would impose sectarian limits upon the Christian ministry, is that in going to preach in the denominations around he associates himself with them; that is, he is identified with the system by going to preach the Gospel to the people who are in it—by accepting the loan of the Church or Chapel to preach to the congregation!

What can be meant by association here? Is it mere outward contact with the people and the building that the accusers take for association? If so, then, on the same principle the Evangelist is associated with every congregation he preaches to. Paul was identified with the Epicureans and the Stoics, the Jews and their systems, by going to the Areopagus and the Temple, according to this principle. Surely they cannot

mean this. Then, do they mean that by going into the Baptist, the Congregational, or the Free Presbyterian Church building, to preach the gospel, that one becomes a Baptist, a Congregational, or a Free Churchman, or that by entering the Free Church pulpit one becomes a Free Church parson? I cannot think, either, that those intelligent brethren who raise this objection mean this. Really, one is at a loss to know on what principle, or by what means, they can speak of an Evangelist as being associated with the Free Church system, simply because he preaches in the Free Church building or to the Free Church congregation.

Yet this is the charge: he is identified with the system. Then is he a member of it? Oh no; but he is speaking to the congregation, and that in their own building, and is not that identification? If so, then the Lord and the apostles were identified with the apostate Jews and with corrupt Judaism, for they preached in their places of worship. But all repudiate the idea of identification in regard to the Lord and His apostles. Then one is not identified with a system by carrying the truth to it.

Remember that the present question is, What is vital identification, apart from the state of things in connection with which it is affirmed or denied? And the argument is not at all affected by the fact that Judaism, as a system, was in the first place of God, for it had become corrupt, and the Lord Himself had pronounced judgment upon it. Then were the apostles identified with that doomed system by preaching in its places of worship? We know they were not. Then is a servant of God identified with a congregation, their system, or their creed, because he preaches in their church? Is not this a parallel case? Some say it is not. And one argument produced is the drawing of—or the trying hard to draw—a comparison between the synagogues of the apostles' days, and the sects of our own days, namely, that Judaism, in the first place, was of God. But this will not stand, for the evangelist

can answer—And so was Christianity. But, say they, the sects of Christianity are all wrong, and have left the Word of God for human traditions; that is just what the Jews had done in the Lord's and the apostles' days, the Lord's servant may reply. The principle is the same whatever the circumstances may be.

So that we see this comparison is more in favour of the spread of the gospel among the denominations by the Lord's servant, which it is intended to condemn, than it is of the theory it is intended to support!

But in justice to the brothers who thus seek to hinder the spread of the truth, we will seek to get as near their thoughts as possible, and give their arguments their full force. They say that, as the denominations are professing Christian communities, therefore, in going among them to preach, the Christian minister is, at least in appearance, identified with them as a community.

Now, then, in the first place they must admit, after what we have seen, that there is no real and vital association, whatever they may think there is in appearance. The preacher does not subscribe to their creed (however, not as a creed; though that creed may be made up of the truths which he preaches), he does not preach up their church order, nor is he a member of the said church. Then what *real* association can there be?

And as to the appearance, what about it? Is it pernicious? Is it dishonouring to Christ? Certainly not; it is more a testimony for Him and His truth in the eyes of men; it is letting your light shine forth. The true effect might be expressed in the following words: "That man is no sectarian bigot, he is a real lover of souls, and no sectarian barriers will keep him from going out in search of them: *he is not a Presbyterian*, yet he will preach in a Free Presbyterian Church building and to their congregations, because he loves their souls; *he is not a Baptist*, yet he will preach in the Baptist Chapel. There is in him that beneficence of spirit, that largeness of heart, which are in accordance with divine love, the unity of the

body of Christ, and the commission to preach the gospel to every creature. And yet he cleaves to the truth, and will not pander to the errors of the day for one moment, whether on this side or that."

All who have been at all observant must, I believe, own that this is the general effect of such an unsectarian testimony, when the minister of Christ fearlessly proclaims the truth wherever he can get an open door. If men close that door to him because he preaches the truth, they are responsible and not he.

But I have met some who endeavour to support the objection by the plea that the Christians who are members of the church itself help in the work, and in this way they are associated with the work one is engaged in, and therefore one must be associated with them. Here I gladly admit at least co-operation, and have often been thankful for it. But it is the co-operation of the Lord's people—of Christians individually that I accept in such a case; this surely is not associating myself with the system they are in. Whether such co-operation be in connection with gospel meetings in their own church or that of others, or in public halls, it surely should be welcomed by the evangelist. Their system in either case is not in question, it is the conversion of souls around them that they are concerned about; we work together for the conversion of souls, and not the propagation of a creed or an ecclesiastical order.

And let me here say that I believe it is highly displeasing to the Lord to refuse the co-operation of one of His redeemed people, who loves Him and His truth (*i.e.*, as much of the latter as may be known). It is the Lord's work, the refreshing showers of blessing—figured in Psalm cxxxiii: as the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth His blessing for evermore—that brings the hearts of the Lord's people together in unity much more effectually than any ecclesiastical theory. It is quite right to receive the co-operation of the Lord's people, who are sound

in the faith and of good moral character, irrespective of creed or party. This is obvious in view of all that has been before us as to the teaching of scripture on these subjects.

It is very clear that those who refuse the co-operation of sound and godly individual Christians in the Lord's work have no scriptural instruction for so doing, but are acting against scriptural principles and precepts.

I was highly amused one day by being told, by an intelligent brother, that in going into a church to preach the gospel by the permission of a godly minister, I was identified with the minister in his wrong position, but he was not identified with me in the preaching of the gospel, even though he desired the gospel preached, and with this object opened his church to me! How very inventive of good argument and logical reasoning is a party and sectarian spirit!! The brother referred to allowed me to note these remarks down in my pocket-book while in his presence, and I give the argument just as I read it over to him, to know if it was exactly what he meant, when he replied, "Yes."

THE CONSCIENCES OF OTHERS.

Another common argument against an unsectarian use of gift is, that the preacher should consider the consciences of others. That is, supposing he is free to go himself, if there are those among his brethren with whom he is in fellowship, who think he is wrong for doing so, *therefore* he ought not to do it. And so all the passages that speak of considering the consciences of others are brought up as being against the liberty of the preacher, without any regard to right or wrong application.

Now, I ask, is this a right use or application of such scriptures? If so, then farewell to the liberty of the Lord's servant, and farewell to his individual responsibility before the Lord, yea, farewell to the directions of the word of God; for

if the consciences of others are to guide me in the use of my gift, then what is to become of the direct instructions of my Lord and Master? They must be set aside, or at least have a secondary place only; if the consciences of my brethren allow it I may carry them out; but if their consciences are against it, then I must consider them and forfeit my liberty and individual responsibility, and give the word of my Lord a secondary place!! And in the present day the consciences of saints are trained in such sectarian grooves that they are bound to be against an unsectarian use of gift. This is, then, the fair and logical sequence of the argument; are those who use it prepared to stand by such conclusions?

Does my reader think that there is anything strained or unfair in this conclusion? Here is the thing in a simple syllogism. The Lord bids His servant do a certain thing. [Namely, go forth and preach the gospel to every creature, thus making him a debtor to all men.] The consciences of his brethren, which he is to consider, are against his doing the thing the Lord has bidden; therefore he does it not. This is simple enough. A brother cannot follow out the directions of the Word and the opposite directions of the consciences of others. One must give way in favour of the other, either I must disregard the consciences of others in *this* matter and follow the Lord's word, or respect the consciences of my brethren and disregard the word of the Lord. If this be so, I know that all the Lord's people will say the word of the Lord must be followed, the consciences of others must not be allowed to intrude between a servant and the directions of his Lord and Master. Hence we say this cannot be a true application of the scripture, and the argument is disposed of.

But we will view it in another light. If I am to consider the consciences of the brethren in this matter, then it is the consciences of any or all of the brethren, and not only the few I am in fellowship with. The exhortations of scripture are not sectarian, surely. This brings the servant of Christ face to face

with another difficulty. It might be that while some would appear stumbled by his going to preach in churches around him, others would be stumbled by his not doing so. It is a real stumbling-block to some earnest and devoted children of God in the churches that *our* (as we speak) Evangelists will not go to them and preach the gospel, even when the door is opened to them. They say, How can they have the love they profess for souls when they will not come and preach the glad tidings to them? I am not saying that the Evangelist may not have godly reason for refusing in many such cases; but I produce the case merely to show that if he is to be guided by consideration for the consciences of the brethren, these are to be considered as well as those he is in fellowship with, though the consciences of the latter may go quite in another direction. Hence the difficulty: Which is he to consider? Here again we are driven to the conclusion that the consciences of others are not to be allowed to interfere with the liberty of the Lord's servant, or to weaken his individual responsibility, much less to intrude between his own conscience and the directions of scripture. This conclusion is abundantly supported by the scripture, as we have already seen while viewing the same thing from other standpoints. The text, "Who art thou that judgeth another man's servant?" entirely forbids any such interference.

At the same time the exhortations of scripture to consider the consciences of others have a very important place in our relations one with another, and we should not allow the fact that such instructions are misused to weaken the force of their true application.

It will be seen, on turning to any or all the passages which include the refraining from certain things (which I may feel quite free about myself, but which I would abstain from in consideration of the consciences of others), that they are in another connection altogether; and do not touch the responsibility of the Lord's servant in his Master's work.

It is in respect to something that has to do with my own personal gratification, something which would be right for me to do if my faith was sufficiently strong to rise above the surroundings and associations of the thing; but at the same time, would be just as right for me NOT to do. And the same thing might be sin to another whose faith was weaker and could not rise above such surroundings. Such was the meat question. The fact that the meat had been offered to idols might be no stumble to the conscience of one, while it would to another. The idol is nothing to the former, nor does he recognise the offering, but sees in the meat the creature of God, and takes it as such, giving God thanks, but another may make something of the fact that it has been offered to idols, and therefore could not partake of it without acknowledging the idol, which would be sin; but if such an one sees another brother whose faith is stronger do so, he is thereby stumbled, hence the strong brother who does it in the presence of, and to the stumbling of his weaker brother, does wrong. He should consider the conscience of his brother, and deny himself. I should be acting on this principle, supposing I felt quite free before the Lord to take a little wine, and yet denied myself, in respect for the consciences of others who thought it to be wrong, and would be stumbled by seeing me take it for that very reason. But surely the principle must not be allowed to interfere with the obedience of a servant of Christ in his path of service. This is fully proven by the Apostle himself. When it was a question of meat he said, "Why should my liberty be judged of another man's conscience," and, "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth." But when it was a question of his path of service to Christ, he said, "But with me it is a small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment, yea I judge not mine own self, but He that judgeth me is the Lord."

There may be many things in relation to myself (such as what I eat or what I drink, or what I do in the way of

recreation), which may in themselves be right for me to do, but right also to leave undone, and if my brethren are stumbled by my doing any *such* things, it becomes displeasing to Christ on *that account* if I do them. But this surely does not apply to things as to which I have positive directions in the word of God. Where the directions of Scripture are clear nothing should be allowed to hinder my following them ; these should be of paramount authority for me. And we have sought to show that the instructions of Scripture are clear enough as to the path, work, and sphere of the evangelist. At the same time let him show the grace of Christ toward those who judge him as wrong. He can well afford to do this if he is consciously doing what the Lord has given him to do.

It may be indeed that one servant of Christ is called to work in a different sphere to that of another, just as one may have a different line of work to that of another. In such case let each wait on the special line of ministry, and work with all his might in the particular sphere that he is persuaded the Lord has given him. But let him not judge another because he is not working in the same sphere nor doing the same thing. We are prone to think that our own little sphere covers the whole of the Lord's vineyard, and so to judge all others who are not working in the same as wrong.

The Lord trains and fits each for the particular work He has for each to do, and it must be displeasing to Him to see His servants finding fault with one another in those very things which He Himself has set each to do.

THE WHOLE OF THE TRUTH.

I believe that a servant of Christ should ever be ready to boldly declare the truth of God, and he must expect, too, that many will be offended at him for doing so, especially at the present time. Nevertheless there are certain truths to be put in their place. At certain times, and to certain people, one

part of the truth would be most profitable, at other times, and to another class of people, other parts of the truth would be most opportune ; and to think that we are to give people all the blessed truth of God in one mass, and expect them to swallow it is most absurd, and a clear proof that we do not know our own hearts, and that we forget how slow we were to learn what little we know.

Much is said in connection with our subject by sectarian brethren about "the whole truth," such as, "If you go to this place or that place to preach you should give them the whole truth. If you give them the whole truth they will not have you again," etc., etc. This argument is as foolish as it appears plausible.

What is meant by "the whole truth?" Is it supposed that even the most intelligent and gifted of the servants of Christ could present all the glorious truths of Christianity in one, or in a dozen addresses? We cannot imagine that any one is so foolish as to think this; this cannot be what is meant. No, what is really meant is that you must make a direct attack on that very point on which those addressed are in error, and so cross their prejudices at the outset, and thus stop their ears. "The whole truth" for these brethren, in this case, means just that part of it on which the congregation one goes to may not be clear. This is the truth that one is to hammer away at, even though he may be addressing unconverted people for the most part, and the point in question be such as has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of the soul. Looked at in this sense, they are quite right when they say: "If you give them 'the whole truth' they will not have you again." But is it not much better to leave the points of difference about Church government, ordained ministry, etc., for the moment, and preach in view of the salvation of souls, remembering that even when saved, souls are led gradually into the truth. And are we not all thus learning; is it not "line upon line, precept upon precept" with us all? And I would like to find

the man who has himself got "the whole truth." The fact is, the more we learn the less we seem to know, because every fresh bit we learn teaches us something more of what there is beyond. The only man who has the whole of the truth is He who Himself is the truth—the man Christ Jesus.

One passage produced in support of the above argument is Acts xx. 17-28—Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian saints, ending with the words: "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." It does, indeed, seem strange that this passage should be brought forward in support of the argument that the Evangelist in going into a church or chapel to preach the gospel to sinners should preach "the whole truth," when we remember that the apostle had been preaching in Ephesus for *two years* (chap. xix. 10), and that those addressed in the above words were the elders of the church. Truly, indeed, any servant of Christ should be able to say the same, as far, however, as he himself knows that counsel, after spending two years with a company of believers. That is supposing their growth rendered them capable of receiving it. But, surely it would be rather an extraordinary thing for a man to be able to say as much for his work after a few gospel addresses in a church or chapel, as the apostle did after his two years' work at Ephesus.

At the same time, the object of ministry is to lead souls into the whole counsel of God; but they—as all of us—have to be led into it, as we have remarked, gradually, "precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." And in accordance with this, the Lord spake unto the people "as they were able to bear;" and the apostle Paul, after spending nearly two years in Corinth, did not say the same to them as he did to the Ephesian elders, for he could not minister all he had to minister to the believers there, because of their condition; they were "not able to bear it," and the apostle adds: "Neither yet are ye able," four or five years after he left them. Here we find most clearly that he did keep back something because they

were not able to receive it. Is it not right for the servants of Christ to exercise the same wisdom now?

Happy is that servant of Christ who is resolved to go on with his work in exercise of heart before the Lord Himself, and under the direction of His own word; and feeling clear before Him, and having the direction of His word, refuses to be hampered by the crotchets, prejudices, and interferences of men, even of his beloved brethren; and while boldly and fearlessly proclaiming the truth where it is denied, yet tenderly and graciously preaching it to those who are ignorant of it as they are "able to bear;" and thus to lead them into it.

RESTRICTION IMPOSED AND WISDOM EXERCISED.

The servant of Christ should never compromise his position as such by a treaty with any man as to what he will or will not preach; though he may have to keep back much in wisdom, yet he should keep back nothing by agreement, but hold himself free to preach the truth of God as he may feel led by the Lord's guiding and his own knowledge of the state of his hearers. To accept a pulpit or platform for the preaching of the gospel on conditions that part of the gospel truth is to be kept back is, to my mind, unbecoming to a servant of God.

At the same time it may be needful in wisdom to keep back much; simply because one's audience, through ignorance, carnal-mindedness, or wrong teaching, are not prepared to receive it. They do not reject it as truth, but question if it is truth, and may be that they need to understand something else leading up to it, before they can receive it. And does it not show a want of holy discretion to go and cut off the ears of a congregation by beginning in a denunciatory way upon the very point or points which they are not prepared to receive? For instance, supposing I am speaking to people who have been trained in wrong ideas of baptism, and of course

think that their way of practising it is the right way, shall I go and immediately begin to denounce their erroneous views on this subject? If so, then no more good will be done; through my zeal without knowledge I have run in vain, having stopped the ears of my audience to anything else; truly indeed I am not likely to be asked back again.

But this by some is thought to be the right mode of procedure, and instead of reproaching themselves that they had stopped ears, into which, had they been more wise, they might have told the gospel of salvation, they turn away congratulating themselves that they have been faithful!! They have been faithful enough to make the *figure* of a great and grand truth of more importance than the reality—the truth itself, and the eternal welfare of souls! The congregation would have listened, maybe with rapt attention and contrition of heart, to the blessed reality itself, viz., the death of Christ for the sinner and the sinner's death with Him, resulting in eternal life in Christ risen for all who believe; this may have resulted in many conversions. But no, the figure must be made of most importance, simply because the mode of it is disputed; and because this is rejected, the preacher runs away in the most relentless manner, boasting of his faithfulness! What wretched self-complacency. Surely such preachers are not worthy to be called Evangelists.

If we do not want to tickle the ear, we want to keep it in order to pour into it, not ritualism, or the claims of a rite (however proper in its place; which certainly is not to displace the blessed reality of which it is the sign only), but the words of grace and life, which by the power of the Holy Ghost may sink down deeply into the heart and convert the soul.

The Evangelist does not preach for the maintenance of certain dogmas and Church governments (although he should cleave to sound doctrine), but for the salvation of souls; this latter is what he should keep in view and pray and preach for. I press, that sound doctrine must be maintained *in* the

preaching, and the Evangelist who is not sound in doctrine should be avoided by those who are, especially in this day of "modern theology." At the same time the preaching of the gospel to sinners is not an apology for *any particular* truth, but the preaching of Him who is the truth; and His finished work.

There are some brethren who think that the fact that some congregations do not hold the truth, or are in error on some part of it, is a conclusive reason why the servant of God should not carry it to them! There are others who think and say, that if he goes he should make an attack upon that very point on which they are not clear, and thus directly cross their prejudices. And there are those who say, in order to be honest, one should tell the minister, or whoever invites, that he intends doing so!

All this is grotesque nonsense, and ignores the need of souls.

In regard to the first point, any lover of the truth and of souls would have rather thought that the fact of a congregation not having the truth in clearness would be a good and sufficient reason for carrying it to them, which thought finds an abundant support both in Scripture and in reason.

In regard to the second point, such a course would make manifest an entire lack of that grace and wisdom that are essential to successful ministry. If the point of truth in question is vital the preacher should not hesitate to fearlessly declare it. I have no sympathy whatever with anyone who keeps back the truth through want of courage, desire for applause, or fear of censure. In wisdom, as we have seen, it may be necessary to keep back certain truths for the time; but even when the disputed or misunderstood point happens to be such as must be declared, it should be done in a gracious way with the wisdom that winneth souls.

As to questions of Church government, ordained or unordained ministry, and such like things, why stop to quibble about them? Perhaps half the souls before you are not

members of the true Church of God—the body of Christ—at all ; the way into the true Church is through Christ, preach Him ! And as to the right or wrong order of ministry, a discourse on this subject will not save their souls ; preach salvation through Christ and His finished work, see that souls are clear on this to start with, and this will prepare them for something else. It is no use to go and talk about sects, Church government, and the right or wrong way of observing Baptism and the Lord's Supper to unconverted people, or even to people who may be converted and yet not know the full delivering power of the Gospel. There is an order in teaching and learning divine truths, as there is in educating a child. There are certain truths on which souls must be clear before they can go on to learn other truths.

But even where the truth denied is essential to salvation, a great deal depends upon the manner in which it is approached. See in what a tender gracious way the blessed Lord deals with the woman of Samaria. He does not break forth upon her with an abrupt attack about her sin, or her place of worship ; but tenderly, graciously, and effectively leads her into the light, beginning by even putting Himself under an obligation to her. Oh ! how I desire to combine in my ministry more of that tenderness, grace, wisdom, and faithfulness that were always present with my blessed Lord and Master, that I may know better how to lead a poor heavy-laden sinner unto divine light, and when to say “ woe unto you.”

See also the way in which Paul approaches the Epicureans and Stoics (Acts xvii.). He does not begin by denouncing the most erroneous views which these sects held about God and His creation ; but brings in something better, and even makes use of a quotation from one of *their* own poets to enforce what he was preaching.

But let me here say that difficulties, the kind of which we have been speaking, are often invented only by objectors. A minister who does not believe the fundamentals of the Gospel,

such as an Unitarian, or a Ritualist, is not likely to offer his pulpit or platform to a man who preaches the pure Gospel of Christ. It is a trouble to the Evangelist, whose heart burns with love to souls, that he is so effectively shut out from them, that he cannot get at the poor deluded congregations of such men. But such Evangelists are not of that kind who, because baptism, the figure of the death of Christ and the believer's death with Him, is not understood, will not go and preach the glorious reality itself. Preach the blessed truth, of which baptism is the figure, and this will be found the most effectual way of enlightening the mind as to the true bearing of the figure itself.

In regard to the point about telling the minister who invites that you are going to preach truths which he does not believe. To say the least this is courting difficulty as well as tempting the man to reject the truth without giving him the opportunity to hear it. But not only so, it takes for granted that the minister does not know whom he is inviting ; and that he does not desire to hear for himself. Does he not know the preacher ? Does he not know what he preaches ? The evangelist would be thoroughly justified in taking the invitation as a proof of exercise about the truth on the part of the one who invites, for himself and on behalf of his congregation.

It is an easy matter to raise questions against those who do the work, and the way they do it ; but it is not quite so easy to go and do it. Let the Lord's servant secure His presence and the support of His word, and he need not fear the questionings of men.

Finally, I would say that I have not the slightest sympathy with those velvet-tongued preachers who displace the gospel by a pleasing discourse, in the preparation of which the tastes of the people alone are consulted. It is one thing to study the condition and capacity of those we minister to ; it is quite another to study their tastes and pleasure, likes and dislikes. The former finds examples in the Lord and His apostles, and

has for its object the permanent profit of souls ; the latter ignores the realities of eternity, and the need of souls, and has for its object only the present amusement of the mind. This is unworthy the name of Christian ministry.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFICULTIES AND EXERCISES.

Individual difficulties and circumstances leading to exercise before the Lord, the Lord's servant is sure to meet with in any department or sphere of Christian work. But he who concentrates his mind upon difficulties will be overcome by them, and he who is not above circumstances in the superiority of simple faith will be unable to act for God in them ; and he who does that only which is attended by no difficulties will simply do nothing at all.

In the present state of the Church there are many things to exercise and try the heart and conscience of the Lord's servant before Himself, many things he has to behold that he knows to be wrong, but which he does not sanction, and are thoroughly grieving to his heart and yet in which he is entirely helpless. It becomes, therefore, very easy for lookers on to find fault if they wish to do so ; especially those who never make a mistake in anything, because they never take anything in hand ; those who are too holy to undertake any work outside their own little company ; those who are too valiant to encounter the difficulties that would arise in work among those who think differently from themselves.

But still one great and important question remains, it is a difficult question, but we must face it. "What will you do with your converts," is often asked of the Evangelist, who will not allow himself to be hindered by sectarian barriers in the carrying out of his Lord's commission, "Go ye into all the world and *preach the gospel to every creature.*" This I acknowledge to be a natural, important, and godly question, and therefore the most difficult that we have had to deal with.

It must be a matter of real exercise to every true Evangelist; however he may get out of it. Souls get converted under the preaching of the gospel of our God in all its simplicity and purity, and are left in, or go to, churches where the fundamental truths of that gospel are denied, and to listen to preaching that does little but insinuate doubt as to all the great truths of Christianity. I say nothing can be more trying to the Evangelist than this. But what is to be done? Must the Evangelist give up his work or limit its sphere and leave souls entirely to the error of false teachers? Shall no effort be made to put the truth before them, simply because error may afterwards be preached to them? Moreover, shall the Evangelist—the servant of God—abandon part of his responsibility and work because the enemy is more energetic in his?

Albeit those who use this difficult question as an objection to unsectarian work must remember that it is impossible to put converts in a place where they will get no trial, no temptation. Even among the most sound company of Christians there are heart-rending strifes and divisions, such as often send young converts into the world or unbelief. This is continually occurring even in the place where the objectors say is the place where young converts should be brought to. They must remember also that the churches to which the Evangelist would be invited to preach are not those where such teachers as we refer to above would be taking the rule, but such as loved and preached, at least, the simple gospel.

It will be understood that I am not here going into the right or wrong of ecclesiastical positions. A previous part of this work takes up these. What we are now considering is the servant's work in regard to the conversion of souls and the confirming of the same in the truth. The Evangelist may not be able to land the converts just where he would desire; but, I ask, shall the Lord's servant, because he cannot do all

that he would with souls, do nothing at all for them? And even if they do stop in churches, the government of which may not be according to the Scriptures, would we not rather see them there converted than unconverted?

What, then, is the Evangelist to do in regard to this matter? is the question. It is certain that it would be wrong of him to relax his efforts on account of it. No, he should go on with his work with all the energy and earnestness, yea, holy enthusiasm that becometh such a work. But does not Scripture make provision for such a state of things? Paul, apprehensive of false teachers at Ephesus both arising in the church and entering into it, did not commend the saints to the keeping of the church, but after exhorting them to watch against these evils, he commended them *to God and the word of His grace*. Here, then, is a resource for the Lord's servant now; we can always do this: Warn the converts of the evils around, exhort them to watch against such, and commend them to God and the word of His grace. The apostle thus warned and admonished the Christians at Ephesus night and day with tears!

If these chapters stir up the servants of God to a deeper sense of their individual responsibility to the Lord, and their dependence upon Him; to more real faithfulness to Him and love to souls; to more real earnest prayer for grace and wisdom to win souls, and to help them when won—if they help to rid the servants of God of the sectarian fetters which so cramp them in their noble work, and to strengthen their hands in going forth to declare the gospel of salvation wherever they can get an open door and the ears of the people; to preach the glorious work of Christ, the value of His finished work, and the saving efficacy of His precious blood throughout the whole world, and to every creature—I say, if any of the Lord's servants are thus helped, the writer's object will be attained.

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