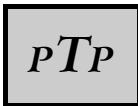

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Preface

The originals of the *15 Letters to a Friend*, as well as the following two papers by C. H. Mackintosh did not have the designations in the headers at the top of the pages found in this edition; nor this Table of Contents. These are added to briefly indicate the subject matter. Besides these additions, anything in braces { } has been added. The texts are not tampered with, though a few words have been updated, whether in these papers or the other papers in this book.

The *15 Letters to a Friend* appeared serially in *Things New and Old*, edited by C. H. Mackintosh, but were omitted from his collected writings. However, the 15 letters have been printed previously as a collection, while the fifteenth letter has also been printed separately. The truths and principles considered in these 15 letters should be acted on by all believers. This paper is followed by CHM's paper on "The Assembly of God" and then by his "Unity: What Is It, and Am I Confessing It?" which also does not appear in his collected writings.

Attention is called to the fact that it is claimed by various persons that what they call "exclusive brethren" began in 1848 in connection with the Bethesda division at Bristol, England. Not surprisingly, the inverse is the truth: Open Brethren began in 1848. At that time, 10 principle leaders at Bethesda composed a statement of principles, called *The Letter of the Ten*. This letter was composed in order to state the principles they intended acting on in receiving some of B. W. Newton's partisans, and some coming from under his ministry -- and two of the signers of the Letter were subsequently shown to be partisans of B. W. Newton. The principle of reception stated in *The Letter of the Ten* was presented to the congregation and accepted by them -- except by some 60 persons who withdrew from Bethesda, rejecting fellowship with this indifference to Christ's honor, and continued to be gathered together unto the Lord's name as previously. The principle of reception enunciated characterizes *all* Open Brethren, including the position of ecclesiastical independency of assemblies taken by Bethesda and its adherents.

C. H. Mackintosh went through that time and he, as did others, acted on the truths they had *previously* learned regarding separation from evil unto the Lord. They acted in unity on the truth that there is one body on earth, that local assemblies are representative of that one body on earth, not independent, and stood in separation from the evil teachings of B. W. Newton *and* those

associated with him in any way. As a well-known example of such truth taught previously to 1848, in 1846 J. N. Darby published a well-known paper, *Separation from evil, God's Principle of Unity*, in view of the British Evangelical Alliance which was formed then. It has been erroneously claimed by some that he wrote that paper because of the 1848 division, an erroneous allegation that seems to be an attempt to pretend that such principles were not heard of before 1848, by such persons as put forth the myth that "exclusivism" began in 1848, whereas the truth is that Open Brethrenism began in 1848.

CHM speaks of some of the matters concerning Bethesda in Letters 14 and 15.

CHM's papers are followed by three papers by H. H. Snell concerning the body and unity.

Next, there are three papers by J. N. Darby bearing on the practical confession of unity in our practice. "Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity," is the first of these three. 'Unity' without separation from evil unto the Lord is a sham 'unity,' a fraud, of persons congregated together on the basis of indifference to evil. Let us call things by their true name. This is followed by an extract from his "Grace, the Power of Gathering and Unity." Last, this book is concluded with his paper on "Ecclesiastical Independency."

The objective in the arrangement of the papers is to provide a simple and basic introduction to the fact that there is one body on earth (see Eph. 4:15, 16, etc.), in spite of the ruined state of the church *as viewed in responsible testimony*, and that we are to confess that unity in our practice as members of that body, in separation from evil, unto the Lord. May God, by the Spirit, give each reader apprehension of what is expected of us in view of the state of Christendom; and may we have grace to respond in heart and practice, owning our own part in the ruin.

The Publisher.

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Letter 1

Dearest A.

It has occurred to me that it might not be unprofitable to follow up the papers on “Prayer and the Prayer Meeting” with a few jottings on the present condition of things in the professing Church of God. It is not, by any means, a pleasant subject; and, most assuredly, it will not prove a popular one; and this perhaps is one reason why I adopt this method of dealing with it, in preference to writing a formal treatise. There is a peculiar charm about correspondence, inasmuch as you can pour out your heart with such freedom to a friend in whom you have confidence: and you almost forget that any other eye save your correspondent’s is to scan the lines which your pen is tracing.

It may be, however, you will protest against being called to wade even through a single letter on such a depressing theme. I fancy I hear you, at the very outset, exclaiming against the bare idea of my taking up your time or my own with all the evil and error, the confusion and *débris* involved in the very title of my letter -- “The present condition of things.” You may feel disposed to say to me, “Alas! my friend, I know too much about that subject already. I see no good in dwelling upon evil and error, failure and folly. I do not find such things in the precious catalogue penned by the inspired apostle, in Phil. 4:8. I vastly prefer the holy subjects there indicated to aught connected with your proposed theme -- ‘The present condition of things.’ It is infinitely better and more strengthening to dwell upon the faithfulness of God, the moral glories of Christ, and the living depths of holy scripture, than upon our poor state or the low condition of things in the church of God. We shall never get either comfort or power by looking at ruin and failure.”

Well, I freely admit all this -- most fully and cordially; and hence, were I to please myself, or even to indulge my own spiritual feelings, I should not pen another line on the subject of my letter. But, as you are aware, I have recently been laid aside with a severe illness which almost unfitted me for the mere effort of thinking, to say nothing of writing or preaching. Well, when I was at the very lowest point of physical prostration, a voice seemed to say, deep down in my heart, “Rise, and write a paper on the present condition of things in the church of God.” And then as I waited on God for guidance as to the mode, it was suggested to me to write a series of letters to my old friend

and yoke-fellow. Thus much as to the origin of the matter now in hand which seems, as it were, a burden laid upon me which I dare not -- nor do I desire to -- shirk. May the good Lord vouchsafe me grace to do His will.

I am fully aware of the fact that people do not like to be called to consider their ways, Self-judgment is not a very agreeable task. Solemn review of ourselves or our surroundings is what none of us very much like. But we may rest assured it is, at times, most needful -- most healthful. Indeed, at all times, it is safe and good to judge ourselves, to review our path, to know the times, to understand the real condition of things within and around, and to be divinely instructed as to how we ought to carry ourselves in the midst of the actual state of the professing Church. One thing is certain, it is the height of folly to seek to shut our eyes to the present appalling condition of Christendom in all its ramifications. Turn where you will, and you are met by the most unmistakable evidences of the downward course of christian profession.

Doubtless, my dearest A., this may sound very morose and severe. Some may pronounce me a gloomy croaker. I may be accused of gross one-sidedness and exaggeration, of wilfully shutting my eyes to a thousand hopeful features in the scene, and deliberately overlooking many encouraging pledges of brighter and better days to come. I may be told to open my eyes and look at the progress of education -- to mark the rapid strides of science -- the onward march of civilization -- to contrast the England of to-day with the England of a hundred years ago; and in the face of all this brilliant array of redeeming features, I may be triumphantly challenged to produce my "evidences of the downward course of christian profession." My attention may be called to the soul-stirring statistics of Bible and missionary societies, of the various philanthropic and scientific associations of this highly-favored age.

Well, I can only say, I rejoice, with all my heart, in every atom of good that is being done, and in every encouraging feature on which the eye can rest. I bless God for all that He, by His Spirit and word, has wrought in our midst, during the last few years. And further, I delight to think of the thousands of God's beloved people who are scattered up and down amid the various religious organizations of the day -- living stones amid the *débris* -- burning coals amid the smouldering ashes. I fondly trust that you and I do, most fully, appreciate all these things. God forbid we should not.

But in the face of all that can possibly be presented of a hopeful nature, allowing as broad a margin as the most sanguine spirit can demand in which to insert all the encouraging features and elements that are traceable around

us, I return, with calm decision, to my statement that,

On all hands we are met by the most unmistakable evidences of the downward course of christian profession.

And why insist upon this? Is it a mere morbid desire to dwell upon the dark side of things? Is it that we would not rejoice as heartily as others in seeing the progress of what is true and good, if such were really visible? By no means. We can in our tiny measure, say with the apostle,

Would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

Assuredly, if the true and the good were really in the ascendant, we should have our share in it as well as others.

But no; my beloved brother, I believe that holy scripture and living facts coincide in demonstrating my statement as to the downward course of things. I shall, if God permit me to write this series of letters, furnish an array of evidence from the pages of inspiration, and from undeniable facts, patent to all who will only open their eyes to see, to prove that Christendom, as such, is traveling, with terrific speed, down an inclined plane to the blackness and darkness of an eternal night; that there is not the smallest shadow of scripture authority on which to base a hope of improvement; and, finally, that there is not a single fact in Christendom's history, not a single feature in Christendom's present state that does not perfectly coincide with the predictions of our Lord Christ and His holy apostles, as to what we are to expect. It is perfectly useless for men to seek to shut their eyes to these things, or in any way to set them aside. The word of God and the facts of the case are against them. There is judgment -- dire judgment -- impending over the scene. Before ever the beams of millennial glory can shine forth upon the world, the besom {broom} of destruction and the sword of judgment must do their appalling work.

I speak only of the great mass of christian profession. God has His people everywhere, blessed be His name Amid all the darkness, the gross evil, and puerile superstition of popery, and in every section of Protestant profession, there are beloved members of the body of Christ. All these will rise to meet their Lord, when He comes to gather His own. Not one shall be left behind. Every grain of genuine wheat shall be gathered into the heavenly garner. And this may take place tonight! And what then? Yes, we may ask, what then? I shrink from penning down the answer; but it must be told -- Strong delusion and eternal perdition for Christendom and every Christless professor therein.

I shall close this brief introductory letter by subscribing myself, as ever, dearest A.,

Your deeply affectionate yoke-fellow,

Letter 2

Dearest A.

Since writing my last letter to you, my mind has been dwelling a good deal on three great facts presented to us throughout the inspired volume -- facts with which, I doubt not, your mind is very familiar, but which, I am thoroughly persuaded, must be laid hold of by a vigorous faith, if we would contemplate with a well-balanced mind the present condition of things throughout the entire professing church.

In the first place, then, we learn from scripture that, in every instance in which man has been set in a place of responsibility, he has utterly failed. Total failure has marked man's history, from paradise to pentecost. There is not so much as a single exception to the dark and melancholy rule. Let man be tried under the fairest possible circumstances, and he is sure to breakdown. Let him be started in business with the very brightest prospects, and hopeless bankruptcy is the certain issue. There is no denying this fact -- no getting over it. It runs like a dark, broad line along the page of human history, from first to last.

Let us refer to our proofs -- a melancholy but necessary task. When first man was placed in the garden of Eden, surrounded by all that the hand of an Almighty and Beneficent Creator could do to make him happy, he believed the serpent's lie, and turned his back upon God. He proved, in a manner perfectly unmistakable, that he had more confidence in the serpent than in Jehovah Elohim -- more respect for the word of the devil than for the word of the blessed Creator. He trusted Satan rather than God blessed throughout the everlasting ages.

This, dearest friend, is our first proof. It may seem to some to be very harshly stated. It may seem coarse, severe, vehement, and ultra. But no; it would not be possible for the human pen to portray, or the human voice to enunciate, this terrible proof in features too exaggerated, or in language too severe. The first man, the great parent stem of the human family, the head of the entire human race, was guilty of the terrible act of which we speak. He preferred the devil to God.

Thus the matter stands in its simplest, truest form. Men may seek to

mould it off, and soften it down, as they will; but no moulding or softening can alter, in the smallest degree, the essential features of this tremendous fact. There it stands recorded on the eternal page of inspiration, nor can all the fine-drawn theories of philosophy, falsely so called, nor all the plausible reasonings of infidelity, ever alter its real nature, character, or bearing.

It may be said, perhaps, that Adam did not know he was listening to the devil. But how does that affect the real merits of the case? It, most assuredly, was not the way of the enemy to come forward openly and boldly, and say,

I am the devil; and I am come to slander Jehovah Elohim, and get you to turn your back upon Him altogether.

Yet this was precisely what he did, no matter how he did it. He led man to surrender the truth of God, and to accept the lie of the serpent. Thus the fact stands before us, if we are to be guided by the imperishable testimony of holy scripture.

I do not by any means intend to expatiate upon the various links in the chain of evidence; but this first link is one of such grave moral import, that I cannot -- nor would you, I am sure, wish me to pass it rapidly by. I consider it a fact of the most overwhelming nature, that the head of the human family -- the great parent stock -- did, in very deed, reject the truth of God, and accept and act upon the lie of the serpent. This he did in the face of an array of evidence of the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, which ought to have furnished a most triumphant answer to the foul lie of the arch-enemy.

I think you will agree with me, beloved brother, in thinking that this fact demands our gravest consideration. It will, even though we were to proceed no further with our series of proofs, go far to prepare us for the contemplation of the present condition of things, in which we shall find superstition and infidelity playing such an appalling part. If it be true -- and who will dare to deny it? -- that the first man, the head of the race, the parent stem, believed the devil instead of God -- hearkened to the creature rather than the Creator -- need we wonder at the murky clouds of superstition that enwrap his fallen family, or at the audacious flights of infidelity in which so many of his unhappy children indulge? The heart of man -- of every unrenewed man beneath the canopy of God's heaven -- is formed by the lie of the serpent -- yea, not only formed, but filled and governed by it. Solemn thought! Fallen human nature is based upon and characterized by a lie as to God; and hence it must be false as to everything divine and heavenly. Man's moral being is utterly false -- false at its very center -- he is corrupt at his very heart's core. Thus it is he has a ready ear for everything untrue, impure, and unholy -- everything against God. You will always find the human heart at the wrong

side of any question concerning God and His truth. No marvel, therefore, that superstition and infidelity are rapidly gaining ground in Christendom.

But I must proceed with my proofs, and not anticipate what is to come before me in a future letter, if God permit.

Passing down along the page of man's history after the fall, we see him progressing, with terrible strides, until at length his iniquity rises to a head, and God sends the deluge. Noah is carried safely through the judgment, and placed at the head of the restored earth, with the sword of government in his hand.

This, truly, was a high position -- a place of immense power, privilege, and responsibility. How does Noah carry himself therein? He gets drunk, and degrades himself in the presence of his sons! Such is the plain, palpable fact. Men may reason as they will. They may seek to smooth, soften, and pare down, as is their wont whenever any great truth is stated which bears down upon human pride and self-gratulation. But they cannot set aside the humiliating fact that the head of the restored earth got drunk. Yes, the very man concerning whom his father Lamech prophesied, that

This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands,
because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.

This man

planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

I do not dwell upon this, but hasten on to another link in our chain of evidence. When Israel were redeemed out of Egypt, they deliberately undertook, and solemnly pledged themselves, to do all that Jehovah had spoken. What was the issue? Ere ever they had received the tables of the law, they, under the leadership of no less a personage than Aaron himself, actually made a golden calf, and said,

These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

How terrible! how deeply humiliating! how astounding! to think of a whole congregation of men, headed by such a man as Aaron, actually accepting a golden calf in lieu of Jehovah! What a proof of our thesis is here, beloved friend! Jehovah displaced by a calf Who would have thought it possible? But the heart recurs to Adam accepting the serpent instead of Jehovah Elohim, and this prepares us for anything. We are not surprised, when we behold Noah lying drunk in his tent, or Israel bowed before a golden calf. Man fails always, and everywhere. Adam is driven from the garden; Noah despised by his son; and Israel sees the tables of testimony shattered to atoms

at the foot of the palpable mount.

But Jehovah institutes priesthood. The very man who did all the terrible mischief is invested with the high and holy office. What is the issue? Strange fire; and Aaron never appears in the presence of God in his garments of glory and beauty!

One more proof, and I close this letter. A king is in process of time set up. What follows? Strange wives, gross idolatry, and the nation rent in twain.

All these, my beloved friend, are plain, undeniable facts, which cannot be set aside, and they prove, so far as they go, the truth of my statement, that failure is stamped, in characters deep and broad, on man's history from first to last.

Letter 3

Dearest A.

It need not surprise us to find that Christianity forms no exception to the melancholy rule which we have been pursuing through the pages of Old Testament scriptures. At the opening of the Acts of the Apostles we have a most charming picture presented to our view, in the condition and practical ways of the early church. The very record is refreshing to read. What must the living facts have been? I am sure you will not object to my penning a few lines in illustration.

Then they that gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed *were together*, and had all things common: and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily *with one accord* in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people (Acts 2:41-46).

Here we have a lovely sample of true Christianity some rich clusters of the fruit of the Spirit -- the glorious triumph of grace over all the narrow selfishness of nature -- the exquisite merging of all personal interests and considerations in the common good. "They were together," and "they had all things common." They were

of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and *great grace was upon them all*. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to every man according as he had need (Acts 4:32-35).

It is impossible to conceive anything more lovely on this earth. It is a display of the moral glories of heaven -- a fair and touching illustration of what it will be, by and by, when our God shall have things His own way, and when He

shall throw open the fair fields of the new creation in view of all created intelligences, when the heavens above and the earth beneath shall exhibit the benign influence of the Savior's reign, and reflect the beams of His moral glory.

But alas! alas! this lovely picture was marred. There were unhallowed elements working underneath the surface of this fair scene, which very speedily made their appearance. Covetousness, selfishness, hypocrisy and deceit broke out in the very midst of all this moral loveliness, proving that man is the same, always and everywhere. In Eden, in the restored earth, in Canaan, and in the very presence of the Pentecostal gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, man utterly breaks down. Unfaithfulness, failure, sin and ruin are stamped on every page of man's history, from first to last. It is perfectly useless for anyone to deny this. The proofs are too strong. Every section of the melancholy story, every page, every paragraph, is but a tributary stream to swell the tide of evidence in proof of the fact that man is not to be trusted. In the bowers of Eden; amid the impressive scenes of the restored world; surrounded by all the splendor of Solomon's reign: yea, in presence of the Pentecostal gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost, human sin and folly have displayed their hideous forms. There is not so much as a solitary exception to the dismal and humiliating rule.

It may be, however, that some will object to the use I am making of the covetousness and deceit of Ananias and Sapphira, and the murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews. It may be deemed unwarrantable to argue the failure of the entire christian dispensation from a few plague spots appearing at the opening of its history.

Well, dearest A., the very same objection may be urged in reference to our entire series of proofs. What drove Adam out of Eden? Eating a little fruit. What degraded the head of the restored earth? Drinking too much wine. What stripped Aaron of his garments of glory and beauty? Strange fire. Thus, in every instance, it is not a question as to the magnitude of the thing done, but as to the gravity of the principle involved. It is of the very deepest moment to see this, in all cases. What appears on the surface may, in our poor shallow judgment, seem very trivial: but the underlying principles may involve the very gravest consequences.

However, it is not to be supposed that we base our judgment as to the utter failure of Christianity, as a witness for Christ on this earth, upon the facts recorded on the opening page of the church's history. Far, very far, from it. Our Lord's prophetic teachings, delivered before the foundation of the christian system was laid, furnish the fullest and clearest warnings as to the

future destiny of that system. What means the parable of the tares? of the leaven? or of the mustard tree?

While men slept the enemy came and sowed tares in the field, and went his way {Matt. 13}.

What are we to learn from this? Surely not the uninterrupted progress of the good -- the pure -- the true; but the corruption of these latter by the mischievous hand of the adversary; the marring of the beauteous work of God, the hindrance of the divine testimony by adverse influences.

Similar is the testimony of the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed. Both lead us to expect the hopeless failure of the christian system, through the unfaithfulness of man and the crafty vigilance of the archenemy. True it is that many look upon the leaven as typical of the gradual progress of the gospel until all nations shall be brought under its mighty influence. And in like manner, the mustard tree is viewed as illustrating the marvelous progress of the christian system.

But it is not possible that the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed can contradict, in their teaching, the parable of the tares; and most surely this latter does not teach the progress of good, but the sad admixture of evil. And further, how is it possible for the careful student of scripture to admit that leaven is ever used as a type of anything good? I believe, beloved friend, you will concur with your correspondent in the opinion that leaven is only used to set forth that which is evil. And as to the mustard tree, the fact of its offering shelter, in its wide-spreading branches, to "the fowls of the air," stamps its character; for where, we may inquire, are those "fowls" ever used as a figure of what is holy or good?

But the entire New Testament actually teems with evidence in proof of our thesis. Every prophetic voice that falls on the ear, as well as every historic statement goes to establish, beyond all question, the hopeless ruin of the church as a responsible witness for Christ on the earth.

I am not now treating of the church as the body of Christ. In this aspect, thank God, there can be no failure, no ruin, no judgment. Christ will infallibly maintain His church according to the divine integrity of His own work. He will present His church ere long without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He has expressly declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His assembly.

But on the other hand, looked at as a responsible witness for Christ, as a steward, a light-bearer, in this world, the church, like every other steward or witness, has miserably failed; and is rapidly ripening for judgment. If we do not distinguish these two aspects of the church or Christianity, we shall be

involved in thorough confusion.

But I must proceed with my chain of evidence.

Turn for a moment to that touching scene in Acts 20 where the blessed apostle is taking leave of the elders of the church at Ephesus. Let us hearken to the following words of deep solemnity,

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you*, not sparing the flock. Also of [or from among] your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30).

Now, I feel assured, beloved friend, you admit that we have something more in the above passage than the mere fact of a servant of Christ taking leave of the sphere of his labors, and of his fellow-laborers. I believe we have here that solemn epoch in the church's history, in the which she was to be deprived of the personal presence of apostles. And what, let me ask, is she taught to expect? Is it spiritual progress? Is it the gradual spread of the gospel over the whole world? Is it the introduction, by moral and spiritual agencies, of the millennium? Is it a succession of godly, devoted, earnest men who should carry on the blessed work begun by the apostles? Nothing whatever of the kind -- nothing approaching it. On the contrary, she is taught to look for "grievous wolves" -- men speaking perverse things" -- perverters of the truth of God and of the souls of men.

Such is the gloomy prospect presented to the church's view in this pathetic farewell address of the most devoted servant that ever stood in the vineyard of Christ. It is vain -- utterly vain, to seek to shut our eyes to this solemn fact. I know people do not like to hear such teaching. Smooth things are far more agreeable and more popular. But we must speak the truth. We dare not attempt to prophesy smooth things -- to cry peace, peace, when there is no peace, but palpable ruin and . imminent judgment. Of what possible use is it to daub the wretched walls of Christendom with the untempered mortar of human thoughts and opinions? "Use," did I say? It is positive cruelty; for as sure as God is in heaven, those walls shall, ere long, be demolished and swept away by the stormy blast of divine judgment. There is nothing before Christendom -- the false professing church -- root, trunk and branches, but the unmitigated wrath of Almighty God. Is this a mere human opinion? Nay, it is the voice of holy scripture.

Let us listen to further testimony.

Turn to Paul's Epistle to Timothy.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

It will, perhaps, be urged, by the protestant reader, that in the passage just quoted we have a photograph of popery. Granted. The features are far too salient -- too striking, for the most cursory observer not to trace the picture of popery, with its monastic and ascetic absurdities.

But let us cull for Protestantism a passage from the second Epistle.

This know also, that in the last days perilous [or difficult] times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves [not abstaining from aught that self may desire], covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents; unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Here we have, not the superstition of the middle ages, but the infidelity of the last days of Christendom, with all its appalling adjuncts so flagrantly displayed, on every side, in this our own day. Thus in 1 Tim. 4 we have popery; ¹ and in 2 Tim. 3 infidelity plainly delineated by the pen of inspiration. In neither are we taught to look for the progress of truth; but in both the progress of error and evil, and the consequent judgment of God.

Precisely similar is the teaching of the Apostle Peter, who tells us that

There were false prophets also, among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

So also the Apostle Jude gives us a most appalling picture of the corruption, the ruin, and the final doom of Christendom. Nothing can be more awful than his delineations.

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily

1. {Actually, *gnosticism*; though elements of it are found in Romanism and elsewhere.}

after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear clouds they are without water, carried about of winds trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Finally, when we turn to the addresses to the seven churches, the same solemn testimony is conveyed to the heart. The church is under judgment. It has left its first love. Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitanes are at work. This responsible witness for Christ -- the last of the series -- proves no better than all the rest. The ruin is hopeless; and nothing remains for the professing church but to be spued out as a nauseous and insufferable abomination.

Here I pause, dearest A., for the present. The chain of evidence is complete. It is impossible for any one who bows to scripture to resist or gainsay it. My first point is established unanswerably, namely, that wherever man has been set in a place of responsibility, he has miserably failed. Hopeless ruin and judgment cover every page of human history, from Adam in the garden of Eden down to the Christian era. There is not so much as a solitary exception to the gloomy and humiliating rule.

But I must close this long letter. In my next, if God permit, I shall glance at other great root-principles to which I have referred. Meanwhile, may our souls be kept above the murky atmosphere that enwraps the professing church, basking in the sunlight of our Father's love, and realizing abiding fellowship with Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!

Letter 4

Dearest A.

I have now to invite your attention to another great principle which I have found most helpful in preparing the mind for the contemplation of the present condition of things in the church of God, namely, that God never restores a fallen witness. When man fails in his responsibility -- which, as we have before proved, he always does -- God does not reinstate him. He brings in something better, as the fruit of His own sovereign grace; but He never puts a new piece upon an old garment.

Thus, when Adam failed in the garden, he was driven out, and never reinstated.

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24).

There were the two trees; the tree of responsibility, and the tree of life; and man having utterly failed as to the former, he could not be suffered to eat of the latter. His title to the tree of life was hopelessly forfeited. He had lost his innocence, never to regain it; and he must leave the garden, never to be reinstated. True it is -- blessedly, gloriously true -- God could give him righteousness instead of innocence; heaven instead of Eden -- a far better thing and a far better place; but He drove him out of Eden; and not only drove him out, but placed an insuperable barrier in the way of his return --

a flaming sword which turned *every way*, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Now this is a most weighty principle, and it runs all through the word of God, side by side with that on which I have dwelt in my last two letters. The first man fails in everything, as we have already proved beyond all question. Everything he touches goes to ruin under his hand. He is turned out of every stewardship on the ground of manifest unfaithfulness, and never can be reinstated. God never re-constructs a fallen economy {an order of things He has instituted}. He introduces a new thing on a new footing, and leads,

through grace, the believer into the enjoyment of it; but the first man is completely set aside, and his history closed for ever. The cross is the termination of the career of the first man; and the second Man, risen from the dead, is the basis and center of God's new creation. He is invested with all the dignities and all the glories. All that the first man lost, the second Man has regained. He has won back all, and much more beside. He has glorified God in every position in which the first man had dishonored Him. He has faithfully discharged every responsibility, and executed every stewardship; and He has laid the foundation of all the eternal counsels of God by His accomplished atonement, so that He can associate believers with Himself in the new creation of which He is the glorious Head and Center.

But, my beloved friend, it may be that some would at this point feel disposed to inquire, Whatever can all this have to do with "the present condition of things in the church of God?" Much every way. Has the church failed in its responsibility? Has the christian system utterly broken down? Has Christianity hopelessly failed as a witness, a steward, a light-bearer for Christ in this world? Has it? or has it not? This is the question. I am quite sure that you, my beloved brother, have no question in your mind as to this. But many who shall read this letter may seriously doubt if indeed the church has signally failed. There are millions throughout the length and breadth of Christendom who would consider me the merest croaker in all that I have advanced on this subject.

They look upon Christendom as a splendid success. They consider that the gospel, like the rider on the white horse {Rev. 6}, has gone forth conquering and to conquer; that it has achieved most glorious triumphs. They look back to the opening of the fourth century, when persecution ceased, and when Constantine spread his sheltering wing over the church of God, as a glorious epoch in the history of Christianity -- the commencement of an era which has gone on increasing in brightness from that day until now.

Such, we may feel assured, is the fondly cherished opinion of ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians at the present moment. But I am thoroughly persuaded that scripture and facts are entirely against them. You and I most fully believe that scripture is quite enough in the establishment of any position: and I think we have had before us a body of evidence drawn from scripture quite sufficient to carry conviction to any mind that will only bow to the authority of the word. I have quoted historic records and prophetic announcements all tending to prove that the church, as a responsible witness for Christ on this earth has, like all other witnesses, stewards and office-bearers, entirely failed. The parables of the leaven, the tares, the

mustard tree, and the ten virgins, all combine to establish our thesis. Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus; his first and second Epistles to Timothy, to say nothing of the close of his own ministry and his disastrous voyage to Rome -- all go to prove the utter ruin of the church in its earthly service and testimony. So also the Apostle Peter, in his second Epistle; and Jude in his appalling picture, set forth the same solemn truth.

And as for John, he never names the church in his Epistles, save once, and that is to speak of it as governed by the spirit of Diotrephes, excommunicating the brethren, and actually refusing the apostle himself. Finally, in the closing section of the inspired canon, the book of Revelation, the church {viewed in responsible testimony as a light-bearer} is actually presented as under judgment. Hardly was it set up, ere it left its first love; and its progress is only downwards, until it is spued out of the Lord's mouth as a nauseous and insufferable abomination; and finally is flung, like a great millstone, into the lake of fire. ²

Some may, perhaps, call in question my right to adduce the seven churches in evidence, inasmuch as they were addressed as distinct local assemblies which have passed away like numerous other churches. But I believe it will be admitted by most who have studied the book of Revelation that those seven addresses have a double character. They are, at once, historic and prophetic -- historic of what has existed -- prophetic of what should exist. True, there were those seven local churches actually existing, and in the exact spiritual conditions indicated by these addresses. But why were those seven selected? Simply because their respective condition served to illustrate ³ the various phases of the church's history from the moment in the which the first symptom of decline manifested itself until it should be finally set aside as a witness for Christ on the earth.

However, as to this last link in our chain of evidence, I have only to say, "I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say." My thesis is unanswerably established even without the proof drawn from the seven churches of Asia. Scripture establishes, beyond question, the fact of the utter ruin of the church as a light-bearer for Christ on the earth; and as to facts, we have but to say to the reader, Lift up your eyes and look upon Christendom, and say if you can trace a single feature of resemblance to the church as presented in the New Testament.

2. I speak only of the professing body. The true saints of God, the members of the body of Christ, shall be all taken to heaven.

3. {So the seven churches were a *fore-shadow* rather than prophecy.}

Where is the one body? Suppose a letter addressed "To the church of God in London;" to whom should it be delivered? Who could claim it? The postmaster and the letter-carrier would be sorely perplexed to know what to do with it; and, doubtless, it would ultimately find its place in the dead-letter office. Could the church of Rome claim it? No; for there are hundreds of thousands of God's people outside her pale. Could the National Establishment {Church of England} claim it? By no means, for the self-same reason. And so of all the various organizations of the day -- the sects and parties into which christian profession is divided. Not a single one could dare to call at the post-office and demand the letter, for the simplest of all reasons, that not one of them is the church of God, and not one of them is even on the ground of the church of God.

No, no, my dearest A., we must admit that Christendom, so far from being a splendid success, has proved a most deplorable and humiliating failure. Christendom has not continued in the goodness of God. What therefore? "Thou also shalt be cut off" {Rom. 11}. Is there no restoration? As well might Adam have thought of getting back to innocence and to Eden. As well might Israel have attempted to put together the broken fragments of the tables of testimony. As well might Aaron or his sons after him have attempted to seize and put on the garments of glory and beauty.

It cannot be. The attempt to reconstruct the church is as futile as the attempt to build the tower of Babel, and must issue in the same confusion. Men may say, "The bricks are fallen down: but we will build with hewn stone." It is all vanity. The bare idea of men -- whether you call them churchmen or dissenters -- attempting to form or re-form -- to construct or reconstruct the church, is the most hopeless labour possible. The very bodies which we carry about with us might tell us a tale if we would only bend our ears to listen. Can they be restored? Never. They must die or be changed; never reconstructed. God will give a body of glory; but never patch up a body of sin and death.

And as to the church so-called, its history on earth is a history of failure and ruin, of sin and judgment, and all human efforts to mend or re-model must prove utterly vain. Christ, blessed be His name, will present the true church to Himself, by-and-by, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. That glorious body shall yet be seen descending from heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband, shining in all the brightness of the glory of God and the Lamb. But as for the false, the faithless, the corrupt church-that vast mass of baptized profession which calls itself by the name of Christendom, nothing remains for it but the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God -- the lake of

fire -- the blackness of darkness for ever.

Oh! my beloved brother, do you not long to see the Lord's people rightly instructed as to all this? Is it not deplorable to see them attempting to form churches and organize bodies, as they say, upon the apostolic model? Where is their warrant? Where is the power? Nowhere. They are seeking to do what God never does. The word of God is against them. Where have we a line of instruction in the New Testament as to forming a church? Where is such a thing hinted at in the most remote manner? That which God set up at, the first has utterly failed in man's hand. It was set up in power and beauty; but man ruined it. And now what do we see? Churchmen and dissenters presuming to model and re-model churches after the apostolic pattern. Alas! alas! they will soon learn their sad mistake.

But what is to be done? That is another question altogether; and a question abundantly answered, when we ask it on right ground and in a right spirit. But first of all, have we learnt that the church is a ruin, and that it is not God's purpose to restore it? If we have really learnt this, we shall be in a moral condition to receive an answer to that oft put question, What is to be done? If we only take our true ground, in reference to this matter; if we see and own the ruin; if we confess our individual part in that ruin; if we make the church's sin our own -- as every truly spiritual person most assuredly will -- if we are truly broken and penitent before our God; then verily shall we put far away from us all proud pretensions and futile efforts to set up a church of our own devising and workmanship.⁴ We shall learn something very different indeed from this. We shall see it to be our place to bow down in lowliness and meekness at the feet of our Lord, confessing our common sin and shame, taking our place amid the ruin to which we ourselves have so largely contributed, and instead of busily asking, What is to be done? we shall learn to cast ourselves upon the rich mercy and sovereign goodness of our God, and the boundless resources treasured up in Christ our glorious Head and Lord who, though He never will reconstruct a fallen church upon earth, can nevertheless sustain and comfort, feed and nourish, strengthen and encourage all those who in true devotedness of heart and humility of mind cast themselves upon His faithfulness and love.

That you and I may be of that happy privileged number is, dearest A., the

4. {The reader who understands the ruin of the church on earth, viewed in responsible testimony, understands that setting up "New Testament churches" as at the beginning, in Apostolic days, is an implicit denial of the ruin, an implicit denial of such a thing as "the church on earth," and may result in independency of churches, or in an aggregation of churches. It is a relative of the Pentecostal notion of getting back to Pentecost, though not going so far.}

earnest prayer of

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow,

Letter 5

Dearest A.,

The principle which I have to bring under your notice in this letter, is one full of the richest consolation to the heart of every faithful servant of Christ. It is this, *In all ages, and under all the dispensations of God, whatever may have been the condition of God's people as a whole, it was the privilege of the individual believer to tread as lofty a path and enjoy as high communion as ever was known in the very brightest and palmiest days of the dispensation.*

Such is my present thesis which I hope to be able to prove from the word of God. I have, in former letters, sought to prove that, in every instance in which man has been placed in a position of responsibility, he has utterly failed. And, further, that God never restores a fallen witness. I trust I have fully established these two points. My present task is a much more pleasing one, inasmuch as it involves the setting forth of the great truth that, in darkest days, faith has ever found its springs in the living God Himself, and, therefore, the deeper the moral gloom all around, the brighter are the flashes of individual faith. The dark background of the corporate condition has thrown individual faith into bright and beauteous relief.

Now I confess, my beloved friend, that this line of truth has peculiar charms for my heart. I have for many years found in it solace and encouragement; and I doubt not we have often dwelt upon it, both in our personal intercourse and in our public ministry. I do not think it is possible to overstate its value and importance, and I am thankful for this opportunity of bringing it out and throwing it into permanent form.

There is a strong and constant tendency in the mind of God's people to lower the standard of devotedness to the level of the general condition of things. This must be carefully guarded against. It is destructive of all service and testimony.

The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19).

This weighty passage embodies in its brief compass the whole subject which I desire to unfold in this letter. God is faithful. His standard ever remains the

same. His foundation can never be moved; and it is the province and the privilege of the individual believer to rest on that foundation and abide by that standard, come what may. Faith can count on God, and draw upon His inexhaustible resources, though the public condition of things be characterized by hopeless ruin. Were it not so, what would have become of the faithful in all ages? How could the Baraks, the Gideons, the Jephthahs, the Samsons, have stood their ground, and wielded the sword against the uncircumcised, if they had allowed themselves to be influenced by the general condition of the people of God? If any one of these illustrious servants had folded his arms and abandoned himself to the paralyzing power of unbelief, because of the state of the nation, what would have been the issue? Assuredly they would never have achieved those splendid victories which the Holy Ghost has graciously recorded for our encouragement, and which we may study with such spiritual delight and profit.

But I think I must seek to prove and illustrate my thesis by bringing before you in an orderly manner some prominent cases in which its truth is specially exemplified. Knowing as I do your profound interest in the word of God, I shall not attempt to offer any apology for copious references to scripture; or, if needs be, elaborate quotation from it. I fancy I hear you saying, "By all means give me scripture. There is nothing like the word. It must be our only standard of appeal -- our one grand authority which settles all questions, solves all difficulties, closes all discussion. Give me scripture." This I know is your mind; and thanks be to God, it is the mind of your correspondent also.

To scripture therefore we shall turn, in dependence upon the guidance and teaching of Him by whom that scripture was indited.

The first proof then, my beloved friend, which I shall offer you will be found in Ex. 33. What, let me ask, was at that moment the condition of the nation of Israel? Let Ex. 32 furnish the sad and humiliating reply. The very highest and most privileged man in the whole congregation had made a golden calf! Yes; here is the terrible record:

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not {know not} what is become of him.

What a picture is here, dearest A., of the debasing and absurd folly of the human heart! Only think of a whole congregation of people giving utterance

to such gross and palpable absurdity. “*Make us gods.*”⁵ We listen with amazement to such accents, emanating as they do from the lips of those who not long before had lifted their voice to heaven in a triumphal hymn of praise. Who would have thought that the worshipers on the shore of the Red Sea should ever give utterance to such words as “*Make us gods which shall go before us*”?

They had said in their magnificent song,

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

Had they now found out some one like Him? It would seem so. And who? A golden calf! How dreadful! And yet this is man. Yes; man, in every age. If we duly ponder the scene of the golden calf -- if we thoroughly seize the moral of it -- if we fully apprehend its teaching, it will go far in preparing us for some of the grossest features in the present condition of things. These things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (Literally, “upon whom the ends of the ages have met.”)

But let us proceed with our subject.

And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

What a picture! A whole assembly -- the entire nation of Israel sunk, in a moment, into absurd and degrading idolatry -- all, with one consent, bowed before a god made of the earrings which a little before had hung from the ears

5. Do not these words of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai, remind us of the blasphemous absurdity of popery as displayed in the sacrifice of the Mass? Does not the priest undertake in that ordinance to make God? And do not millions throughout the length and breadth of Christendom prostrate themselves in adoring homage before a wafer god which a mouse may carry off and devour? And this is an integral part of the present condition of things in the professing church of God -- this is a prominent feature in the scene through which we are passing. Is a scrap of bread a higher object of worship than a piece of gold? O Christendom! Christendom! think of thy present condition -- think of thy destiny -- ponder thy doom!

of their wives and daughters! And this, too, in the face of all they had witnessed of the mighty acts of Jehovah. They had seen the land of Egypt trembling under the successive strokes of His judicial rod. They had seen the Red Sea laid open before them, and a pathway formed for them by His omnipotent arm through these very waters which proved a grave for Egypt's armies. He had sent down manna from heaven, and brought forth water from a flinty rock, to meet their need. All this they had witnessed; and, yet, in a moment, as it were, they could forget this marvelous array of evidence, and mistake a piece of gold for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Terrible exhibition, this, of what is in man, and of what we are to expect from him if left to himself!

Nor should we, my beloved friend, ever forget who, it was that led the people into this most disastrous course of action. It was no less a personage than Aaron -- the elder brother of the lawgiver himself. It may be deemed a digression to refer to this; but it is a profitable digression; because it tends to illustrate the exceeding folly of leaning on, or looking to, the very highest and best of men.

In the early part of the book of Exodus we find Moses shrinking from the divine legation. He hesitated to go into Egypt at the bidding of God, though assured again and again that Jehovah would be with him, that He would be a mouth and wisdom to him, nevertheless, he shrank and would fain retire from the responsibility. But the very moment he heard that Aaron should accompany him, he was ready to go. And yet this very man was the source of the deepest sorrow that Moses ever tasted. This was the man who made the golden calf!

How admonitory is all this! What a sad mistake it is to lean on an arm of flesh! And yet how prone we are all to do so in one way or another! We lean on our fellow-mortal instead of leaning on the living God, and in the sequel we find we have been trusting to a broken reed. "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint."

Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?

But we must return to our theme, and consider the path of the man of God, in the face of the condition of things with which he was surrounded -- a condition, to say the least of it, gloomy enough.

The heart of Moses might well sink and cower as he beheld the whole congregation of Israel, with Aaron his brother at their head, sunk in abominable idolatry. All seemed hopelessly gone. But "the foundation of God standeth sure." This is a grand and immutable truth in all ages. Nothing can touch the truth of God. It, shines out all the brighter from amid the deepest

and darkest shades into which man is capable of sinking. We can form but very little idea of what the heart of Moses, that beloved and honored servant of God, passed through when he saw his Lord displaced by a golden calf. But he could count on God. Yea, and he could also act for God. The two things ever go together. The man of faith cannot afford to spend his time in unavailing lamentations over the condition of things. He has his work to do, and his path to tread, and that work and that path are never more marked than in the very midst of abounding error and hopeless confusion.

The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity {2 Tim. 2:19}.⁶

See how blessedly this fine practical principle was carried out by Moses, the man of God -- a principle as true in the day of the golden calf, as amid the appalling, ruins of Christendom.

And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, *afar off from the camp*, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that *every one which sought the Lord* went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation which was without the camp.

Here we have what we may call a bold and magnificent piece of acting. Moses felt that Jehovah and a golden calf could not be together, and hence if a calf was in the camp, Jehovah must be outside. Such was the simple reasoning of faith; faith always reasons aright. When the public body is all wrong, the path of individual faith is outside.

Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.

It never can be right, and, thanks be to God, it is never necessary, to go on with iniquity. No, no, "*depart*" is the watchword for the faithful soul, when iniquity is set up in that which assumes to be the witness for God on the earth. Cost what it may, we are to depart. It may look like exclusiveness, and a setting ourselves up to be holier and better and wiser than our neighbors. But no matter what it looks like, or what people may call it, we must "*depart from iniquity.*" "*Every one which sought the Lord*" had to go outside of the defiled place to find Him, and yet that very place was none other than the camp of Israel where Jehovah had taken up His abode.

Thus we see that Moses on this occasion was preeminently a man for the crisis. He acted for God, and he was the honored instrument of opening up a path for God's people whereby they might escape from a scene of hopeless

6. {The correct reading is "name of [the] Lord." It is a matter of His Lordship over us.}

pollution, and enjoy the rich and rare privilege of communion with God in an evil day. And as for himself, we learn what he gained by this marvelous transaction from the following record,

And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Am I wrong, dearest A., in adducing Moses in proof of my thesis, "That no matter what may be the actual condition of the people of God as a whole, it is the privilege of the individual believer to tread as lofty a path and enjoy as high communion as was ever known in the brightest and palmiest days?" I think you will say, No.

And here I must close this long letter. If you so desire, you shall hear again from

Yours, my dearest A.,

Most affectionately in Christ,

Letter 6

Dearest A.

. . . It seems to me we are in imminent danger of yielding to the current, and allowing ourselves to be carried down the stream, because it appears so hopeless to think of making a firm stand for Christ and His cause. Against this, my beloved friend, we must jealously watch and vigorously strive. Nothing can ever justify the individual believer in lowering the standard, relaxing his grasp, or yielding the breadth of a hair, in the grand struggle to which he is called. The very fact of the utter ruin of the body corporate, is the urgent reason for personal devotedness. The more chilling and withering the surrounding atmosphere, the greater the demand for personal energy. Even though we could not reckon upon the countenance or support of a single individual, it is our bounden duty and high privilege to plant the foot of faith firmly on divine ground, and there to be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. A regiment may be cut down to a man; but if that man be but able to grasp and defend the colors, the dignity of the regiment is maintained. So also if a single individual be enabled to hold up the standard of the name and word of Jesus, he may count on present blessing and a future bright reward. "To *him* that overcometh will I grant," &c.

But I must proceed with my series of living illustrations drawn from the inspired pages of the volume of God -- that peerless, priceless, eternal Revelation, which, we may truly say, teems with evidence in proof of my thesis that, "*Whatever be the condition of the public body, it is the happy privilege of the man of God to enjoy the very highest communion, and occupy the very highest ground.*" This, as you will remember, is my present subject; and it is a subject of deepest interest to me -- one in which the heart finds peculiar solace, strength and encouragement.

In my last communication, we were led to contemplate the magnificent conduct of Moses, at the foot of Mount Sinai. I must now ask you to look at the conduct of Elias, on the top of Mount Carmel. Both these honored servants of God are closely linked together on the page of inspiration.

In the eighteenth chapter of the first book of Kings, we have one of the brightest scenes in the life of Elijah the Tishbite. I am not, you may be sure, going to offer my beloved friend anything like an elaborate exposition of this chapter. I just select one fact out of it for my present purpose, and that is recorded in the

thirty-first verse,

And Elijah took *twelve stones*, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord.

Here, then, we have faith taking its stand on God's own ground, acting according to the integrity of divine revelation, and confessing the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes; and this, too, in the presence of Ahab and Jezebel and eight hundred false prophets; and not only so, but in the presence of a divided nation. Israel's visible unity was gone. The ten tribes were broken off from the two. The entire condition of things was depressing in the extreme.

But Elijah, on the top of Carmel, was enabled to look beyond Israel's practical state, and fix his believing gaze on God's immutable truth. I say, on the top of Carmel, it was thus with this illustrious witness. Elsewhere, alas! it was different. Under the juniper tree, and on Mount Horeb we do not see the same lofty range, for "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are," and as such he sometimes fell far below the moral elevation of the life of faith.

However, it is with Elijah on Mount Carmel that we have to do just now, and with the altar of twelve stones which, he was enabled, by faith, there to erect in the face of all the ruin and corruption around him. Had he looked at the things that were seen -- had he been governed by Israel's moral condition -- had he shaped his way and regulated his conduct by the state of things around him, he could not have dared to build an altar of twelve stones. Unbelieving nature might reason thus, "This is not the time for an altar of twelve stones. The day is gone by for that. It was all very well and very suitable in the days of Joshua the son of Nun, and in the brilliant days of Solomon. But to think of it now, is the height of folly and presumption. You ought to be ashamed to refer to such a thing just now, inasmuch as it only rebukes the condition of your people. How much better -- how much more becoming -- how much more morally suitable to lower the standard according to your true condition. Why assume such high ground in view of your low estate? Why seek to maintain such lofty principles in the face of such humiliating practice?"

But what, let me ask, is faith's reply to all this worthless reasoning! Simply this -- "*God's standard or nothing.*" If the truth of God is to be accommodated to the condition of God's people, there is an end to all true testimony and acceptable service. It is quite true that a certain course of action may be right, at one time, and not at all right at another. This we can perfectly understand; but the truth of God never changes. "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." We must maintain the eternal stability of the truth of God, even though that truth makes manifest our fallen condition.

I think you will admit, dearest A., that there is something uncommonly fine

in the actings of our prophet, on Mount Carmel. It does the heart good, in this day of miserable laxity -- this day of playing fast and loose with the truth of God, to see a man unfurling the divine standard in the face of eight hundred false prophets, with Ahab and Jezebel at their back.

If there is one feature of the present moment more deplorable than another, it is the loose way in which the truth of God is held. We see, on all hands, a strong tendency to lower the standard of obedience. It is deemed narrow-minded to contend for the paramount authority of Holy Scripture. The Word of God is fast losing its place in the hearts and minds of professing Christians. That familiar motto, "the Bible, and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants," if it ever was true -- which I very much doubt -- is certainly not true now. There is a most determined effort, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom to eliminate -- to get rid altogether of the word of God as a paramount infallible authority.

This may seem a strong, harsh, ultra statement. I may be deemed a stupid narrow-minded bigot for penning such words. I cannot help it, my friend. I am thoroughly convinced of the truth of what I say. I believe if you look closely into the proceedings of the various sections of the professing church -- if you examine the public preachings and teachings of the day -- if you will give close attention to what emanates from the press, the pulpit, and the platform, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, you will find that I have only too strong and ample ground for my statement.

Thanks be to God, there are here and there some bright exceptions. Occasionally you may hear a voice raised for the truth of God -- for the plenary inspiration and absolute authority of holy scripture. But alas! alas! the voices are few, feeble, and far between. Viewed as a whole, the professing church is gliding rapidly down the inclined plane. The progress of infidelity is truly appalling. I remember, in the days of my childhood, how that a feeling of horror was awakened in the heart by the very mention of an infidel, or of any one who could dare to speak against our adorable Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, or deny the inspiration of the word of God in its every line and every sentence.

Alas! alas! how changed is the aspect of things in this our day! I cannot allow myself to go into details in the way of evidence; but I am thoroughly persuaded of this fact that the professing church is hastening on to a fearful moment in her history, in the which she will utterly reject the word, the Christ, and the Spirit of God. Look where you will, and you must be struck with the fact that the *ignorance* of superstition and the *impudence* of infidelity are fast gaining sway over the minds of millions.

As to superstition, what has this enlightened age of ours witnessed? What are the fruits which this pernicious tree has produced at the close of the nineteenth century? In the first place, millions of our fellow men have professed their belief in an immaculate woman, and, in the second place, their belief in an infallible

man! Only think of this! Think of any one in his sober senses giving his assent and consent to two such monstrous absurdities! Does it not look uncommonly like that “strong delusion” which God will, ere long, send on Christendom, to believe a lie! {2 Thess. 2}.

And as to infidelity, in its audacious tampering with the word of God, its calling in question the divine integrity of the sacred volume, its scornful rejection of the plenary inspiration of holy scripture, its blasphemous assaults upon the Person of the Son of God who is over all God blessed for ever -- you have only to look around you, on every side, to see the tributary streams rushing, with terrible vehemence, to swell the tide of evidence in proof of the melancholy fact that infidelity is raising its head, with proud audacity, throughout the length and breadth of the professing church.

It is the deep and settled persuasion of this that makes one prize, all the more, the faith and faithfulness of those worthies of old who stood forth, in the face of a hostile world, and boldly maintained the truth of God, spite of the palpable ruin and failure of the people of God. It is perfectly delightful to contemplate the prophet Elijah the Tishbite, standing by his altar of twelve stones, and offering thereon his sacrifice to the living and true God -- the Jehovah of Israel. He was simply standing on the same platform as Moses, in Ex. 33. It is the blessed platform of faith whereon each true believer can take his stand, in calm and holy confidence, and there abide with God.

The standard of God must never be lowered the breadth of a hair. It is, like Himself, unchangeable. It was as much the duty and the privilege of Elijah to act under that standard, as it was of Solomon, David, Joshua, or Moses. Israel might change, but Jehovah or His word never can; and it is with Him and His eternal word that faith has to do, in all ages. Come what may, my much loved friend, you and I are to walk with God, to lean on Him, cling to Him, draw from Him, find *all* our springs in Him -- springs of peace and power -- the power of personal communion, of worship, of service and of testimony. He never fails a trusting heart -- never has -- never will -- never can -- no, never; blessed, throughout all ages, be His holy Name! Let us, therefore, abide in Him and hold fast His word, spite of everything. While seeing and feeling and owning the real condition of things around us, let us never forget that we have individually to do with God and the word of His grace.

Ever my dearest A.

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow,

Dearest A.

I cannot attempt to adduce all the evidence which Old Testament scripture affords in proof of my present thesis; but there are two or three cases to which I must call your attention in addition to those which I have already brought before you.

I should greatly like to linger with you over the intensely interesting history of Hezekiah -- so full of comfort and encouragement, and affording such a powerful illustration of my subject; but I shall pass on to a later section of the inspired history, and take up the case of Josiah, who ascended the throne of his fathers at a moment when the nation had almost reached its very lowest point, and the moral horizon seemed overcast with many a dark and heavy cloud.

I need hardly say, my beloved friend, that I am not going to enter upon anything like an elaborate exposition of the history of the deeply interesting reign of Josiah. This would demand a volume instead of a letter. I merely refer to it now for the purpose of proving my thesis, which, as you will remember, is, "that no matter what may be the condition of the ostensible people of God, at any given time, it is the privilege of the individual believer to tread as lofty a path, and enjoy as high communion as ever was known in the highest and palmiest days of the dispensation."

What, then, was the condition of things when Josiah -- a child of eight years old -- came to the throne? As gloomy and depressing as it well could be. He was surrounded, we may say, by the accumulated rubbish of ages. He had to grapple with errors and evils introduced by no less a personage than Solomon himself, the very wisest of men.

If any one desires to have a correct idea of the practical state of things in Josiah's day, let him muse over 2 Kings 23. The record is perfectly appalling. There were vessels made for Baal in the temple of the Lord. There were idolatrous priests, burning incense in the high places, in the cities of Judah, and in Jerusalem -- incense to Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the hosts of heaven. There were Sodomites. There were those who made their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech. There were horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun. There were high places which Solomon had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon.

Only conceive, my beloved friend, the man who was used by the Holy

Ghost to pen the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles, building altars to all these false gods! And these abominations had been allowed to stand amid the reformatory movements of such men as Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat, and to descend, hoary with age, to the days of the youthful Josiah. Indeed we can hardly imagine anything more terribly depressing than the condition of things which surrounded this beloved young monarch. It seemed perfectly hopeless. His spirit might well sink within him, as he beheld such an enormous pile of rubbish, the lamentable and humiliating fruit of many years of gross unfaithfulness and departure from the truth of God. How could it ever be removed? How could he, a mere youth, grapple with such formidable evils?

Then, again, his heart might suggest the inquiry, "Am I the man for such a work? Is it becoming in me, so young, so inexperienced, so little versed in men and things, to set myself up against such a man as Solomon? Why should I pretend to more wisdom than my father? All these institutions have lived on through the times of men far more devoted and holy than I. Surely the things that Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat have left standing, I have no right to abolish. Besides, the case is hopeless. Judgment is inevitable. The decree has gone forth. Jehovah has signed the death-warrant of the guilty nation. I hear, already, the thunder's roll. It is not possible for a poor feeble creature like me to stem the tide of corruption, or avert the terrible avalanche of divine judgment. There is no hope. Things must take their course. I am not the man, nor is this the time for reformatory action. I can but yield to inevitable destiny, bow my head, and let Jehovah's governmental chariot move on."

Can you not, my dearest A., easily imagine Josiah adopting such a line of reasoning with his own heart? I know I can. It is, I greatly fear, the precise line that I should adopt, were I in his position. But, thanks be to God, His beloved servant was graciously preserved from all such cowering and contemptible unbelief. He was enabled to take his stand upon the immutable truth of God, and to try by that perfect touchstone all those errors and evils which he found existing around him, and reject them utterly. Josiah felt -- and he was divinely right in the feeling -- that there was no necessity why he should go on, for a single hour, with aught that was contrary to the mind of Jehovah. It mattered not, the weight of a feather to him -- nor should it to any one -- who had been the originator of error or evil. It was sufficient for him that it was error and evil. His one business was to reject it all with holy decision and unswerving purpose of heart. It might seem presumptuous in him, so young a man, to lay a disturbing hand upon institutions which had been set on foot by Solomon; but with this he had nothing whatever to do. It was not a question of Josiah *versus* Solomon; but of truth *versus* error.

This is a grand point, my beloved friend, for this our own day. We hear a great deal about the Fathers, and learned doctors, and good men, here and there and everywhere. And then again, some talk loudly about the necessity of cultivating largeness of heart, breadth of mind, liberality of spirit, and such like. All this sounds very plausible; and, with a large class of people, it has great weight. But the whole question hangs upon this, Have we got the truth of God, or have we not? Has God revealed His mind to us so that we may know it with all possible certainty? Are we left to human opinion? Have we nothing to go upon or rest in but the *ipse dixit* of some poor erring mortal like ourselves? Is it a question of human authority? Are learning and antiquity a sufficient guarantee for infallible truth? Can we rest the salvation of our souls, or the guidance of our conscience, or the ordering of our service upon a church, a council, or any body of men under the sun?

I think I can anticipate your reply to these queries. I am most fully persuaded, dearest A., that you regard the opinions and dogmas of men as the small dust of the balance, when it is a question of positive authority. All human writings, ancient, medieval or modern, are interesting as references; perfectly worthless as authorities. There is but the one supreme and absolute authority, and that is holy scripture -- that peerless, priceless revelation which our God has, in infinite grace, put into our hands, which all may possess if they will, and which possessing, they are rendered blessedly independent of every human authority, past or present.

And this leads me at once to the special point in Josiah's history which I consider so peculiarly applicable to the present condition of things in the church of God. I refer to the discovery of the Book of the Law.

And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. And Shaphan carried the book to the king . . . then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes.

Here, then, we have what may justly be viewed as the grand fact in the life of this most interesting man, namely, the discovery or recovery of the book of the law -- the letting in of the full light of divine revelation, first upon Josiah's conscience, and, secondly, upon the entire condition of things around him. It is a very serious thing for any one -- man, woman or child -- to stand in the searching light of God's word. That word judges everything. It makes no terms with the flesh or the world. It cuts up by the root all within and around us

which is not according to God. All this is serious work, and reads to serious results. So Josiah found it in his day, and so all must find it. It is one thing to judge our surroundings by the word, and it is quite another thing to judge ourselves. Now Josiah began with himself. Before ever he called upon others to listen to the weighty utterances of the law, he rent his own clothes, in true self-judgment beneath their searching power.

Now, my beloved friend, I cannot but feel, and that deeply, that this is precisely what is so much needed, at the present moment, in that which is called the church of God. We want to realize the searching power and to own the commanding authority of the word of God -- its searching power in the heart and conscience -- its commanding authority in our whole practical career. The two things will ever go together. The more deeply I feel the action of the word of God in my own heart, the more I shall feel and exhibit its formative influence upon my entire course, character, and conduct. The word of God is intensely real and practical. It addresses itself, in living power to the soul, and lets in upon the moral being the very light of God Himself. It applies itself, in divine energy, to all the details of life and conduct -- our habits, our associations, our common every-day concerns; and leads us to judge ourselves and our surroundings in the searching light of the throne of God.

All this, my friend, is serious work; and we must go through it, if we are to be used as God's instruments to act upon others. So Josiah felt and proved it in his day. He did not, first of all, rush forth to attack the errors of others. No, he first rent his own clothes, as one thoroughly humbled and self-judged; and then he called his brethren together, that they too, might hearken to the same powerful testimony, and take the same ground of self-judgment and brokenness; for this, he felt, was the only true road to blessing.

It will, perhaps, be objected that there is no analogy between our time and that of king Josiah, inasmuch as the church has had the book of the law in her possession for centuries, whereas to Josiah it was an entirely new thing. There is no force whatever in this objection. What is of moment to us is to see the powerful manner in which the word of God acted on the heart of Josiah and his brethren. True it is that the church has had the scriptures in her possession for ages; but is she governed by them? This is the question. Of what possible use is it to make our boast of having the Bible, if, as regards our whole practical life, that Bible be but a dead letter? And where, let me ask, throughout Christendom, is the governing power of the word owned? Is there a single religious system under the sun, which can stand the test of holy scripture for one hour? Take any religious body you please, Greek, Latin, Anglican or other, and see if you can find in the New Testament the foundation of its

ecclesiastical polity, its clerical orders, or its theological creed.

These may seem bold questions; but we must speak boldly. I ask any upright mind to examine the religious institutions of Christendom in the light of scripture, and see if they can stand the test. Is this asking too much? Is scripture to be our guide or not? Is it a sufficient guide? Does it furnish thoroughly to all good works? The inspired apostle says, "Yes" (2 Tim. 3:16). What do we say? Are we at liberty to think for ourselves? What is the meaning of that popular phrase, "The right of private judgment?" Is there really such a right? Can we speak of our having any right at all, save indeed a right to the flames of an everlasting hell? It is the height of folly for man to talk of rights. God has a right to rule. It is ours to obey. Doubtless Solomon and many of his successors exercised the right of private judgment when they set up the varied abominations to which I have called your attention. Did Josiah exercise his right in abolishing them? Nay, he acted on the authority of the word of God. This was the secret of his power. It was not a question of man's judgment at all; had it been so, one man, of course, would have had as much right as another. But it was the supreme authority of God's word. This is what I earnestly desire to establish. It is precisely here, I believe, lies the grand deficiency of the day in which our lot is cast. The divine sufficiency and absolute authority of scripture are virtually denied though nominally owned. We have the Bible in our hands; but how little we know of its teaching! And how little are we governed by it! We go on, from week to week, and year to year, with things which have no foundation whatever in its pages -- yea, with things utterly opposed to its teaching; and, all the while, we boast of our having the scriptures, just like the Jews of old, who made their boast of having the oracles of God, while those very oracles condemned themselves and their ways, and left them without a single plea.

But I must pause. I shall, if you do not object, return to Josiah in my next, and point out the glorious result of his faithfulness in acting simply and entirely upon the supreme authority of THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

Ever, my much loved friend,

Your deeply affectionate,

Letter 8

My beloved friend,

The more deeply I ponder the intensely interesting history of Josiah, king of Judah, the more convinced I am that it has a special voice, and a special lesson for the church of God, in this our day. I refer particularly to the beautiful way in which he bowed to the authority of the word of God. I am well assured that Josiah would have had not one atom of sympathy with the spirit and principles so rife at the present moment, or with the teachings of those whose whole aim and object seem to be to rob us of that inestimable treasure which we possess in the holy scriptures. He felt and owned the power of the word of God, its power upon his heart and conscience, its power over his entire course and conduct. He did not, on the one hand, question whether or not God had spoken; nor yet, on the other, whether or not God could make him understand what He said.

Now, these, as you well know, dearest A., are the two great questions of the day. Infidelity, with bold and impious front, stands before us, and raises the question, "Has God spoken? -- Has He given us a revelation of His mind?" Superstition, with an air of piety, -- but it is the piety of profound ignorance, -- admits that God has spoken, but raises the question, "Can we understand what He says? Can we know it to be the word of God, without human authority?"

These questions, though apparently differing so widely in tone, spirit, and character, meet in one point; indeed they are essentially one in their effect as to the word of God, inasmuch as they both alike completely rob the soul of its power and authority.

The infidel denies altogether a divine revelation. He presumes to tell us that God could not give us a full and perfect revelation of His mind such as we have in the holy scriptures. Infidels, it seems, can tell us -- and certainly they do tell us very plainly what is in their minds; but God cannot tell us what is in His. We have no such thing as a book -- revelation of the mind of God. We have plenty of book-revelations of the mind of infidels; but God cannot give us anything of the kind.

Such is the monstrous, bare-faced, audacious ground taken by the infidel, the sceptic, and the rationalist. Excuse my strong language; dearest A., but I

find it impossible to speak in measured terms of what I must call the impudence of infidelity which presumes to tell us that our God cannot speak to us -- cannot communicate to us what is in His heart -- cannot do what any mere earthly father can do with his children, or any earthly master with his servants--cannot express His will.

And why not? we may lawfully ask. Because infidels tell us so. And we are to believe what infidels tell us, though we cannot believe what God says. We are to trust the Lucians, the Paynes, the Voltaires, and the thousands of others of the same miserable school; but we must not, cannot, trust God. And what warrant have we for putting our trust in them? What security do they offer for the truth of their statements? What do we gain by rejecting the word of God, and accepting the speculations of infidelity? Have we a more solid ground to rest upon?

Ah! my friend, the one grand object of infidelity in all its phases, in all its stages, in all its varied shades of thought and argument, is to shut out from the human soul the blessed light of divine revelation. And I think you will agree with your correspondent in saying that, when once that light is shut out, there is no consistent standing ground short of the pantheism which declares that everything is God, or the atheism which declares there is no God at all.

I confess, my beloved friend, I am deeply impressed with the awful solemnity of all this. People are not aware of what is involved in the very first and faintest shade of scepticism. They do not see that to admit into their hearts a doubt as to the divine authenticity of the Bible, is to get upon the edge of an inclined plane which leads directly down to the blackness and darkness of utter atheism. The only real knowledge we can have of God is contained in the scriptures; and hence, if we are deprived of them, we are deprived of God.

The infidel may tell us that God is to be known in creation. Did any one ever find Him out there? No doubt, creation does prove the existence of a Creator, as we read in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans,

The invisible things of him from the creation are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Creation yields a testimony which the heathen were bound to receive, and, had they received it, a higher light would assuredly have shone upon them. But they did not receive it, nay, they actually worshiped the things that were made, instead of the One who made them. Philosophers talk of rising from nature up to nature's God. But nature is a ruin, and man himself a ruin in the midst of ruin; and instead of rising to nature's God, he makes a god of nature, and degrades himself below the level of a beast. See Rom. 1:21-32.

The plain fact is, we cannot do without a divine revelation; and that revelation we possess in the holy scriptures. God has given us a book, -- all praise and thanks to His name! -- which speaks to our hearts with divine power and clearness. There is no mistaking it, it carries its own credentials with it. It judges us thoroughly, unlocks every chamber of the heart, discloses the deepest moral springs of our being, lays bare every motive, every thought, every feeling, every desire and imagination. It is, as the inspired apostle tells us,

Quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

But not only has He given us a book; but He can make us understand what it says. And here, my beloved friend, you and I join issue -- triumphantly and thankfully join issue with the ignorance of superstition. We confront the cool impudence of infidelity, with the calm and firm statement that our God has spoken. We meet the blind ignorance of superstition with the distinct and decided declaration that our God can make us understand what He says.

This, I believe, is the true way to meet both the one and the other of these evil agencies of the devil, in this our day, which, as I have said, do both alike rob the soul of the inestimable boon of holy scripture. It is well that our young people especially should be convinced of the fact that they are as thoroughly deprived of the word of God by superstition as by infidelity. If I must look to man to assure me that scripture is the word of God or to interpret its meaning to my heart, then I maintain that it is not the word of God at all, and my faith does not stand in the power of God, but in the wisdom of man. If God's word needs man's guarantee or interpretation, it comes to be a divine revelation to my soul.

It is not, dearest A., that you or I would undervalue what are called external evidences in proof of the divine authenticity of the Bible; nor yet that we do not prize human ministry in the exposition of scripture. Nothing of the kind. I believe we very highly estimate both the one and the other. But then what I feel is important, just now, is that the word of God should be received in its own divine sufficiency, authority and supremacy. It needs no credentials from man. It is perfect in itself, because it is from God. It could not add a single jot or tittle to the power, value, and authority of holy scripture, to say that all the councils that were ever convened -- all the doctors that ever taught -- all the fathers that ever wrote -- in a word, the voice of the universal church for the last eighteen centuries bore testimony to the authenticity of the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. And, on the other hand, it could not, in the smallest degree, touch the integrity of those peerless writings

though all these authorities that I have named were to call in question their divine inspiration. If the scriptures be not received on their own authority, if they need human testimony to assure us of their divinity, or if they need human aid to enable us to understand them, then they are not the word of God. But, being the word of God, they are divinely perfect, not only for the salvation and guidance of the individual soul, but also for all the exigencies of the church of God during its entire history in this world.

This, my beloved and valued friend, is the solid ground on which we stand -- all praise and thanks to our God forgiving us such a ground! We firmly and reverently believe in the divine authority, the all-sufficiency, and the absolute supremacy of holy scripture. The speculations, the reasonings, the learned arguments and fine-drawn theories of all the infidels, sceptics, and rationalists that ever lived or are now living on this earth have no more weight with us than the pattering of rain upon the window. And why? Because we know we have a divine revelation. How do we know it? Ask a man at the back of a mountain how does he know the sun is shining? Tell him that many very learned men have found out by their learning that there is no sun at all; while others declare that though the sun does shine, he cannot enjoy its beams without their assistance. Can we not well imagine his reply? I believe he would say, "I know nothing and care nothing about learned men, but I know the sun shines, because I have felt the power of his beams."

Now, I am quite sure that learned infidels would sneer at such a mode of settling the question. But I am very much disposed to think it is about the best mode after all. I do not see that much is gained by arguing with infidels. It is all very well to help souls that are afflicted with honest doubts, or troubled by the suggestions of the infidel mind. But to attempt to argue with infidels about the divine inspiration of the Bible is about as hopeless a task as to discuss the differential calculus with an ignorant crossing-sweeper. The power of the word must be felt in the depths of the soul. Where this is the case, no argument is needed. Where it is not, no argument will avail.

Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? {John 4}.

This was sound reasoning. Yes, and it is equally sound for you and me to say,

Come, read a book, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the word of God?

Yes, my beloved friend, I do believe the internal evidences of the word of God are, at once, the most precious and powerful of any that can be produced. If it be true, as one of our own poets has told us, that "God is His own interpreter" in providence, it is none the less, but very much more true that He

is His own interpreter in scripture. If God cannot make me understand what He says, no man can; if He does, no man need. When this solid ground is clearly seen and firmly occupied, we are, through grace, prepared to meet the insolence of infidelity, the ignorance of superstition, and the feebleness of many of our modern apologies for the written word of God. And, in addition to this, we are in a position to estimate at their proper value all the external evidences that can be produced in proof of the divinity of our precious Bible. Such evidences are of the deepest interest. Who, but the most thoughtless, can fail to be arrested by the very history of the book? Take that one fact of its having been, for over a thousand years, in the custody of a corrupt and apostate church that would, most willingly, have crushed it into annihilation. There lay the peerless volume, buried in the dark cloisters of Rome, chained, like a hated prisoner, in the gloomy vaults of her monasteries. Who watched over it there? Who preserved it? Who warded off the destructive hand? Who but the One whose Spirit penned its every line? Who can fail to see the hand of God in the preservation of the book, just as distinctly as we recognize His Spirit in its inspiration?

Assuredly, we can say,

It is not that we value external evidences less, but we value internal evidences more.

A man might be intellectually convinced by the marvelous array of facts in the history of the Bible that it is, in very deed, the word of God, and yet never have felt its living, quickening, saving power in his own soul. Whereas the man who has felt this latter, while he prizes the former, is entirely independent of them.

But there is one other fact, dearest A., to which I must call your attention, ere I close this letter, and that is the marked honor and dignity put upon the holy scriptures by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In His conflict with Satan, in the wilderness, His one reply was, "It is written." In His conflict with wicked and wily men, His one standard of appeal was the holy scriptures. When equipping His servants for their work, He opens their understanding that they might understand the scriptures. And then, just as He is about to ascend into the heavens, He casts them simply upon the same divine and eternal authority, the holy scripture, "It is written."

What an answer is here, both to infidelity and superstition! He gives us the holy scriptures, and He enables us to understand them. What a mercy! What an unspeakable privilege! What a grand reality! We possess, each one for himself, that precious book on which our blessed Lord Himself ever fed, by which He lived, as a man, in this world, by which He shaped His way, by

which He silenced every adversary, which He ever used in His public ministry and in His private life -- the blessed word of God which He Himself has put into our hands, in order that we may find it to be what our adorable Lord and Master ever found it in the whole of His marvelous life and service.

Will my beloved friend think I have wandered far away from my thesis? I trust not. I believe you will feel with me that the line which I have pursued in this letter bears, most pointedly, upon "the present condition of things in the church of God." We may have another glance at Josiah, and, meanwhile, I shall subscribe myself, as ever,

Your deeply affectionate yoke-fellow,

Letter 9

My beloved friend,,

I must ask you still to linger with me for a little over the stirring times of Josiah, king of Judah; but it is only for the purpose of looking particularly at one grand effect of his beautiful subjection to the authority of holy scripture. I allude to the celebration of the passover, that great foundation feast of the Jewish economy. If I mistake not, we shall find in this event not only a most striking illustration of our thesis, but also some most valuable and weighty instruction bearing pointedly on “the present condition of things in the church of God.”

Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover *on the fourteenth day of the first month.*

This was acting according to the very highest principles of the institution. Hezekiah kept the passover in the *second* month, thus availing himself of the provision which grace had made for a defiled condition of things. (See Num. 9:3; cp. with vv. 10, 11.) But Josiah took the very highest ground, as simple faith ever does. God's grace can meet us in the very lowest condition in which we may be found; but He is ever glorified and gratified when faith plants its foot on the loftiest ground, as presented by divine revelation. Nothing so delights the heart of God as the largest appropriation of an artless faith. Blessed for ever be His holy name!

And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord. And said unto the Levites that taught *all Israel*, [not merely Judah] which were holy unto the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the Lord your God, and his people *Israel*. And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to *the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.* And stand in the holy place, according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites. *So* kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to *the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses* (2 Chron. 35:1-6).

Here, then, my dearest A., we have an uncommonly fine illustration of the first part of our thesis, namely, that “whatever may be the condition of the

public body, it is the privilege of the individual believer to occupy the very highest possible ground." We find Josiah, in the above passage, going back to the divine standard in reference to the great central feast of Israel. All must be done "according to the word of the Lord by Moses." Nothing less, nothing lower, than this would do. Unbelief might suggest a thousand difficulties. The heart might send up a thousand reasonings. It might seem presumptuous, in the face of the general condition of things, to think of aiming at such a lofty standard. It might seem utterly vain to think of acting according to the word of the Lord by Moses. But Josiah was enabled to plant his foot on the loftiest ground, and to take the widest possible range. He took his stand on the authority of the word of the Lord by Moses; and, as to his range of vision, he took in nothing less than the whole Israel of God.

And Josiah was right. You and I, my beloved and valued friend, are thoroughly persuaded of this. We feel assured that no other line of action would have been according to the integrity of faith, or to the glory of God. True, alas! Israel's condition had sadly changed, but no change had come over "the word of the Lord by Moses." The truth of God is ever the same, and it is by that truth, and nothing else, that faith will ever shape its way. God had not varied His instructions as to the celebration of the passover. There was not one way for Moses, and another way for Josiah, but God's way for both. Josiah felt this, and he acted accordingly.

And mark the glorious result.

So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the Lord, according to the commandment of king Josiah. And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. *And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept*, and the priests, and the Levites, and *all Judah and Israel* that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept (2 Chron. 35:16-19).

Surely, my dear friend, this is something worth pondering. We have here a striking proof of our statement, that "In darkest days it is the privilege of faith to enjoy as high communion as ever was known in the highest and palmiest moments of the dispensation." Is it not perfectly magnificent to behold in the days of Josiah, when the whole Jewish polity was on the very eve of dissolution, the celebration of a passover exceeding in its blessedness any that had ever been kept from the days of Samuel the prophet? Does it not prove to our poor narrow unbelieving hearts that there is no limit to the grace of God, and no limit to the range of faith?

Assuredly it does. God can never disappoint the expectations of faith. He did not, He would not, He could not tell His servant Josiah that he had made a mistake in taking such high ground, that he had entirely miscalculated, that he ought to have lowered his standard of action to the level of the nation's moral condition. Ah! no, dearest A., this would not have been like our God at all. Such is not His manner, blessed and praised be His glorious name for evermore!

Was it that Josiah did not feel and own the general condition of things, as also his own personal failure? Let his penitential tears and rent garments answer.

As for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard. *Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God*, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord.

Assuredly Josiah felt the ruin, and wept over it. But he could not surrender the truth of God. He could rend his garments, but he could not, and would not, lower God's standard. If all was in ruin around him, that was the very reason why he should keep close, very close, to the word of God. For what else had he to cling to? Where was there a single ray of light, where one atom of authority, where a single hair's-breadth of solid standing ground, save in the imperishable revelation of God? And was not that word for him just as distinctly as it had been for Moses and Joshua, Samuel, and David, and Solomon? Was not he to listen to its voice, and bow down to its holy authority? Were not its priceless lessons as distinctly for him as for all those who had gone before him?

You and I, my friend, have no difficulty as to the true answer to all these inquiries. But how many there are at the present moment who would fain persuade us that the Bible is not a sufficient guide for its at this stage of the world's history. Such changes have taken place, such discoveries have been made in the various fields of scientific investigation, that it is puerile to contend for the all-sufficiency of scripture at this advanced period of the world's history. In fact, they would have us believe that man's mind has got in advance of the mind of God, for this is the real amount of the argument. This is what it means, if it means anything. God has written a book for man's guidance, but that book is now found to be insufficient. A flaw has been discovered in the revelation of God by man's sagacious and powerful intellect!

And what, then, are we to do? Whither are we to turn? Can it be possible

that God has left His people to drift about in a wild, watery waste, without compass, rudder, or chart? Has our Lord Christ left His church or His servants without any competent authority or in fallible guidance? Ah! no, blessed be His peerless name! He has given us His own perfect revelation His own most precious word, which contains within its covers all we can possibly want to know, not only for our individual salvation and guidance, but also for all the most minute details of His church's history, from the moment in which it was set up upon this earth until that longed-for moment in which He will take it to heaven.

But I must not pursue this line any further just now, deeply as I feel its immense importance. I have referred to it in a former letter, and I shall now for a moment seek to point out what I consider to be a grand lesson for this our day -- a lesson strikingly taught in Josiah's passover.

We invariably find that the heart of every pious Jew -- every one who bowed to the authority of the law of God -- turned with a deep, fond, and intense interest to that grand central and foundation feast of the passover, in which, amongst other things, the great truths of redemption and the unity of Israel were strikingly shadowed forth. Every true Israelite, every one who loved God and loved His word, found delight in the celebration of that most precious institution. It was the impressive memorial of Israel's redemption -- the significant expression of Israel's unity. Its strict observance, according to all its divinely appointed rites and ordinances, was an obligation binding upon the whole congregation of Israel. The wilful neglecter of it was to be cut off from the congregation. It was neither to be neglected on the one hand, nor tampered with on the other. We could not conceive a faithful Israelite altering a single jot or tittle of the prescribed order of the feast. Neither, as to the time nor the mode of its celebration, was there the slightest margin left for the insertion of human thoughts on the subject. The word of the Lord settled everything. The idea of any one undertaking to alter the time or the manner of keeping the all-important feast would never, we may safely assert, enter the mind of any pious, God-fearing, member of the congregation. If we could conceive any one having the boldness to say that it was quite the same whether the passover was celebrated once a year, or once in three years; and, further, that it was quite the same whether the paschal lamb was sodden or roast, whether there was unleavened bread or not; in short, that, provided people were sincere, it did not matter how the thing was done. How would such an one have been dealt with? Num. 9 supplies the answer -- a brief, but solemn, answer! "He shall be cut off."

Now, my beloved and valued friend, I take it for granted that you agree

with your correspondent in thinking that what the feast of the passover was to a faithful Israelite, that the feast of the Lord's supper is to a true Christian. That was the type, this the memorial, of the death of Christ. This, I presume, will not be called in question by any devout student of scripture.

I am not now going to occupy your time with an elaborate exposition of the principles of the Lord's supper. I merely call your attention to the weighty facts in connection with it, namely, that in no other way than by eating the Lord's supper do we set forth the great truth of the unity of the body -- in no other way do we set forth the death of our Lord. We may speak of these things, hear of them, write about them, read about them, sing about them, profess to hold them as true; but only by eating the Lord's supper according to the word of God do we give expression to them.

As to the first of these most weighty facts, 1 Cor. 10 is conclusive.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one loaf, one body: *for we are all partakers of that one loaf.*

This is most instructive. It teaches us with all possible distinctness that the Lord's supper is pre-eminently a communion feast. It cuts up by the roots the notion of any one receiving the Lord's supper as a mere individual. Not only is there no meaning, and no value, in such a thing, but it is positively false and mischievous, because antagonistic to holy scripture.

The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

To make it an individual thing -- to set aside the thought of the body -- is to mar the integrity of the divine institution, and break the bones of the paschal lamb. It is absolutely essential to the true celebration of the Lord's supper that the unity of the body should be set forth in the one loaf, of which we all partake. If this be set aside or tampered with, we do not keep the feast according to the mind of Christ. The one loaf on the table of our Lord sets forth the one body, and we, by partaking of that one loaf, give expression to our holy fellowship in the unity of that body.

Now, my beloved friend, it seems to me that this is a deeply important aspect of the Lord's table, and one not sufficiently understood or carried out in the professing church. I speak not now of the gross error involved in speaking of the Lord's supper as a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead, or as a sacrament or a covenant between the soul and God. All this would be unhesitatingly rejected by the great majority of true Christians.

But does it not strike you that we are all lamentably deficient in apprehending and expressing the precious truth of the unity of the body in the

celebration of the Lord's supper? Is there not a strong tendency in our minds to make that precious feast merely an individual thing between our own souls and the Lord? We think of our own blessing, our own comfort, our own refreshment; or, it may be that many go to the table as a means whereby they may be brought somewhat nearer to Christ, thus placing it on an utterly false basis, and surrounding it with a legal atmosphere.

All this demands our most serious consideration. It behoves all Christians to look well to their foundations as to this matter. We want to come with all humility of mind and teachableness of spirit to the word of God, and bend our attention to its teaching, in this important question. If it be true that partaking of the Lord's supper in the Lord's appointed way is the only act in which we express the unity of the body, should we not examine whether we are, in this matter, acting according to the mind of Christ? Is it not a very serious thing for Christians to neglect the Lord's table? Must it not grieve the heart of Christ to find any of His beloved members satisfied to go on from week to week, and month to month, without ever keeping the feast? Is it possible that a Christian can be in a right state of soul who habitually absents himself from that feast which alone sets forth a truth so precious to Christ, namely, the unity of His body? or can any true lover of the Lord Jesus be satisfied to go on for weeks and months without ever partaking of that which alone calls his crucified Lord to remembrance? The New Testament teaches us that

on the first day of the week {Acts 20:7}

the Lord's people came together to break bread. "The Lord's supper" and "the Lord's day" are blessedly linked together by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Have we, then, any authority to tamper with this divine order? Are we authorized to alter the time or the mode of keeping the feast? Have we any right to make it once a month, or once a quarter, or once in six months?

These are plain questions for the heart and conscience of every Christian. I shall leave them to act, and here close this rather long epistle by subscribing myself, as ever,

Dearest A.,

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow,

My beloved friend,

It seems a long time since I last addressed you. It has been a very remarkable time to me, as you may judge, when I tell you that for eight weeks I was wholly unable to take a pen or a book in my hand. But, through infinite mercy, though I could not write or read, I could think; and amongst various subjects, one especially has engaged my attention, namely the question of the Lord's supper, viewed as the index of the state of the church -- the state of the hearts of professing Christians with reference to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

This has interested me a good deal. I referred to it briefly at the close of my last letter, but, if you will allow me, I shall go a little more fully into it.

I think you will admit that we are perfectly warranted in viewing the history of the Lord's supper as a very remarkable moral indicator of the true practical condition of the church -- of the real state of the hearts of Christians toward our Lord Christ. We should, I think, be justified in concluding that, had the church remained true in heart to Christ, the Lord's supper that inexpressibly precious memorial of Himself, in His death -- would always have maintained its own divinely-appointed place, exhibited its own divinely appointed elements, and set forth its own grand and important truths. Instituted, as it was, by our blessed Lord, "the same night in which he was betrayed" Appointed by Him expressly to be the affecting memorial of Himself in His death -- to call Him to mind, in that marvelous scene in which He gave up His life for us, we might surely expect that all who really loved Him, all who had been taught to prize His death as the only, the necessary, and the everlasting foundation of all their blessedness -- all who truly loved and revered His precious commandments -- would be most jealous in their affectionate maintenance of all the features, facts, and elements of the Lord's supper. He Himself has said,

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

And again,

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.

Now, we know that just on the eve of His departure out of this world, when the dark shadows of Gethsemane, and the yet deeper and darker shadows of Calvary, were falling upon His spirit, He expressly appointed the supper as a pledge of His love for His own, and as a memorial of Himself to be observed by His disciples during His absence.

I think you will not object to my bringing under your notice the entire body of scripture evidence on this most interesting question. It is only by

having that distinctly before our minds, and in our hearts, that we shall be able to see how soon, how sadly, and how completely, the church departed from the truth as to the supper of the Lord; and, furthermore, how forcibly that departure proves the deplorable state of the church's heart as to Christ. If His own institution has been neglected, it is but the expression of the terrible neglect with which He Himself has been treated. If His supper has been marred, mutilated, and flung aside, it only indicates the moral distance to which the church has traveled from Him. His commandment, in this most weighty matter, has not been, is not, kept; and what does this prove but that He is not loved? We may talk of loving Him, but if we do not keep His commandments, the talking is a lie and a sham -- a heartless, shameless mockery.

But I turn to the testimony of holy scripture. In Matt. 26 we read,

As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (vv. 26-28).

In Mark 14 we read,

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them; and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many (vv. 22-24).

The record in Luke is deeply affecting -- so tender, so touchingly personal.

And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave unto them, saying, This is *my body* which is *given for you*: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in *my blood*, which is shed *for you* (Luke 22:14-20).

Now, it may be said that in all the above passages we have no warrant for extending the holy obligation and privilege of the Lord's supper beyond those persons who sat around our blessed Lord on that last solemn occasion. There is not, it may be objected, a single clause admitting others to partake of the precious benefit. Hence, therefore, had we no further instruction than what is

furnished by the three synoptical gospels, the celebration of the Lord's supper would not be binding on believers now; or rather -- for I intensely dislike the word "*binding*," when applied to so delightful and precious a privilege -- believers now might deem themselves shut out from what every spiritual mind must regard as the most blessed institution in which the Christian can take part.

Furthermore, it may be said -- has been said by a large class of professing Christians -- that it is a descent from that higher spirituality to which we are called, and a return to "weak and beggarly elements," to insist upon the ordinance of the Lord's supper. Hence, as you are aware, the institution is wholly set aside by that body to whom I refer.

Happily for us, my beloved friend, both these objections, if they possessed any weight -- which I am sure, to you and me, they do not -- no, not the weight of a feather -- are completely swept away as we pursue the further history of the Lord's supper, as unfolded in the Acts and the epistles.

It is interesting to notice that, as in the gospels, we have the supper *instituted*; so in the Acts we have it *celebrated*; and in the epistles we have it *expounded*. And we may assert, with all possible confidence, that the celebration and the exposition do most completely demolish the objection founded on the institution; and not only so, but they wither up the absurdity of classing the precious supper of our Lord under the head of "beggarly elements," and prove the fatal error of setting it aside altogether.

For, let me ask, what do we find in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles? Was there any difficulty felt by the many thousands of believers in the city of Jerusalem as to their sweet privilege of sitting down at the table of their Lord? Or, further, let me ask, did the twelve apostles and those happy thousands, filled, taught, and animated by the Holy Ghost, just come down from the risen and glorified Head in the heavens, consider it a descent from a higher spirituality, or a return to "weak and beggarly elements," to remember their beloved Lord in the breaking of bread, according to His own most gracious appointment? Let us read the answer, in the glowing words of the inspired historian:

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in *breaking of bread*, and in prayers . . . And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house (κατ' οἶκον), did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people (Acts 2:41-47).

Now, we do not gather from this passage that the breaking of bread was confined exclusively to the Lord's day, or first day of the week; but we see very distinctly that these early Christians, in the bloom and freshness of their first love, were in the constant habit of breaking bread, in affectionate remembrance of their Lord. They were so filled with the Holy Ghost, that Christ was ever before their hearts, and they delighted to celebrate that precious feast which was, according to His own express word, the affecting memorial of Himself in His death. If any one had spoken to them about its being a descent from a higher spirituality, or a return to carnal ordinances, thus to break bread in loving memory of their Lord; or if any one had suggested the idea of having the Lord's supper once a month, once a quarter, once in six months, or of setting it aside altogether as a beggarly element -- we should be marvelously delighted to hear what kind of a reply would emanate from eight thousand loving hearts filled with the Holy Ghost, filled with ardent love to the precious Savior, who, though He had passed through the heavens, and taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty, in the highest, had nevertheless left it as His last request that His people should remember Him in that special act of breaking bread. I think we can have little difficulty in conceiving what that reply would be. We may rest assured those early Christians, with the twelve apostles at their head, would have scouted all such notions with a holy indignation commensurate with their deep personal affection for their Lord.

But let us pass on.

In Acts 20 we find the Apostle Paul and his company at Troas, where he tarried seven days, possibly in order to spend the first day of the week with the brethren there, in order that they might break bread together. If this were so, it would lead us to the conclusion that the first day of the week, or Lord's day, was pre-eminently the day set apart for the celebration of the Lord's supper. One thing is evident, even from this scripture, that the apostles and the early disciples were in the habit of coming together on the first day of the week for the express purpose of breaking bread, not for preaching, though Paul did preach, but specially to remember the Lord in His own appointed way.

And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days, where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when we [thus the four editors render it] came together to break bread, &c.

Now, here we find the Apostle Paul proving by his presence at the Lord's supper his appreciation of the holy privilege, and that he at least did not consider it a descent from a higher spirituality, or a return to weak and beggarly elements, to partake of that precious feast. In a word, we learn from

our two quotations from the Acts, that, in the days of the church's first love, when all was in lovely freshness and bloom, in thee full power of the Holy Ghost, in the plenitude of apostolic gift and grace, the whole church, together with the twelve apostles, and the Apostle Paul himself -- the greatest teacher the church has ever had -- the special minister of the truth of the church -- were in the habit of coming together on the first day of the week, the Lord's day, the resurrection day, to break bread.

And, my beloved friend, ere I go further, I would ask you if you do not consider this a fact well worthy of the earnest attention of Christians in this our day? I may be somewhat premature in putting this practical question just now, inasmuch as my object is to unfold, first of all, the truth of scripture on the subject of the Lord's supper, and then to bring that truth to bear upon the present condition of things in the church of God.

But then you will allow me just to press this question. Is it not more than interesting -- is it not practically important to notice the fact of the frequent celebration of the Lord's supper by the apostles and the early church? Always on the first day of the week, often more frequently at the first; no such thing as a monthly, quarterly, or half-yearly celebration of the feast; no hint at such a thing. Indeed, I feel persuaded in my own mind -- though I would not dogmatize upon it -- that no such thing would be thought of, understood, or tolerated by those beloved early Christians. They loved their Lord too well to admit of their neglecting that most precious and affecting memorial of His love, which He had appointed on the very night in which He was betrayed. And if any one had hinted at such a thing as setting it aside altogether as a mere carnal ordinance, unsuited to that higher range of spiritual life to which we are called, we can hardly conceive in what terms they would couch their reply.

Ah! no, my friend, we cannot but see that, just in proportion as people loved Christ, loved His word, were filled with the Holy Ghost, did they delight to flock to His table, to remember Him, and show forth, in happy and holy communion, His death until He come. And if this be so -- and who will deny it? are we not justified in concluding that when professing Christians can go on for weeks and months, and some altogether without ever keeping the blessed feast, their hearts must be cold as to Christ? If I love a friend, a dear absent friend, I shall delight to gaze upon any special memorial which he may have left me. Now, our loving Lord, in appointing the bread and the cup to set forth His body and blood, *separated the one from the other*, that is His death, as an accomplished fact, made use of these most touching words, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" Would not, then, every true lover of Christ delight thus to remember Him? Could such an one be satisfied to go on for weeks or

months without ever calling Him to mind in this special way?

And be it carefully noted, that it is only by partaking of the Lord's supper that we so remember Christ -- that we show His death -- that we give expression to the great truth of the unity of the body. I question if this is fully seen by Christians generally. It is to be feared that the Lord's table has lost its true place, lost its true import, lost its solemn interest in the hearts of Christians. The Lord's table has, in many cases, been flung into the shade of the pulpit -- the supper has been displaced by the sermon. And when we come to view all this as the index of the state of our hearts toward Christ, it is calculated to awaken the most solemn reflections. I speak not of it now as a departure from the authority of scripture -- which it most surely is -- but as the sad and painful evidence of the gross neglect with which our beloved Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is treated by those who profess His name.

If God permit, I shall pursue this subject in my next. Meanwhile allow me to

Subscribe myself, as ever,

Your deeply affectionate yokefellow,

Letter 11

My beloved friend,

When we come to the exposition of the Lord's Supper as given in the first epistle to the Corinthians, we find much additional light poured upon it by the inspired apostle. Had we merely the record of the institution, as given in the Gospels, or of the celebration, as given in the Acts, we should have a very imperfect apprehension of its deep and wondrous significance.

True it is -- and this is most precious to the heart -- if we had only the gospel narratives, we should have what is of infinite value to every true lover of Christ. In those priceless records, we have Himself and His precious sacrifice set before our hearts, in the most vivid and touching manner. We hear our adorable Lord and Savior saying to us, as He hands us the bread,

Take, eat; this is *my body* which is given *for you*.

And again, as He hands us the cup,

This cup is the new testament in *my blood*, which is shed *for you*.

And, further, we have those most affecting, soul-stirring words,

This do in remembrance *of me*.

All this is of the deepest possible interest to the true Christian. A person may be ignorant of the truth communicated by the risen and glorified Christ to His servant Paul, and unfolded by the latter, in the power of the Holy Ghost, for the guidance of the church in all ages; but, notwithstanding this, he can taste the divine sweetness of that feast which brings his Lord before him, in all the depth, tenderness, and reality of His love -- a love which was stronger than death, which many waters could not quench -- a love which led Him down to the dust of death for us. Blessed be God, it is not a question of intelligence but of true affection for the Person of Christ. And I doubt not that thousands of precious souls, throughout Christendom, receive the Lord's Supper in connection with a vast amount of error and darkness; but they are not occupied with the error; it may be they have never thought of it -- never searched the scriptures in reference to the subject at all. They have just the one thought before their minds; they remember their Lord, and feed upon the precious mystery of His death.

I confess, dear friend, it is an immense relief to the heart to think of such, when one looks forth upon the present dark and confused state of the professing church. The Lord has His hidden loved ones everywhere; and wherever there is

a heart that beats true to Christ, that heart will enjoy the Lord's Supper, ⁷ even though surrounded by a quantity of things which have no foundation whatever in holy scripture.

But then, while we fully admit all this -- and you and I joyfully admit and would ever remember it -- we should nevertheless, earnestly and lovingly seek to instruct the beloved lambs and sheep of our Lord's flock, and to lead them into the knowledge of their true place and portion in Christ. And it seems to me, dearest A., that the laxity, the error, the confusion, the darkness, and indifference so painfully manifest, on all sides, in reference to the Lord's Supper, affords a sad but most powerful demonstration of the way in which both the Person and word of Christ are flung aside; for I cannot but believe that, were His blessed Person more the object before the hearts of His people, and if His word had its proper authority over their consciences, His table would have its right place in their thoughts and in their practice.

However, I must ask you to turn with me to the first epistle to the Corinthians, in which we have the exposition of the table and the supper of our Lord. You have, doubtless, remarked, in your study of ch. 10, that the cup is noticed before the bread. This may be owing to the moral condition of the assembly at Corinth which was such that the apostle felt it needful to depart from the usual order of the feast, in order to bring into special prominence before the heart that cup which sets forth the precious blood of Christ -- the divine and everlasting basis of our peace and blessing -- the most powerful moral lever which could possibly be brought to bear upon the spiritual condition of the church. The Corinthians needed a word of warning to "flee from idolatry"; and how could such a word be more powerfully enforced than by bringing before their hearts the mighty moral mystery of the blood-shedding of Christ by which alone they were brought, as purged worshipers, into the presence of the one living and true God. We can see, at a glance, that the fact of presenting the cup out of its usual order gives it a special emphasis; and the reason for such emphasis is found in the spiritual state of the people addressed.

I shall now quote the passage at length.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The loaf [$\alpha\rho\tau\omicron\varsigma$] which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? Because we the many are one loaf, one body, for we all partake of that one loaf.

7. {This is not strictly accurate, as 1 Cor. 10:18 shows. Partaking of the loaf on the Lord's table ("the Lord's table" is a figure of speech concerning a spiritual thing -- not a literal table) puts one in communion with the Lord's table, as Israelites, eating of the peace-offering offered on the altar, were in communion with the altar. C. J. Davis, and others, have pointed out that Christians set up their own tables and suppers, though calling these the Lord's table and the Lord's supper.}

This, my much-loved friend, you will feel to be a most powerful passage. It gives, as you will perceive, peculiar prominence to the truth of the one body. I, of course, take it for granted that you agree with your correspondent in judging that the word "body" in ch. 10 refers to Christ's body the church; as the word "body" in ch. 11 refers to the body of our Lord -- His own literal body given for us, and bruised on the cursed tree as an offering and an atonement for our souls. The "one loaf," laid on the *table*, symbolizes the unity of the church. The "loaf" broken and eaten in the *Supper*, symbolizes the body of our Lord in the which He bare our sins (not *up to*, but) *on* the cross.

Now, some may feel led to ask, "How is it that we have nothing in the Gospels, or in the Acts, in reference to this truth of the one body?" Simply because the time had not come and things were not ripe for the unfolding of this great mystery. In what have been called the three synoptical Gospels, as well as in the Acts, the testimony to Israel is maintained. God is seen lingering, in long-suffering mercy, over the blinded nation, if haply they would repent and turn to Him. In the Gospels we have the testimony of the Baptist and of our Lord Himself -- righteousness and grace. In the Acts, we have the testimony of the Holy Ghost; and then the special mission of the apostle Paul which closes, as to Israel, in the very last chapter, where he shuts the nation up under the judicial sentence uttered, centuries before by the prophet Isaiah.

Thus, we have a marvelous chain of testimony to Israel -- John the Baptist -- the Messiah -- the Holy Ghost -- the twelve apostles -- the apostle Paul -- all rejected, and the nation, as a consequence, given up, *for the present* -- let it not be forgotten, only for a season, only in part -- to judicial blindness {Rom. 11}.

All this, my beloved friend, is perfectly familiar to you. We have often gone over the ground together. But I refer to it now simply to show that, pending the testimony to the nation of Israel, it was not possible that the truth about the one body could be unfolded. But in the ministry of the apostle Paul, we have not only a testimony to Israel, but also the unfolding of the glorious mystery of the church, composed of Jew and Gentile, baptized by one Spirit into one body, associated with the glorified Head at the right hand of God. This is the mystery which was "*hid in God*, from the beginning of the world" -- "not made known, in other ages, to the sons of men" -- "kept secret since the world began."

There was absolutely nothing known of the truth of the church until it was revealed to the apostle Paul, and by him unfolded in his epistles. It can be of no possible use for any one to deny this, or to maintain that the truth of the one body was always known to the people of God; and that the saints of Old Testament times and those of the New are all on one common ground. The word of God is against them. The passages I have just quoted from Rom. 16 and Eph. 3 prove, beyond all question, that the truth of the one body, composed of Jew and Gentile, was "*hid in God*" -- not hid in Old Testament scriptures; but hid in God, for most

assuredly, whatever is contained in the scriptures is no longer hidden but revealed.

But I shall not pursue this line any further, as it would draw me away from my more immediate object, just now. I merely add that, as regards the strong opposition shown, in certain quarters, to the special place and portion of the church of God -- the body of Christ, I have found it to be, in very many cases, the sad result of worldliness, prejudice, false theology, and lack of child-like subjection to the authority of holy scripture. Any one, who simply bows to the word of God, must see that the grand doctrine of the church -- its special place, portion, and prospect -- was never made known to any mortal until the days of the apostle Paul. And it seems to me, dearest A., to be time and labor lost to argue on the subject with any one who does not submit his whole moral being to the divine authority of scripture. A man who will not yield to the plain statements of the word of God, is not likely to be convinced by the arguments of a man.

However, thanks and praise to our most gracious Lord, we now know and believe the precious truth of the one body; and, according to the teaching of 1 Cor. 10, we can never sit down to the table of our Lord without thinking of every member of that body. We cannot gaze on the "one loaf" without having our hearts directed to the blessed Head above and to each and all the beloved members on earth.

I repeat the words, "*on earth*," and would invite your special attention to them. Not that I imagine, for a moment, that you have any difficulty or question in reference to them; but one finds a good deal of confusion in the minds of Christians as to whether the body is only presented on earth, or partly on earth, and partly in heaven. Scripture plainly teaches that the place of the body is on earth, for there the Holy Ghost is, there the gifts are. From the day of Pentecost until the moment of the rapture, the place of the body is on the earth.⁸ Those that have fallen asleep do not, for the present, count of the body. Some are passing away, and others are being incorporated; but the body is on the earth. Just like a regiment of soldiers; for instance, I knew the 17th Lancers, 40 years ago, and I know it still; but there may not be a single man in the regiment now that was in it 40 years ago; still the regiment exists, has the same colors, the same discipline, is subject to the same code of rules, the same military regulations, it is, in short, the self-same regiment though its component parts have changed many times.

I was much struck lately with that expression, in 1 Cor. 12:27:

Now ye are the body of Christ.⁹

An objector might say, "What! can a single assembly of believers be said to be

8. {Among other passages, Eph. 4:16 proves the writer's point.}

9. {"Now ye are Christ's body" (J.N. Darby translation) better expresses the matter. The Corinthians had body-character; but each assembly is not a body of Christ.}

'the body?' Are there not saints in Philippi, Colosse, Ephesus, and Thessalonica? How, then, can the Christians at Corinth be designated by such a title?"

The answer is blessedly simple. Each assembly, wherever convened, is the local expression of the whole body; and hence what is true of the whole is true of each local expression. There is no such thing as independency {of assemblies} in the New Testament -- no such thing as being a member of a church -- no such thing as joining a congregation. As a poor christian gipsy once said to some friends of his who said they wished "to join the Brethren." "Ah!" said he, "*what need ye's be talkin' of joinin? Sure, if ye's be converted, all the joinin' is done!*"

How blessedly true! and yet how little understood! At the time of our conversion, God joined us, by His Spirit, to the one body, and any other joining after that, is clearly a step in the wrong direction, which must be retraced, if we would "keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace."

What then is a person to do, when converted? Look about for some scriptural body, church or congregation to join? Nothing of the kind. There really is no such thing within the covers of the Bible. For men to set about forming churches is as unscriptural an assumption as though they were to set about framing a new plan of salvation, or making out a new kind of righteousness. And if it be wrong for men to form churches, it must be wrong for any to join such. In fact, to form the church is God's work and His only. And as none but God can form the church, so none but He can join any one thereto.

But again I say, "What is the young convert to do?" Wait on God in humility of mind for guidance. Prayerfully search the scriptures, and ask the Lord to lead him to His own table where he can remember Him, according to His own appointment, showing forth His death, and giving practical expression to the truth of the one body. In this way he is sure to be guided aright. "The meek will he teach his way." And again, "With the lowly is wisdom." But if I am full of myself -- full of my own notions -- full of prejudice and religious pride -- unbroken, unsubdued, unteachable, I shall assuredly be left to follow my own devices. It needs a broken will, a teachable spirit, an eye anointed with heavenly eyesalve to discern, in a day of confusion like the present, the table of the Lord. If I am occupied with myself, or looking at people, comparing Christians here with Christians there, I shall, most surely, be perplexed and bewildered -- an unhappy stranger to peace and progress. But, on the other hand, if, in singleness of eye, I look to God for guidance, He will guide me as surely as He has saved me. He will cause me to find my place in His assembly and at His table. He will give me such light and authority from His own word, that I shall have no more doubt as to my being in my right place than I have as to my eternal salvation.

It is impossible, my much loved brother, to shut our eyes to the peculiar difficulties of the day in which we live. I often feel deeply for young converts, and for all who really desire to know the way of truth, but are sadly perplexed by

conflicting opinions, and opposing sects and parties. But I am increasingly persuaded of this fact, that if a soul will only wait on the Lord, in self-distrust, and ask Him to point out the way -- His own blessed way, He will assuredly do so, according to His own sweet promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye." It is not cleverness, or long-headedness, or intellectual power, or logical skill that will avail in the search after truth. Nay, all these things, if not brought under the sentence of death, will prove so many barriers or stumbling-blocks in our way. "*A little child*" is the model on which we must be formed for entrance into the kingdom; and we may depend upon it, that, unless we cultivate the spirit of a little child, we shall never be able to thread our way through the intricate labyrinth of Christendom.

Blessed be God, "*There is a way* which the vultures' eye hath not seen, nor the lion's whelp trodden," and in that way it is our happy privilege to be found. It may, if viewed from nature's stand-point, seem rough, narrow, lonely; but oh! dearest A., as you know, it is a way on which the light of our Father's approving countenance ever shines, and in which the companionship of our Lord Christ is ever enjoyed. "And is not this enough?" I know your answer. But I must close.

Ever, most affectionately yours,

Letter 12

My beloved friend,

I must still invite you to linger with me over the, intensely interesting subject of the Lord's supper, though it may seem to be a digression -- and a lengthened one too -- from the main line of things proposed in this series of letters. But in reality it is not a digression, inasmuch as it would hardly be possible to write on "the present condition of things in the church of God" without touching upon the important subject of the table and supper of the Lord.

Since penning my last letter to you, I have been dwelling with very much interest on that part of 1 Cor. 11 which bears upon the question of the Lord's supper. It seems to me a very striking and affecting proof of the value and importance attaching, to this most precious institution, to find that our Lord Jesus Christ not only instructed the twelve apostles in reference to it, but actually appeared to His servant Paul, in heavenly glory, and gave him a special revelation designed for the church in all ages. This weighty fact furnishes an unanswerable argument against the notion that the Lord's supper partakes of an earthly, or Jewish, character, or that it involves in any way a descent from that higher spirituality to which we as Christians are called. And not only so, but it also speaks in accents of power to all those who, wilfully or indolently, absent themselves from the supper of their Lord.

I say "*wilfully or indolently* absent themselves," for, alas! we find the two things operating in the church of God. Some there are who can readily attend a preaching, a lecture, or a soirée, but who rarely present themselves at the table. Others, again, are so indolent as to spiritual things, as not to care much about any meeting.

1 Cor. 11 meets both the one and the other. Let us bend our ears and our hearts to its weighty instruction.

Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together, in assembly [ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ -- thus the four editors read it,]¹⁰ I hear that

10. I consider this a very important reading, and vastly, superior to our Authorized Version.
(continued...)

there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together, therefore, into one place, it is not to eat the *Lord's* supper. For in eating every one taketh before *his own* supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.” ¹¹

How very marked the distinction between “the Lord’s supper” and “his own supper!” Does it not strike you, dear friend, that in the former we have the grand idea of the whole body; while in the latter we have a miserable selfish individuality? We cannot partake with spiritual intelligence of “the Lord’s supper,” without having before our hearts the blessed truth of the whole body and every precious member thereof. We cannot, if partaking in communion with the heart and mind of Christ, forget a single one of those so dear to Him, and so intimately associated with Him. In short, when we eat “the Lord’s supper,” we think of Christ and His beloved members. When we eat “our own supper,” we are occupied with self and its interests. Miserable occupation! Well might the inspired apostle exclaim,

What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye *the assembly of God*, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

Has all this no voice for us? Do we thoroughly apprehend the real secret of the apostle’s appeal? Are we to pass over this passage of scripture as a reproof administered to a disorderly company of people recently converted from the gross abominations of heathen idolatry, and not yet instructed in the common refinements of Christianity? I cannot think so. I believe there is a holy lesson in this entire scripture for the professing church of this our day.

10. (...continued)

“When ye come together *in the church*” gives the idea of assembling in some building or other to which people attach the name of a church. This is utterly false. There is no such thing in scripture as a building being called a church. The true reading of 1 Cor. 11:18 is evidently as given above, “When ye come together in assembly.” The article is omitted by all the four editors.

11. I feel most fully assured, my beloved and valued friend, that you have no sympathy whatever with the question so much agitated just now in certain quarters, as to whether the wine on the Lord’s table should be fermented or unfermented. I cannot conceive anything poorer or more pitiable than to raise such a silly question in connection with an ordinance of such deep solemnity, importance, and significance -- an ordinance designed to bring before our souls the death of Christ, and the unity of His body, the church -- to recall Him to our hearts in the deep mystery of His cross and passion. What would the apostle say to a person carrying with him to the assembly a special kind of wine for himself? Would not this look very much like “eating his own supper?” And does not this question savor more of self and its crotchets than of Christ and His cross? I do not here attempt to give a judgment as to the question, though I have a very decided one. It is the raising of such a question, in connection with such a subject, that I consider so deplorable. May the Lord deliver His people from all questions and strifes of words!

True, we do not see such a thing as drunkenness at what is called the Lord's supper, but is there not a "despising of the assembly of God?" Are there not heresies and schisms in our midst? And where are these so flagrantly and painfully apparent as in immediate connection with the table and supper of the Lord? If we are to be taught exclusively by holy scripture, we cannot fail to see that the table of the Lord, with its one loaf, sets before us the great truth of the "one body" -- a truth so deeply precious to the heart of Christ. Where is this maintained in Christendom? Where is it thought of? Where is there anything approaching to an expression of it in the celebration of the Lord's supper?

Let us not, my beloved friend, be afraid to look this weighty question straight in the face. Blessed be God, you and your correspondent have no object of our own to seek after. We have no personal interests to serve, no party cause to further. We have both, for many long years, been outside the camp, in that large and wealthy place from whence we can look around us at all that is going on, and test everything by the unerring word of God. We are outside of all the religious organizations of the day; but for that very reason, we are in a position to embrace, as in the very affections of the heart of Christ, all the members of His blessed body, wherever we may find them.

And may I not add, that just in proportion as we recognize that body, and seek to embrace those members, shall we become painfully conscious of the mode in which both the one and the other are lost sight of in the celebration of what is called the Lord's supper. In fact, the assembly of God is despised, and each one eats his own supper. The communion of the one body is ignored, and the precious feast which is intended to set forth that communion is looked upon as a means of grace to the individual communicant.

Nor is this all. I have further to ask you, how is it that Christians of various denominations can meet together during the week for the purpose of carrying out some great scheme of religion or philanthropy; but when the Lord's day comes you will find them within their various denominational enclosures, either without the Lord's supper for weeks together, or, if they have it at all, they do not partake of it on the ground of the one body, but as members of a mere human organization -- call it what you please. Why do not Christians all meet on the first day of the week to break bread? How is it that millions of professing Christians only have the communion once a month, and many more only once in six months? How is it that many set it aside altogether? How comes it to pass that in one vast section of the professing church the Lord's supper is called "a sacrifice"; in another "a sacrament," and in another "a covenant?" Suppose the Apostle Paul to arrive in London next week, where could he go to break bread? Where could He find the table and

supper of His Lord? Where could he celebrate the precious feast according to the order which he had received from our Lord Christ, and imparted to the church? He might go to one place, and see a man, calling himself a priest, arrayed in vestments, and offering up what he calls “an unbloody sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead.” He might go to another place, and find a man, more simply arrayed, no doubt, but a man in the capacity of a priest, giving the sacrament to a number of people, without any question as to whether they are converted or not. He might go to other places, and find no table or supper at all; and if he were to inquire what brought them together, he would be told that they assembled, not to break bread, but to hear a sermon.

What would the blessed apostle do? What would he say? Could he sanction such a state of things? Could he countenance such a palpable and gross departure from the teaching of his Lord -- such an ignoring of the “one body” -- such neglect of the Head?

You know, my dearest A., that I do not write thus to wound the feelings of the very feeblest lamb in all the flock of Christ. As God is my witness, I would lay down my pen for ever rather than do so. But I must deal with the facts -- the plain, palpable, facts actually displayed in the present condition of the professing church of God. I cannot see any object in writing at all, if I am to cushion the plain truth; and if the statement of truth wounds any one, I cannot help that. I would ask the thoughtful reader to look around him, and see where is the Lord’s supper celebrated according to the teaching of holy scripture. Where will he find the Lord’s people gathered in assembly on the Lord’s day, the first day of the week, to break bread, as set forth in the New Testament? I would ask such an one if he himself is in the habit of meeting for this grand object. There is nothing in the entire range of the church’s history of higher importance, nothing of deeper interest to the heart of Christ, nothing more precious, nothing more solemn and significant, nothing more binding upon the hearts and consciences of all Christians, than the Lord’s supper. If this be so -- and who can deny it? -- does it not become us all to look well to it that we are not sanctioning in any way the neglect of the Lord’s supper, or any infringement whatever of the divine principle set forth in its celebration according to scripture. I maintain that every true lover of Christ is bound to protest solemnly against any departure from the due order of this most precious institution. Can we suppose for a moment that the blessed Apostle Paul would be found in any place where the supper was set aside, or interfered with in the smallest degree? Would he be satisfied to go on for several Lord’s days without the feast at all, or to see it, where professedly celebrated, marred, mutilated, or tampered with, in any way? I do not, and cannot,

believe it. I cannot conceive the writer of 1 Cor. 10 and 11 giving the sanction of his presence to aught but God's due order in this matter.

Will anyone say, -- It makes no matter how we celebrate the Lord's supper, provided we have it at all, and are sincere in our observance of it." I ask, are the *Lord's table* and the *Lord's supper* to be observed according to the Lord's word, or according to our own notions? Is it true that the Lord's supper, as presented in His word, is designed to set forth the unity of His body, to show out His death, and to recall Him to remembrance in the way of His own special appointment? Nay, more, is it true that the Lord's supper is the *only* way in which the church can truly give expression to these grand realities? I confess I do not see how this can be called in question. Well, then, can we with impunity neglect or tamper with the holy institution? Why, my beloved friend, when it was merely a question of a woman having her head covered or uncovered, the inspired apostle is so peremptory on the point, that he closes all discussion by the authoritative and withering statement,

If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God!

What would he say to any interference with the time {i.e., the day} or mode of celebrating the holy supper of the Lord?

But I must draw this letter to a close, and shall do so by quoting the remainder of the Spirit's teaching on the great subject which has been engaging our attention. From it we shall learn the lofty source from whence the inspired apostle derived his knowledge of the truth respecting the supper of His Lord; and we shall also be able to form a judgment as to the weight, importance, interest, significance, and value attaching to that institution in the mind of God.

For I have received of the Lord [not merely from the twelve] that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, *the same night in which he was betrayed* [how sweetly touching! how deeply affecting!] took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you: ¹² this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore, who soever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily [in an unworthy manner], shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and

12. Some authorities reject the word "broken" in the above passage. It would seem to clash with those words, "A bone of him shall not be broken." The body of our Lord was "given," and "bruised"; but the word "broken" is objected to. The reader must inquire and judge.

so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body [that is, His own literal body given, and bruised for us on the cross]. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. [They were judged in their own persons, and visited with bodily sickness and death, because of their neglect of the Lord's supper.] For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:23-32).

Now, my much-loved friend, is it asking too much of any Christian, after presenting such a body of scripture evidence on the subject of the Lord's supper, if we entreat him to judge, in the light of such evidence, the present condition of things in the church of God, in reference to the celebration of the Lord's supper? I think I anticipate your reply. For my own part, as I compare scripture with facts around me, I can only exclaim, what has the professing church done with the Lord's table? What has she done with the Lord's word? What has she done with the Lord's Christ?

Ever most affectionately yours,

Letter 13

My beloved friend,

When I commenced this series of letters, I had no idea of its extending to such a number as that which I have just penned. But so many subjects have crowded in upon the mind, and the space for each letter has been, of necessity, so limited, that I almost fear I have wearied you. And yet there is much in my mind to say to you -- many things about which I long to pour out my heart to one with whom I feel such entire sympathy. But this “paper and ink” work is so terribly tedious that I often find the chariot wheels driving very heavily.

However, there is one special subject to which I must refer, ere I close this series of letters -- a subject which could not possibly be overlooked by one professing to treat of “the present condition of things in the church of God.”

It is now close upon half a century since a very remarkable movement commenced in Great Britain and Ireland {starting in late 1827}. At that time many of the Lord’s beloved people were led to see that there was something radically wrong in the various religious organizations of the day. Some, it may be, felt the death and desolation, the dearth, darkness and poverty of all around. They longed for something which the existing religious machinery failed to supply. There was a thirsting for christian fellowship, and a longing for a higher range of truth than was to be found either in the National Establishment {the Church of England} or in the various dissenting bodies.

Others, again, were led to search the scriptures, and to compare what they found in these precious writings with the existing condition of things around them in the entire professing church, and they were not only led, but *forced* to the conclusion that the whole professing church was in a condition of utter and hopeless ruin -- that there was not a single ecclesiastical polity, not a single clerical order, not a single theological creed, throughout the length and breadth of Christendom, that could stand the test of holy scripture -- that there was no such thing to be found as a faithful expression of the church of God as seen in the New Testament -- no expression of the one body, no such thing as an assembly of believers gathered simply {together} to the name of {the Lord} Jesus {Matt. 18:20; cp. 1 Cor. 5:4}, and practically owning the presence, power, rule, and authority of the Holy Ghost.

Further, as regards the grand question of ministry, they looked in vain,

throughout the various religious systems, for anything approaching to the truth as taught in the New Testament. Whether they examined the Greek, Latin, Anglican or Scotch Establishments, or, on the other hand, the various popular bodies of the day, they found that whether under the title of Bishop, Priest, Deacon, or Minister, human authority was absolutely essential to the exercise of every branch of ministry, so called. If a man possessed all the gifts of the apostle Paul himself, he dared not teach or preach Jesus Christ, unless he was licensed or authorised by man; whereas, on the contrary, though destitute altogether of spiritual gifts, nay, even of spiritual life itself, yet, if authorised, ordained, licensed or approved by man, he might teach and preach in that which professed to be the church of God. Man's authority, without Christ's gift, was quite sufficient. Christ's gift without man's authority was not.

All this they found was diametrically opposed to the word of God. When they turned, for example, to such a scripture as Eph. 4, they found, that ministry, in all its branches, had its source in a risen and glorified Head in the heavens.

To every one of us is given grace *according to the measure of the gift of Christ*.

Not a syllable about human authority or human ordination, in any shape or form -- not a sound of such a thing, or of anything approaching to it, but the very reverse. It is simply "the gift of Christ" or nothing at all.

Wherefore he saith, *when he ascended up on high*, he led captivity captive, and *gave gifts unto men* And he gave some, apostles; ¹³ and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. ¹⁴

Here, then, they found the only source of ministry. All the ministerial gifts, all the gifts for edification flow down direct from a risen and glorified Christ. There is no human medium through which they can come -- no human channel through which they are to flow -- no human authority necessary to render them available -- no human addition whatsoever. The gifts come down in all their divine integrity from the Head to the members. Man can add nothing to them. He cannot improve upon them. Those who receive them are responsible to

13. It is remarkable that even "Apostles" though ordained by Christ in the days of His flesh, are here viewed as flowing from Christ ascended.

14. {It is really necessary to point out the false punctuation in this text. J. N. Darby has:
 . . . and *he* has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and
 some shepherds and teachers . . . }

The utterly absurd idea has been put forward that Christ gave some churches this gifted one, and other churches that gifted one, etc -- which would really mean that Christ gave some churches apostles, a thought that should have precluded the desperate meaning imposed on the text, a device of the clergy in order to find themselves in this text.}

exercise them -- to wait upon their gift -- to cultivate and develops it, with all diligence and faithfulness; but as to any human authority, licence, sanction, or ordination, in order to make the precious gifts of Christ available for His body, the church, not only is there no such thing, but it is absolutely and completely opposed to the word of God and to the mind of Christ.

Many earnest Christians, in various places, feeling deeply the state of the professing church, were led to separate from the different denominations of the day. Very few, if any of them, knew exactly what they were going to do; but they felt it impossible to go on any longer with what was so palpably opposed to the word of God. The old proverb, "Birds of a feather flock together" had its illustration in the history of those early brethren. They were all dissatisfied with what they saw around them; and it may be truly said of many of them, "They went out, not knowing whither they went." They could not continue in connection with plain and palpable error. They were sick of the worldliness and death of the professing church; they longed for something better; they came out, one from this, another from that, another from something else; they met outside and they saw no reason why they could not go on together, or why they might not break bread together as the early Christians did, counting on the Lord to be with them and to enable them to edify one another as He might bestow the needed gift and grace.

Amongst those who thus separated from the various organizations were some men of considerable gift, moral weight, intellectual power, and intelligence -- clergymen, barristers, solicitors, military and naval officers, physicians, and men of high position and property. Their secession, as you may suppose, caused a very considerable stir and drew forth much opposition. Many a link of friendship was snapped; many a fondly cherished companionship was broken up; many sacrifices were made; much trial and sorrow was encountered; much reproach, obloquy, and persecution, had to be endured. I cannot attempt to enter into details, nor have I any desire to do so. It could serve no useful end, and the record could but give needless pain. All who will live godly -- all who are determined to follow the Lord -- all who will keep a good conscience -- all who, with firm purpose of heart, will act on the authority of holy scripture, must make up their minds to endure trial and persecution. Our Lord Christ has told us that He came not to send peace but a sword.

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather *division*. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.

And again, He tells us that

A man's foes shall be they of his own household.

All this was fully realized in those times to which I am now referring; and not only was there this domestic opposition and persecution, but public prejudice in various shapes and forms, entailing much trial, sorrow, and loss.

Still the work went on. The Brethren gave themselves devotedly and energetically to the blessed work of evangelization and teaching. Books and tracts were written and circulated. The gospel was preached with a clearness, fulness, depth, and power, unknown since the apostolic times. The grand doctrines of the church as the body of Christ; the unity of the body; the presence and action of the Holy Ghost, in the individual believer and in the assembly; together with the blessed hope of the coming of Christ, first *for* His people, and then *with* them -- all these glorious truths which had been almost wholly lost sight of for eighteen centuries, were brought out with great power, uncton, and freshness, to the joy and blessing of hundreds of precious souls.

Moreover, the important distinction between preaching the gospel to the unconverted and teaching the Lord's people -- so little understood or acted upon even now -- began to be forcibly illustrated, and with the most blessed results. The evangelist and the teacher waited, each upon his own proper work -- souls were converted, and believers were built up on their most holy faith. Worship, too, and "the communion of saints," began to be understood. The Lord's people met, on the first day of the week, to break bread {see Acts 20:7}, and found the presence of Jesus to be a divine reality in their midst {see Matt. 18:20}. Of course, none were admitted to the {Lord's} table save such as were believed to be true Christians, sound in faith, and godly in walk.

All this, dearest A., attracted much attention. Many wondered whereunto it would grow. Some prophesied that it would all soon come to nothing. It was but a bubble on the stream of time, which would speedily burst. It was deemed utterly impossible that a number of people, without any ecclesiastical framework, any palpable organization, any clerical order, any visible head, any confession of faith, could ever get on together. How, it was asked, can your meetings go on? Who is to preside? Who is to keep order? You will have people popping up in all directions to speak, or pray, or give out hymns. It must prove a perfect Babel.

Such were the dark suggestions of many unfriendly and unbelieving prognosticators; but they did not prove true. People who attended the meetings were mightily struck by the fact of scores or hundreds of people assembled, without priest, parson, or president, and yet no disorder, no confusion, no jar, no hitch. The Lord Himself was there. He was allowed His proper place as President, and He took it and filled it to the joy, comfort, blessing, and

edification of His beloved people, who preferred Him to any human device.

I need hardly say, dear friend, that, here and there, mistakes were made. The weakness and folly of mere nature occasionally displayed themselves in the meetings. Just as, in the life of the individual Christian, notwithstanding the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, there are mistakes, evil, failure and infirmity, so in the assemblies of Brethren, as we can easily understand, there would be the exhibition of that which was not of the Spirit, although, in the main, the Spirit's presence and rule were owned and felt. The enemy, we may be sure, would take special pains to introduce confusion into the assembly, in order to bring discredit on the ground which the assembly occupied.

Still, I can say, on looking back over an experience of 35 years, the order and power of the meetings were wonderful; while as to the mistakes and failures, I found a thousand-fold worse in the organizations around, and that, too, not mourned over as failure but viewed as the legitimate fruit of human arrangement. The Brethren had no human order or arrangement, yet the solemnity and order of their meetings were most striking. Many of those who attended their meetings as spectators, could not be persuaded but that there was, after all, some pre-arrangement, some recognized order; but I can solemnly declare to you, my friend, there was no such thing. We never could tell, when we entered the meeting, what its order, tone, or character, was to be. I speak only of the meetings of the assembly for worship and communion. As to those meetings which were convened on individual responsibility, for preaching or teaching, the case was wholly different. The order of such meetings was always pretty much the same. It was entirely a matter of individual responsibility {of those gifted for it}.

But I must draw this letter to a close. If the Lord will, I shall continue the subject in my next. I have given you but a very hasty and meager sketch of an intensely interesting movement in the church of God. I have referred to the rise of those called "Brethren." In my next I shall speak of their further history and its lessons.

Ever affectionately yours,

Letter 14

My beloved friend,

It need not surprise us if that interesting movement referred to in my last should be found to partake of the moral features presented in Matt. 13 -- to exhibit the moral tendencies set forth in the parable of the tares, the leaven, and the mustard-tree. In its early stages there was much that was profoundly interesting -- great freshness, great simplicity, much genuine devotedness, and separation from the world. Many of those who at first came out had very undefined thoughts, and very imperfect apprehensions of truth. But they flocked together, and tasted, in a way they had never done before, the sweetness and power of the communion of saints.

Moreover, as they gave themselves to the free and prayerful study of the word of God, apart from all' their preconceived theological views, they very soon began to find the Bible a new book. Deep, precious, and long-lost truth began to pour its living light upon their understandings. The grand doctrine of the church -- its place, portion, and prospect; the operations of the Spirit of God; the proper hope of the church, namely, the coming of the Bridegroom, the bright and morning star, as distinct from the destiny of Israel and the earth -- all this came forth with great clearness, vividness, and power, and attracted a large measure of attention in the various sections of christian profession. In short, it was a most distinct, powerful, and blessed action of the Holy Ghost, the influence of which was felt to the ends of the earth.

Of course, there was intense opposition, specially on the part of the clergy and ministers of all denominations. "The Brethren" (so-called) were designated spiritual Ishmaelites, whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against them. They were looked upon as the most bitter, the most bigoted, the most intolerant, sect in Christendom; and this while protesting loudly against sectarianism. Various nicknames were bestowed upon them, such as "Plymouthists," "Darbyites," "New Lights," and various other names, derived from certain prominent individuals in different localities. But all this was a mere effort of the enemy to neutralize the influence of the ground occupied by the Brethren, which was felt to be, and really was, a standing testimony against the state and practice of the various religious bodies of the day -- a positive declaration of the utter and hopeless ruin of the professing

church, and the folly of attempting to form churches, and ordain ministers, without so much as a shadow of authority or power to do so.

However, my beloved friend, it was not the opposition and persecution from without that Brethren had most to dread. These rather tended to strengthen their hands, and draw them together. Times of persecution have always been healthful times for God's people. So these early Brethren found it. There was much love and practical sympathy amongst them, very little formality, very little of what we may call "red tape and routine," very little "Brethrenism"; but much real love and care for one another, great simplicity, beautiful freshness, and true devotedness to Christ and His cause.

But the arch-enemy had his eye upon them, and marvelously soon the bitter fruit of his subtle wiles began to appear. Almost from the outset he commenced, in the very midst of the Brethren themselves, a deep work, the manifest design of which was to undermine and set aside those grand truths which, as I most fully believe, the Lord was bringing out by the ministry of the Brethren, namely, the unity of the body of Christ; the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly, as distinct from His presence in the individual believer;¹⁵ and the special hope of the church, the coming of the Bridegroom for His people, as distinct from His appearing in judgment upon the world.

Against these most precious and glorious truths the enemy raised up an intense opposition, and that, strange to say, in the very place from whence the Brethren had received their special nickname.

15. This is a truth of the utmost importance.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in *you*? (1 Cor. 3:16).

Here we have the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly; and in 1 Thess. 5:19 we have the practical exhortation founded upon this glorious truth, "Quench not the Spirit." The Holy Ghost is in your midst -- see that ye quench Him not, leave full scope for Him to act by whom He will. Hinder Him not by aught of your own doings or arrangements. Do not attempt to set up any order of your own, but bow in absolute submission to the will and authority of the Lord the Spirit.

Then, in 1 Cor. 6:19, we read,

What! know ye not that *your body* is the temple of the holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

Here we have the presence of the Holy Ghost in the individual believer; and the practical exhortation founded on this we find in Eph. 4:30,

And *grieve* not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

How perfect is scripture! How profound its teaching! How precise its distinctions! The Holy Ghost dwells in the assembly -- *quench* Him not! He dwells in your body -- *grieve* Him not!

Now, my dearest A., you need not fear that I am going to drag you through our Plymouth and Bethesda troubles. Far be the thought! My desire would be to forget them for ever. It would be utterly impossible for me to convey to you the bitter memories and sad associations that linger round these two words, "Plymouth" and "Bethesda."¹⁶ But this I must tell you, that, although that humiliating history caused me the deepest sorrow I had ever tasted, yet I really reaped a golden harvest from it, for which I shall have to bless God throughout eternity.

I had not the honor of being among the first of those who planted their feet on the blessed ground occupied by Brethren. I left the Establishment {the Church of England} about the year 1839, and took my place at the table in Dublin {Ireland}, where dear Mr. {J. G.} Bellett was ministering with great acceptance. As a young man, I, of course, walked in retirement, having no thought of coming forward in public ministry of any kind. Indeed, I may say to you, beloved friend, that nothing but the most solemn sense of responsibility could ever have induced me to stand up in public. I never could, nor can I now, understand the excessive forwardness of some young men, who seem ever ready to thrust themselves before the assembly of God's people, even in the presence of grey heads and gifted vessels. To me this sort of thing has ever been supremely offensive.

But this is only by the way.

I was not long on the ground {of gathering -- namely, that there is one body, and in separation from evil unto the Lord}, when it became painfully manifest that the enemy was making a deadly effort to quash altogether the testimony of Brethren. I shall not mention any names -- it could serve no useful end to do so. It is with facts and principles we have to do. I may just say that Plymouth {England} became the special sphere for the display of the enemy's power {through B. W. Newton}. Numbers increased rapidly there, and there was a most diligent and determined effort to make Plymouth a kind of center, from which an influence was to go forth through Devonshire and Somersetshire. But, alas! it became the center and source of mischief and sorrow. There were, I believe, between eight hundred and nine hundred in communion. It looked very imposing to such as were not behind the scenes, or could not see beneath the surface. But, for my own part, I have no doubt

16. If the reader desires to know something of the particulars of this manifest work of Satan, let him procure a copy of a tract, entitled, "The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda," by William Trotter. This is the calmest, clearest, soundest, and most judicious document that I have read on the subject. The action at Plymouth was quite distinct from that at Bethesda, though often confounded with it.

that the stamp of death and the power of Satan might have been discerned by a spiritual observer, almost from the very outset.

The presence of the Holy Ghost in the assembly was practically denied. Human authority, human management, and human influence took the place of simple, earnest, holy dependence upon the rule and guidance of the Spirit of God. Certain gifted leaders held the reins in their own hands. If any, not approved by them or by their admirers, attempted to minister, they were put down, and that, too, often by means which I should blush to name. In short, it was clerical authority over again, only in a much more odious form, inasmuch as it was positively dishonest. If we are going to have human authority at all, let us go back at once to the authority of the Pope; for I must candidly declare, I know not any consistent standing-ground between the Pope in the {alleged} chair of St. Peter, and the Holy Ghost in the assembly. In this latter I do, thank God, most deeply and reverently believe -- yea, so heartily and thoroughly do I believe in it, that, by the grace of God, I should not remain for an hour in any place where it was denied in principle or in practice. Human order, power, and arrangement, be they ever so imposing, are a poor miserable substitute for the blessed presence and living ministry of God the Holy Ghost, who has come down to dwell, not merely in individuals, but in the assembly; and not merely in Pentecostal gifts, but as the blessed Comforter, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, to feed us with all His fulness and preciousness, and, blessed be God, to abide with us for ever.

It was this latter that was practically denied at Ebrington Street, Plymouth, and in its place there was most manifestly man's iron grasp to keep things in order.

I cannot attempt to go into detail; I can merely deal with the salient facts; and I do so simply for the purpose of illustrating and enforcing these great truths, of which the devil sought to deprive us, and which, through the goodness and faithfulness of God, have come forth from the terrible *débris* of Plymouthism, in greater brightness, fulness, freshness, and power, than ever; so that, as I said, we have positively reaped a golden harvest from this most sad and humiliating history. I am quite sure, my beloved friend, you have no desire to go and grope amid the *débris*; were you to do so, you would find a quantity, of the most wretched and defiling rubbish that could possibly engage your attention. But we shall draw the curtain of silence over it, and thank God that in this, as in all beside, the eater has yielded meat, and the strong sweetness. Ebrington Street fell, and buried many in its ruins -- buried them, I mean, as regards conscience, walk, and public testimony. But its fall has

been fruitful in blessing to thousands. Had it been allowed to go on, we should have been left without a true Christ, and without the Holy Ghost; for, most assuredly, a false Christ was preached at Plymouth, and the presence of the Holy Ghost was denied. And what had we left? Darkness, death, and desolation. I do most solemnly declare to you, my friend, that in the annals of the church of God, I know of no more marked and determined effort of Satan to upset the very foundations of Christianity, and swamp us all in the blasphemous depths of a dark and abominable Socinianism. This is the calm and deliberate judgment of your correspondent, after having waded through it all, and looking back at it all, after an interval of thirty years.

But God had mercy upon us; and when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raised up a standard against him. The very remembrance of the noble stand that was made for the truth of God, from the year 1845 to 1848, fills the heart at this moment with deep praise and thankfulness. The hand of the Lord was with His people. It may be all very well for superficial observers, who know nothing really about the facts of the case, to talk about failure in manner, temper, spirit, style, and such like. To me it is all the most vapid and worthless verbiage. Even supposing men did lose their temper, can we wonder at it, when we remember that they had to deal, not unfrequently, with shameful lies, trickery, and, above all, with blasphemous doctrines? Shall we think for a moment of comparing mere infirmity of temper -- even granting that such was manifested -- with positive blasphemy against Christ, or cold indifference thereto? Supposing a man loses his temper in proving that two and three make five, I am sorry he lost his temper, but two and three make five all the same.

Some, however, may condemn me for raking up old sores. They may deem it better to screen the Brethren. I reply, I have nothing to screen. I am not dealing with Brethren, but with the manifest wiles of Satan. Should I screen them? Nay, but expose them, and raise a warning note in the ear of the church of God. It is neither a question of screening nor exposing Brethren, but of simply reading their history, and profiting by its solemn and striking lessons. Has all that happened at Plymouth or Bristol ¹⁷ {England} touched the ground which Brethren occupy? Not in the smallest degree. Nay, it has brought out the truth with greater clearness and force than ever. It has caused us to see with far greater distinctness the grand reality of what was involved. I am persuaded there are hundreds amongst us who never really understood the true ground of the church of God -- its standing, its privileges, and its hopes, until they were called to pass through the terrible sorrow of Plymouth and

17. {Bethesda in Bristol, England -- 1848 -- was the beginning of Open Brethren.}

Bethesda. Numbers had come upon the ground without understanding it. They were attracted by the preaching and teaching. They found at the meetings of Brethren what they could not find anywhere else. Hundreds of precious souls, who had been for years in darkness and bondage, groping their way amid the hazy mists of Christendom, were relieved, charmed, and blessed, by the full and free gospel of the grace of God, and by the unfolding of the precious truth contained in many portions of the word of God, which had till then been a dead letter to them. Moreover, many were attracted by the love and fellowship which they found amongst Brethren, and were led to cast in their lot amongst them, with very little, if any, intelligence as to the great underlying principles. The consequence was, that, when the struggle came {in 1845-1848}, they were not prepared for it, and many were stumbled, and turned aside. They were put to the test, as all are sure to be sooner or later, and many gave way, and returned to what they had come out of, thus “building again the things which they destroyed, and making themselves transgressors.” For if the things were right, why had they left them? If wrong, why go back to them? In either case they made themselves transgressors.

But I must close this letter. If God permit, I shall conclude this series in my next. It has already extended itself far beyond my original thought, and yet I have much that I long to say to you. The Lord’s own peace be with you!

Ever, my dearest A.,

Your deeply affectionate

Letter 15

My beloved friend,

The year 1848 was a testing time for all who professed to occupy the ground of Brethren.¹⁸ In the summer of that year, a question was raised as to whether we were really gathered on the ground of the unity of the body, or merely as independent or fragmentary congregations, having a measure of acquaintance and sympathy, but no common ground of responsibility in fellowship and testimony as those who were members one of another, united to the living Head in heaven, and to one another, by the Holy Ghost. It was at Bristol {England} that this profoundly interesting question was raised; and from thence it extended to every place, on the face of the earth, where there happened to be an assembly of Brethren.

As you are doubtless aware, there was a congregation of Baptists who met for worship at a chapel called "Bethesda," in Bristol. There was an associated body meeting at "Salem" chapel; but I shall speak of both under the one name of Bethesda, and further I shall do so as briefly as possible, inasmuch as my sole object is to bring out the great principle at stake, and not, by any means, to dwell on persons or places which can only possess an ephemeral interest.

Well, then, some years previous to the time above referred to, this Baptist congregation was received into fellowship with Brethren -- received as a body. The whole assembly, professedly and ostensibly, took the ground occupied by Brethren. I do not mention names or descend into minute details; I merely give the great leading fact, because it illustrates a most important principle.

It has been my conviction, for many years, that this reception of a congregation was a fatal mistake on the part of Brethren. Even admitting, as I most heartily do, that all the members and ministers may have been most excellent people taken individually; yet I am persuaded that it is a mistake, in any case, to receive a whole body as such. There is no such thing as a corporate conscience. Conscience is an individual thing; and unless we act individually before God, there will be no stability in our course. A whole body of people, led by their teachers, may profess to take certain ground, and to

18. {It is better to say, "the ground of being gathered together, Christ's presence, and the one body (Matt. 18:20; Eph. 4:4; etc.)"}

adopt certain principles; but what security is there that each member of that body is acting in the energy of personal faith, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and on the authority of the word of God? It is of the very last importance that, in every step we take, we should act in simple faith, in communion with God, and with an exercised conscience. Indeed I cannot but believe that one special cause of weakness in the various assemblies of Brethren is that numbers have come on the ground who are not in the power of the truth in their own souls, and they act as a dead weight and a hindrance. But, most clearly, it is a grave mistake to receive a whole body of people into communion where there is no opportunity of testing the spiritual state of the individuals composing that body.

We had a very striking illustration of this in London, in the year 1853. A congregation of Baptists desired to take the ground occupied by Brethren; and they did so. But hardly had they taken the step, when the brother who had built the chapel and gathered, by his preaching, the congregation, perceived the mistake. He immediately called the assembly together, and told them that both he and they must act on their individual responsibility before the Lord. In pursuance of this statement, on the following Lord's day, the chapel was locked, and the people were compelled individually to consider their ground and their proper course of action.

Now, some would pronounce this a very bold step; but it was a noble step; and the sequel proved it to be a right step -- *the* only right step. In the course of a few weeks -- weeks, no doubt, of profound exercise of soul and deep and painful searchings of heart -- that whole congregation -- with two or three exceptions, and those, I believe, of a doubtful character -- not in a body, but individually applied for fellowship, at the various assemblies of Brethren, and each case was taken up on its own merits, and tested by the word of God. Then the brother to whom the chapel belonged, kindly lent it as a convenient meeting place for Brethren. Of course, he had, during the time the place was closed on Lord's day morning, carried on his individual work of preaching and teaching, as he does to this day; and, blessed be God, since that time, that dear spot has been made the birth-place of hundreds of souls, and a blessed feeding-place for the lambs and sheep of the beloved flock of Christ. *May it continue to be so till He comes!*

How very different was the case of Bethesda! A testing time came. Deadly error was taught at Plymouth -- error touching the position and relations of our Lord Jesus Christ -- error which placed Him (I shrink from penning the words) *under the curse and wrath of God all His days and that not vicariously, but in virtue of His association with Israel and the human family.*

I cannot bear to go further into the terrible doctrine taught at Plymouth, or to transfer to this page the expressions in which that doctrine was presented. I have no desire to use strong or stern language in reference to individuals; but I must say to you, my beloved friend, that I consider the doctrine quite as bad as Socinianism itself; at least the former as well as the latter leaves us without the Christ of God. It is useless to talk of distinctions, for if we have not the Christ of the New Testament, we have no Christ, no Savior at all. Arius or Socinus may deny the deity of our adorable Lord and Savior; Irving may deny His pure and sinless humanity; a Plymouth teacher may present Him in a position and in a relationship which would make Him need a savior for Himself -- may God pardon the very penning of the lines! May He pardon the man who taught such horrible doctrine! -- They all deny the Christ of God.

They blaspheme His person and His name. Their doctrines are to be held in utter abhorrence by every true lover of Jesus.

Well then, dearest A., this deadly error was taught at Plymouth; and, moreover, the holders and teachers of this error were received at Bethesda. A few faithful members remonstrated, protested, and entreated that such doctrine should be judged, and its teachers put out of communion. It was all in vain. Ten of the leaders wrote a letter -- the well-known "Letter of the Ten" -- well known, I mean, to those of us who were called to wade through those deep waters. In this letter, which was adopted by the great bulk of the congregation at Bethesda, they refused to judge the doctrine. They said, "What have we at Bristol to do with doctrines taught at Plymouth?" In a word, they committed themselves, plainly and palpably, to the ground of neutrality and indifference, as regards our blessed Head; and independency, as regards His beloved body.¹⁹

Such was the ground set forth in "The Letter of the Ten" -- a document prepared by ten intelligent men, adopted by some hundreds of christian people, and which, I believe, remains, to this day, unrepealed and unrepented of. It is true that, after the sad mischief was done, and fifty or sixty of the Lord's people had left Bethesda rather than sanction such a wretched principle or ground of fellowship, the leaders held what they called seven church meetings for the purpose of examining the tracts in which the error was taught, and one of the leaders {George Muller} said that "according to that doctrine, Christ would need a savior for Himself." But the "Letter" was never withdrawn -- never repented of; and hence it remains this day, as the studied and deliberate statement of the real ground of Bethesda fellowship, which is, to my mind,

19. {This is the beginning of Open Brethren. See the Preface for a few more facts.}

simply indifference as to Christ and independency, as to His Body the church.

I purposely refrain from giving the names of persons, and from entering into any details as to the conduct, manner, or spirit of individuals. As regards all these things, we can believe there were faults on all sides. I must confess I have no taste for dwelling upon such things. And further, I may assure you, my friend, that I am not conscious of a single atom of bitter feeling toward any individual. I am writing after an interval of 27 years, and I desire to confine myself to the great principle involved in the whole case of Plymouth and Bethesda. I have not depended upon hearsay in the matter. We all know how things maybe colored and exaggerated in the heat of discussion. But there can be no question of coloring, exaggeration, or heated discussion, in reading the Plymouth tracts which contain what I must designate abominable doctrine, or in reading the "Letter of the Ten" which sets forth the miserable principles of neutrality, indifference, and independency.

The fact is, Bethesda ought never to have been acknowledged as an assembly gathered on divine ground; and this was proved by the fact that, when called to act on the truth of the unity of the body, it completely broke down. And not this only; but had the members of the congregation been more animated by true loyalty to Christ they would have risen as one man to expel from their borders every trace of the doctrine which blasphemed their Lord. I am quite prepared to believe that numbers were totally ignorant of what they were about; that they meant well, and had no true apprehension of what was involved. But if an ignorant pilot is urging the vessel upon the rocks, it is poor consolation to those on board to be told that lie is a most blameless well-meaning man.

Such, then, dearest A., is a very brief and condensed statement of the real ground of what is called "The Bethesda Question." Of course, Brethren everywhere had to face it. There was no getting out of it. It had to be looked at straight in the face. To many it proved a terrible stumbling-block. They never could see their way through it. For my own part, I felt I had just the one thing to do, namely, to take my eye off completely from persons and their influence, and fix it steadily upon Christ. Then all was as clear as a sunbeam and as simple as the very elements of truth itself. I have never had a shadow of a doubt or hesitation, as to the course adopted in the main, or as to the great underlying principles; but I can quite understand and make allowance for the difficulties of souls just setting out on their course, when called upon to encounter the Bethesda question, particularly when I remember how hard it is, generally speaking, to get a thoroughly dispassionate and unprejudiced view of it. But this I must say, as the result of a good deal of experience and

observation, I have invariably found that where a person was enabled to look at the matter simply in reference to Christ and His glory, all difficulty vanished. But, on the other hand, if personal feeling, affection for individuals, anything merely natural, be allowed to operate, the spiritual vision is sure to be clouded, and a divine conclusion will not be reached.

There is one thing which seems to act as a terrible bugbear to many, and that is the cry of "Exclusivism" raised against those who, as I believe, seek to maintain the truth of God at all cost. A moment's calm reflection, in the light of scripture, will be sufficient to show that we must either go thoroughly in for the principle of exclusivism, or admit that, on no ground, for no reason whatsoever, should we ever exclude from the Lord's table one who may really be a member of the body of Christ. If any one will maintain this latter, he is plainly at issue with the apostle in 1 Cor. 5. In that chapter, the assembly at Corinth was distinctly taught, by the inspired apostle, to be an "exclusive." assembly. They were commanded to exclude from their midst and from the table of their Lord, one who, notwithstanding his grievous sin, was a member of the body of Christ.

Now, is not this the very heart's core of the principle of exclusivism? Unquestionably. And, further, my friend, let me ask, must not the assembly of God, of necessity, be exclusive? Is it not responsible -- solemnly responsible to judge the doctrine and the morals of all who present themselves for communion? Is it not solemnly bound to put away any one who, in doctrine or walk, dishonors the Lord and defiles the assembly? Will any one question this? Well, then, this is "exclusivism" -- that terrific word! ²⁰

The fact is very many confound two things which are quite distinct in scripture, the house of God and the body of Christ. Hence, if any one is refused a place at the table, or put away from it, they speak of "rending the body of Christ," or "cutting off members of Christ." Was the body rent, or a member cut off, when the sinning one was put away from the assembly at Corinth? Clearly not. Neither is it in any such case. Thanks be to God, no one can rend the body of Christ or cut off its very feeblest member. God has taken care that "there shall be no schism in the body." The strictest discipline of the house of God can never touch, in the most remote way, the unity of the body of Christ. That unity is absolutely indissoluble. A clear understanding of this would answer a thousand questions and solve a thousand difficulties.

20. {"Exclusivism" was the name of opprobrium given by the followers of Bethesda (i.e., by those who took Open Brethren ground in 1848) to those who acted on the basis of excluding moral and doctrinal evil, and those who had fellowship with such things, whether personally indulging the evil or not.}

But then it is often said, when a person is put away or refused, "Do you not consider him a child of God?" I answer, No such question is raised.

The Lord knoweth them that are his; and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity {2 Tim. 2:19}.

We are not called upon to pronounce as to a man's secret relations with God, but simply as to his public walk before men. If an assembly denies its responsibility to judge the doctrine and walk of those "within," it is not an assembly of God at all, and all who would be true to Christ should leave it, at once.

Hence, therefore, my beloved and valued friend, we can see that "exclusivism," so far from being a dreaded bugbear, is the bounden duty of every assembly gathered on the ground of the church of God {as one body}; and those who deny it prove themselves to be simply ignorant of the true character of the house of God, and of the immensely important distinction between the discipline of the house and the unity of the body.

And here you will allow me just to answer a question which is not unfrequently put; it is this, "Do the Brethren consider themselves *the* church of God?" They do nothing of the kind. They are not the church of God. There are thousands of the beloved members of Christ scattered throughout the various denominations of the day. I am prepared to recognize, in the person of a Roman Catholic priest, a member of the body of Christ and a gifted vessel of the Holy Ghost. I may marvel how he can stay where he is, for I believe the Romish system to be a dark and dreadful apostasy. But then I do not believe in any one of the religious systems in Christendom. Not one of them can stand the test of holy scripture. Not one of them is the church of God. No; nor is one of them on the ground of the church of God.

And here, my friend, is just the difference. I do not believe that the Brethren are the church of God; but *they are on the ground of the church of God {as one body}*, else I should not be amongst them for one hour. They occupy a position which ought to command every saint of God in Christendom. What should prevent all Christians from coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, in the unity of the body of Christ, and in dependence upon the guidance and power of the Holy Ghost? Is not this what we find in the New Testament? And, if so, why should we not follow it? Do I want to see the church restored to its pentecostal glory? By no means. This was the delusion of poor Edward Irving. I never expect to see the church restored; but I long to see Christians departing from error and iniquity, and walking in obedience to the precious word of God. Is this expecting too much? Nay, I can never be satisfied with anything less.

And do not imagine, dearest A., that I want to puff off "The Brethren." Nothing is further from my thoughts. I believe the ground they occupy is divine, else I should not be on it. But as to our conduct on the ground, we can only put our faces in the dust. The *position* is divine; but as to our *condition*, we have ever to humble ourselves before our God. A friend once said to me, "Do you know that the Rev. Mr. is delivering a course of lectures against the Brethren?" "Tell him," I said, "with my kind regards, that I am doing the very same, just now. But there is this immense difference between us, that he is lecturing against their *principles*, while I am lecturing against their *practices*. He is attacking the ground; I, the conduct on the ground."

And yet, it is not that I consider the Brethren any worse than their neighbors; but, when I consider the high ground they take, the conduct and character ought to be correspondingly high. This alas! is not the case. Our spiritual tone, both in private life and in our public reunions, is sorrowfully low. There is a sad lack of depth and power in our assemblies. There is excessive feebleness in worship and ministry.

I cannot, nor do I want to, go into details in the way of proof or illustration. I content myself with the statement of the broad fact, in order that our souls may be exercised as to the real cause of all this. I fear there are many contributing causes. I believe the vast increase in our numbers, within the last twenty years, is, by no means, an index of an increase of power. Quite the reverse. No doubt, we have to be thankful for the increase -- thankful for every soul brought into what we believe to be a right position. But then we need to be watchful. The enemy is vigilant, and he will seek to introduce spurious materials into our midst in order to bring discredit on the ground, and cast dishonor on the Lord. In the various denominations around us the inconsistencies of individuals are in a measure hidden behind the bulwarks of the system. But Brethren stand fully exposed, and their failures are used as an argument against their ground. The grand point for us all is to be humble and lowly, dependent and watchful. Let us remember those precious words to the church of Philadelphia, "Thou hast little strength, and hast kept *my word*, and not denied *my name*." Yes, dear friend, this is it, "My word" -- "My name." May we remember it! May we be kept very little in our own eyes, clinging to Christ, confessing His name, keeping His word, serving His cause, waiting for His coming!

Here I must close my letter, and my series of letters. I only hope I have not wearied you. I certainly have run on much further than I intended when I began. But then you never told me to stop, so that if I have overtaxed you, you must, in measure, blame yourself.

The Lord bless you, beloved brother, most abundantly, and make you a blessing! So prays,

Your deeply affectionate C. H. Mackintosh

The Assembly of God
Or,
The All-Sufficiency
of the Name of Jesus

by C. H. Mackintosh

In a day like the present, when almost every new idea becomes the center or gathering point of some new association, we cannot but feel the value of having divinely formed convictions as to what the assembly of God really is. We live in a time of unusual mental activity, and hence there is the more urgent need of calm and prayerful study of the word of God. That word, blessed be its Author, is like a rock amid the ocean of human thought. There it stands unmoved, notwithstanding the raging of the storm and the ceaseless lashing of the waves. And not only does it thus stand unmoved itself, but it imparts its own stability to all who simply take their stand upon it. What a mercy to make one's escape from the heavings and tossings of the stormy ocean, and find a calm resting place on that everlasting rock!

This, truly, is a mercy. Were it not that we have "The law and the testimony," where should we be? Whither should we go? What should we do? What darkness! What confusion! What perplexity! Ten thousand jarring voices fall, at times, upon the ear, and each voice seems to speak with such authority, that, if one is not well taught and grounded in the word, there is great danger of being drawn away, or, at least, sadly unhinged. One man will tell you that *this* is right; another will tell you *that* is right; a third will tell you that *everything* is right; and a fourth will tell you that *nothing* is right. With reference to the question of church position, you will meet with some who go *here*; some who go *there*; some who go *everywhere*; and some who go *nowhere*.

Now, under such circumstances, what is one to do? All cannot possibly be right. And yet, surely, there is something right. It cannot be that we are *compelled* to live in error, in darkness, or uncertainty. "*There is a path*," blessed be God, though

No fowl knoweth it, and the vulture's eye hath not seen it. The lion's whelps

have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it.

Where is this safe and blessed path? Hear the divine reply:

Behold, *the fear of the Lord*, that is wisdom: and to *depart from evil* is understanding (Job 28).

Let us, therefore, in the fear of the Lord, in the light of His infallible truth, and in humble dependence upon the teaching of His Holy Spirit, proceed to the examination of the subject which stands at the head of this paper; and may we have grace to abandon all confidence in our own thoughts, and the thoughts of others, that so we may heartily and honestly yield ourselves up to be taught only of God.

Now, in order to get fairly into the grand and allimportant subject of the assembly of God, we have, first, to state *a fact*; and, secondly, to *ask a question*. The fact is this: *there is an assembly of God on the earth*. The question is: *What is that assembly?*

I. And, first, then as to our *fact*. There is such a thing as the assembly of God on the earth. This is a most important fact, surely. God has an assembly on the earth. I do not refer to any merely human organization, such as the Greek church; the church of Rome; the church of England; the church of Scotland; or to any of the various systems which have sprung from these, framed and fashioned by man's hand, and carried on by man's resources. I refer simply to that assembly which is gathered by God the Holy Ghost, round the Person of God the Son, to worship, and hold fellowship with, God the Father. Our capacity to recognize and appreciate this assembly is a totally different matter, and will depend on our spirituality, our self-emptiness, our brokenness of will, our child-like subjection to the authority of holy scripture. If we set forth upon our search for the assembly of God, or for any expression thereof, with our minds full of prejudice, preconceived thoughts, and personal predilections; or if, in our searchings, we seek the aid of the flickering light of the dogmas, opinions, and traditions of men, nothing is more certain than that we shall fail to reach the truth. To recognize God's assembly, we must be exclusively taught by God's word, and led by God's Spirit; for, of God's assembly, as well as of the sons of God, it may be said, "The world knoweth it not."

Hence, then, if we are, in any wise, governed by the spirit of the world; if we desire to exalt man; if we seek to commend ourselves to the thoughts of men; if our object be to gain the attractive ends of a plausible and soul-ensnaring expediency, we may as well, forthwith, abandon our search for the assembly of God, and take refuge in that form of human organization which most fully commends itself to our thinkings or our conscientious convictions.

Further, if our object be to find a religious community in which the word of God is read, or in which the people of God are found, we may speedily satisfy ourselves, for it would be hard indeed to find a section of the professing body in which either or both of these objects might not be fully realized.

Finally, if we merely aim at doing all the good we can, without any question as to how we do it; if "*Per fas aut nefas*," be our motto, in whatever we undertake; if we are prepared to reverse those weighty words of Samuel, and say that,

To sacrifice is better than to obey, and the fat of rams better than to hearken; then is it worse than vain for us to pursue our search for the assembly of God, inasmuch as that assembly can only be discovered and approved by one who has been taught to flee from the ten thousand flowery pathways of human expediency, and to submit his conscience, his heart, his understanding, his whole moral being to the supreme authority of, "Thus saith the Lord."

In one word, then, the obedient disciple knows that there is such a thing as God's assembly: and he it is, too, that will be enabled, through grace, to find it, and to know his own place therein. The intelligent student of scripture knows, full well, the difference between a system founded, formed, and governed by the wisdom and the will of man, and that assembly which is gathered round, and governed by, Christ the Lord. How vast is the difference! It is just the difference between God and man.

But we may here be asked for the scripture proofs of our fact that there is such a thing on this earth as the assembly of God, and we shall, at once, proceed to furnish these; for we may be permitted to say that, without the authority of the word, all statements are utterly valueless. What, therefore, saith the scripture?

Our first quotation shall be that famous passage, in Matt. 16,

When Jesus came into the coast of Coesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my assembly;²¹ (ἐκκλησίαν) and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (vv. 13-18).

21. The words "church" and "assembly" are both from the same Greek word.

Here our blessed Lord intimates His purpose to build an assembly, and sets forth the true foundation of that assembly, namely, "Christ the Son of the living God." This is an all-important point in our subject. The building is founded on the Rock, and that Rock is not the poor failing, stumbling, erring Peter, but CHRIST, the eternal Son of the living God; and every stone in that building partakes of the Rock-life which, as being victorious over all the power of the enemy, is indestructible.

Again, passing over a section of Matthew's gospel, we come to an equally familiar passage.

Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the assembly: but if he neglect to hear the assembly, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that 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 {unto} my name*, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:15-20).

We shall have occasion to refer to this passage again, under the second division of our subject. It is here introduced merely as a link in the chain of scripture evidence of the fact that there is such a thing as the assembly of God on the earth. This assembly is not a name, a form, a pretense, an assumption. It is a divine reality -- an institution of God, possessing His seal and sanction. It is a something to be appealed to in all cases of personal trespass and dispute which cannot be settled by the parties involved. This assembly may only consist of "two or three" -- the smallest plurality, if you please; but there it is, owned of God, and its decisions ratified in heaven.

Now, we are not to be scared away from the truth on this subject, by the fact that the church of Rome has attempted to base her monstrous pretensions on the two passages which we have just quoted. That church is not God's assembly, built on the Rock Christ, and gathered in the name of Jesus; but a human apostasy; founded on a failing mortal, and governed by the traditions and doctrines of men. We must not, therefore, suffer ourselves to be deprived of God's reality by reason of Satan's counterfeit. God has His assembly on the earth, and we are responsible to recognize it, and find our place therein. This may be difficult, in a day of confusion, like the present. It will demand a single eye -- a subject will -- a mortified mind. But let the reader be assured

of this, that it is his privilege to possess as divine certainty as to his place in the assembly of God as in reference to the truth of his own salvation through the blood of the Lamb; nor should he be satisfied without this. I should not be content to go on for an hour without the assurance that I am, in spirit and principle, associated with the assembly of God. I say, in spirit and principle; because I may happen to be in a place where there is no local expression of the assembly, in which case I must be satisfied to hold fellowship, in spirit, with all those who are on the ground of the assembly of God, and wait on Him so to order my way that I may enjoy the real privilege of being present in person with His people, to taste the blessings, as well as to share in the holy responsibilities of His assembly.

This simplifies the matter amazingly. If I cannot have God's assembly, I shall have nothing. It will not do to point me to a religious community, with some christians therein, the gospel preached, and the ordinances administered. I must be convinced, by the authority of the word and Spirit of God, that it is, in very truth, gathered on the ground and marked by the characteristics of God's assembly, else I cannot own it. I can own the children of God therein, if they will permit me to do so, outside the bounds of their religious system; but their system I cannot own or sanction in any one way whatsoever. Were I to do so, it would just be tantamount to the assertion that it makes not a whit of difference whether I take my place in the assembly of God, or in the systems of man -- whether I acknowledge the Lordship of Christ or the authority of man -- whether I bow to the word of God, or the opinions of man.

No doubt, this will give offence to many. It will be pronounced bigotry, prejudice, narrow-mindedness, intolerance, and the like. But this need not trouble us much. All we have to do is to ascertain the truth as to God's assembly, and cleave to it, heartily and energetically, at all cost. If God has an assembly -- and scripture says He has -- then let me be therein and nowhere else. It must be obvious that where there are several conflicting systems, they cannot all be divine. What am I to do? Am I to be satisfied to take the less of two evils? Surely not. What then? The answer is plain, pointed, and direct -- God's assembly or nothing. If there be a local expression of that assembly, well; be there in person. If not, be content to hold spiritual communion with all who humbly and faithfully own and occupy that holy ground. It may sound and seem like liberality to be ready to sanction and go with everything and everybody. It may appear very easy and very pleasant to be in a place "where everybody's will is indulged, and nobody's conscience is exercised" -- where we may hold what we like, and say what we like, and do what we like, and go where we like. All this may seem very delightful -- very plausible -- very popular -- very attractive; but Oh! it will be barrenness and bitterness in the

end; and, in the day of the Lord, it will, assuredly, be burnt up as so much wood, hay, and stubble, that cannot stand the action of His judgment.

But let us proceed with our scripture proofs. In the Acts of the Apostles, or rather, the Acts of the Holy Ghost, we find the assembly formally set up. A passage or two will suffice:

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the assembly, daily, such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

Such was the original, simple apostolic order. When a person was converted, he took his place in the assembly, there was no difficulty in the matter, there were no sects or parties, each claiming to be considered a church, a cause, or an interest. There was just the one thing, and that was the assembly of God, where He dwelt, acted, and ruled. It was not a system formed according to the will, the judgment, or even the conscience of man. Man had not, as yet, entered upon the business of church-making. This was God's work. It was just as exclusively God's province and prerogative to gather the saved, as to save the scattered.²²

Why, we may justly inquire; should it be different now? Why should the regenerated seek aught beyond, or aught different to the assembly of God? Is not that sufficient? Is not the place where He dwells, and acts, and rules, just the place where all His people ought to be? Assuredly. Should they rest satisfied with aught else? Assuredly not. We repeat, with emphasis, "*Either that or nothing.*"

22. There is no such thing in scripture as being a member of *a* church. Every true believer is a member of *the* church of God -- the Body of Christ, and can therefore no more be, properly, a member of anything else than my arm can be a member of any other body.

The only true ground on which believers can gather is set forth in that grand statement,
There is one body, and one Spirit.

And, again,

We being many are one loaf and one body (Eph. 4:4, 1 Cor. 10:17).

If God declares that there is but "one body," it must be contrary to His mind to have many bodies, sects, or denominations.

Now, while it is quite true that no given number of believers, in any given place, can be called "The body of Christ," or "The assembly of God"; yet they should be gathered on the ground of that Body and that assembly, and on no other ground. We call the reader's special attention to this principle. It holds good at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. The fact of the ruin of the professing church does not touch it. It has been true since the day of Pentecost; is true at this moment; and shall be true until the church is taken to meet her Head and Lord in the clouds, that "*There is one body.*" All believers belong to that body; and they should meet on that ground, and on no other.

True it is, alas! that failure, and ruin, and apostasy have come in. The mighty tide of error has risen, and swept away many of the ancient landmarks of the assembly. Man's wisdom, and his will; or, if you please, his reason, his judgment, and his conscience have wrought, in matters ecclesiastical, and that result appears before us in the almost numberless and nameless sects and parties of the present moment. Still, we are bold to say, the assembly is the assembly still, notwithstanding all the failure, the error, and the confusion, consequent thereon. The difficulty in reaching it may be great, but its reality, when reached, is unaltered and unalterable. In apostolic times the assembly stood out, in bold relief, from the dark background of Judaism, on the one hand, and Paganism on the other. It was impossible to mistake it; there it stood, a grand reality! a company of living men, gathered, indwelt, ruled and regulated by God the Holy Ghost, so that the unlearned or unbelieving coming in, were convinced of all, and constrained to acknowledge that God was there. (See carefully, 1 Cor. 12 and 14 *passim*.)

Thus, in the gospel, our blessed Lord intimates His purpose of building an assembly. This assembly is historically presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles. Then, when we turn to the epistles of Paul, we find him addressing the assembly, in seven distinct places, namely, Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica; and, finally, in the opening of the book of Revelation, we have addresses to seven distinct assemblies. Now, in all these places, the assembly of God was a plain, palpable, real thing, established and maintained by God Himself. It was not a human organization, but a divine institution -- a testimony -- a light bearer for God, in each place.

Thus much as to our scripture proofs of the fact that God has an assembly on the earth, gathered, indwelt, and governed by the Holy Ghost who is the true and only Vicar of Christ upon earth. The Gospel prophetically intimates the assembly; the Acts historically presents the assembly; and the epistles formally address the assembly. All this is plain. And let it be carefully noted that we will listen to nothing on this subject but the voice of holy scripture. Let not reason speak, for we own it not. Let not tradition lift her voice, for we wholly disregard her. Let not expediency thrust itself upon us, for we shall give it no place whatever. We believe in the all-sufficiency of holy scripture -- that it is sufficient to furnish the man of God thoroughly -- to equip him perfectly for all good works (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The word of God is either sufficient or it is not. We believe it to be amply sufficient for every exigency of God's assembly. It could not be otherwise if God be its Author. We must either deny the divinity or admit the sufficiency of the Bible. There is not a single hair's breadth of middle ground. It is impossible that God could have written an imperfect, an insufficient book.

This is a very grave principle in connection with our subject. Many of our Protestant writers have, in assailing Popery, maintained the sufficiency and authority of the Bible; but it does seem very plain to us that they are always at fault when their opponents turn sharp round upon them and demand proof from scripture for many things sanctioned and adopted by Protestant Communities. There are many things adopted and practiced in the National Establishment and other Protestant Communities, which have no sanction in the word; and when the shrewd and intelligent defenders of Popery have called attention to these things, and demanded authority for them, the weakness of mere Protestantism has been made strikingly apparent. If we admit, for a moment, that, in some things, we must have recourse to tradition and expediency, then who will undertake to fix the boundary line? If it be allowable to depart from scripture at all, how far are we to go? If the authority of tradition be admitted, at all, who is to fix its domain? If we leave the narrow and well-defined pathway of divine revelation, and enter upon the wide and bewildering field of human tradition, has not one man as much right as another to make a choice? In short, it is obviously impossible to meet the adherents of Roman Catholicism on any other ground than that on which the assembly of God takes its stand, namely, the all-sufficiency of the word of God, the name of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Ghost. Such, blessed be God, is the impregnable position occupied by His assembly; and however weak and contemptible that assembly may be, in the eye of the world, we know, for Christ has told us, that

The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Those gates shall, assuredly, prevail against every human system -- against all those corporations and associations which men have set on foot. And in no case has that triumph been, even already, made more awfully manifest, than in that of the Church of Rome itself, although it has arrogantly laid claim to this very declaration of our Lord as the bulwark of its strength. Nothing can withstand the power of the gates of hell, but that assembly which is built upon "The living Stone"; and the local expression of that assembly may be "Two or three gathered {together} in [unto] the name of Jesus," a poor, feeble, contemptible handful -- the filth of the earth, and the off-scouring of all things.

It is well to be clear and decided as to this. Christ's promise can never fail. He has, blessed be His name, come down to the lowest possible point to which His assembly can be reduced, even "*two*" {Matt. 18:20}. How gracious! How tender! How considerate! How like Himself! He attaches all the dignity -- all the value -- all the efficacy of His own divine and deathless Name to an obscure handful gathered round Himself. It must be very evident to the spiritual mind that the Lord Jesus, in speaking of the "two or three," thought

not of those vast systems which have sprung up in ancient, medieval, and modern times, throughout the eastern and western worlds, numbering their adherents and votaries, not by "twos or threes," but by kingdoms, provinces, and parishes. It is very plain that a baptized kingdom, and "two or three" living souls, gathered in {gathered together unto} the Name of Jesus, do not and cannot mean the same thing. Baptized Christendom is one thing, and the assembly of God is another. What this latter is, we have yet to unfold; we are here asserting that they are not, and cannot be, the same thing. They are constantly confounded, though no two things can be more distinct.

If we would know under what figure Christ presents the baptized world, we have only to look at the "leaven" and the "mustard tree" of Matt. 13. The former gives us the internal, and the latter the external character of "the kingdom of heaven" -- of that which was originally set up in truth and simplicity -- a real thing, though small, but which, through Satan's crafty working, has become, inwardly, a corrupt mass, though, outwardly, a far-spreading, showy, popular thing in the earth, gathering all sorts beneath the shadow of its patronage. Such is the lesson -- the simple yet deeply solemn lesson to be learnt, by the spiritual mind, from the "leaven" and the "mustard tree" of Matt. 13. And we may add, one result of learning this lesson would be an ability to distinguish between "The kingdom of heaven," and "The assembly of God." The former may be compared to a wide morass, the latter, to a running stream passing through it, and in constant danger of losing its distinctive character, as well as its proper direction, by intermingling with the surrounding waters. To confound the two things is to deal a deathblow to all godly discipline and consequent purity in the assembly of God. If the kingdom and the assembly mean one and the same thing, then how should we act in the case of "That wicked person" in 1 Cor. 5? The apostle tells us to "put him away." Where are we to put him? Our Lord Himself tells us, distinctly, that "The field is *the world*"; and, again, in John 17, He says that His people are not of the world. This makes all plain enough. But men tell us, in the very face of our Lord's statement, that the field is the church, and the tares and wheat, ungodly and godly, are to grow together, that they are, on no account, to be separated. Thus the plain and positive teaching of the Holy Ghost in 1 Cor. 5 is set in open opposition to the equally plain and positive teaching of our Lord, in Matt. 13; and all this flows from the effort to confound two distinct things, namely, "The kingdom of heaven," and "The assembly of God."

It would not, by any means, comport with the object of this paper to enter further upon the interesting subject of "The kingdom." Enough has been said if the reader has thereby been convinced of the immense importance of duly distinguishing that kingdom from the assembly. What this latter is we shall

now proceed to enquire; and may God the Holy Ghost be our Teacher!

II. In handling our question as to the assembly of God, it will give clearness and precision to our thoughts, to consider the four following points, namely:

First, What is the *ground* on which the assembly is gathered ?

Secondly, What is the *center* round which the assembly is gathered?

Thirdly, What is the *power* by which the assembly is gathered?

Fourthly, What is the *authority* on which the assembly is gathered?

1. And, first, then, as to the ground on which God's assembly is gathered, it is, in one word, salvation, or eternal life. We do not enter the assembly in order to be saved, but as those who are saved. The word is,

On this rock I will build my church.

He does not say, "on my church I will build the salvation of souls." One of Rome's boasted dogmas is this, "There is no salvation out of the true church." Yes, but we can go deeper still and say, "Off the true Rock there is no church." Take away the Rock, and you have nothing but a baseless fabric of error and corruption. What a miserable delusion, to think of being saved by that! Thank God, it is not so. We do not get to Christ through the church, but to the church through Christ. To reverse this order, is to displace Christ altogether, and thus have neither Rock, nor church, nor salvation. We meet Christ as a life-giving Savior, before we have anything to say to the assembly at all; and hence we could possess eternal life, and enjoy full salvation, though there were no such thing as an assembly of God on the earth. ²³

We cannot be too simple in grasping this truth, at a time like the present,

23. The reader will do well to note the fact that, in Matt. 16, we have the very earliest allusion to the church, and there our Lord speaks of it as a future thing. He says, "On this Rock I *will* build my church." He does not say, "I *have* been, or I *am* building." In short, the church had no existence until our Lord Christ was raised from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God. Then, but not until then, the Holy Ghost was sent down to baptize believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, into one body, and unite them to the risen and glorified Head in heaven. {cp. Acts 1:4, 5; 2:32, 33; 1 Cor. 12:13}. This body has been on the earth since the descent of the Holy Ghost; is here still; and shall be until Christ comes to fetch it to Himself. It is a perfectly unique thing. It is not to be found in old Testament Scripture. Paul expressly tells us it was not revealed in other ages; it was hid in God, and never made known until it was committed to him. (See carefully, Rom. 16:25, 26; Eph. 3:3-11; Col 1:24-27.) True it is -- most blessedly true, that God had a people in old Testament times. Not merely the nation of Israel, but a quickened, saved, spiritual people who lived by faith, went to heaven, and are there "The spirits of just men made perfect." But the church is never spoken of until Matt. 16, and there only as a future thing. As to the expression used by Stephen, "The church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38), it is pretty generally known that it simply refers to the Congregation of Israel. The *termini* of the church's earthly history are Pentecost (Acts 2), and the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

when ecclesiastical pretension is rising to such a height. The church, falsely so called, is opening her bosom, with delusive tenderness, and inviting poor sin-burdened, world-sick, and heavy laden souls to take refuge therein. She, with crafty liberality, throws open her treasury door, and places her resources at the disposal of needy, craving, yearning souls. And truly those resources have powerful attractions for those who are not on "The Rock." There is an ordained Priesthood, professing to stand in an unbroken line with the Apostles. -- Alas! how different the two ends of the line! There is a continual sacrifice. Alas! a bloodless one and therefore a worthless one (Heb. 9:22). -- There is a splendid ritual. Alas! it seeks its origin amid the shadows of a by-gone age -- shadows which have been, for ever, displaced by the Person, the work, and the offices of the eternal Son of God. For ever be His peerless Name adored!

The believer has a very conclusive answer to all the pretensions and promises of the Romish system. He can say he has found his *all* in a crucified and risen Savior. What does he want with the sacrifice of the mass? He is washed in the blood of Christ. What does he want with a poor sinful dying priest who cannot save himself? He has the Son of God as his priest. What does he want with a pompous ritual with all its imposing adjuncts? He worships, in spirit and in truth {cf. John 4:23}, within the holiest of all, whither he enters with boldness, through the blood of Jesus {Heb. 10:19}.

Nor is it merely with Roman Catholicism we have to do in the establishment of our first point. We fear there are thousands, besides Roman Catholics, who, in heart, look to the church, if not for salvation, at least to be a stepping stone thereto. Hence the importance of seeing clearly that the ground on which God's assembly is gathered is salvation or eternal life; so that whatever be the object of that assembly, it most certainly is not to provide salvation for its members, seeing that all its members are saved ere they enter its precincts at all. God's assembly is a houseful of salvation from one end to the other. Blessed fact! It is not an institution set on foot for the purpose of providing salvation for sinners, nor yet for providing for their religious wants. It is a saved, living body, formed and gathered by the Holy Ghost, to make known to "Principalities and powers in the heavenlies, the manifold wisdom of God," and to declare to the whole universe, the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus.

Now, the great enemy of Christ and the church is well aware of what a powerful testimony the assembly of God is called and designed to yield on the earth; and therefore he has put forth all his hellish energy to quash that testimony, in every possible way. He hates the Name of Jesus, and everything tending to glorify that Name. Hence his intense opposition to the assembly as a whole, and to each local expression thereof, wherever it may happen to

exist. He has no objection to a mere religious establishment set on foot for the purpose of providing for man's religious wants, whether maintained by government or by voluntary effort. You may set up what you please. You may join what you please. You may be what you please; anything and everything for Satan but the assembly of God. That he hates most cordially, and will seek to blacken and blast, by every means in his power. But those consolatory accents of the Lord Christ fall, with divine power, on the ear of faith:

On this Rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

2. This conducts us, naturally, to our second point, namely, What is the center round which God's assembly is gathered? The center is Christ -- the living Stone, as we read in the epistle of Peter,

To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4, 5).

It is around the Person of a living Christ, then, that God's assembly is gathered. It is not round a doctrine, however true ; nor round an ordinance, however important ; but round a living divine Person. This is a great cardinal and vital point which must be distinctly seized, tenaciously held, and faithfully and constantly avowed and carried out. "To whom coming." It is not said "To which coming." We do not come to a thing, but to a Person.

Let us go forth therefore unto Him (Heb. 13).

The Holy Ghost leads us only to Jesus. Nothing short of this will avail. We may speak of joining a church, becoming a member of a congregation, attaching ourselves to a party, a cause, or an interest. All these expressions tend to darken and confuse the mind, and hide from our view the divine idea of the assembly of God. It is not our business to join anything. When God converted us, He joined us, by His Spirit, to Christ, and that should be enough for us. Christ is the only center of God's assembly.

And, we may ask, is not He sufficient? Is it not quite enough for us to be "joined to the Lord?" Why add anything thereto?

Where two or three are gathered together *in {unto} my name*, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).

What more can we possibly need? If Jesus is in our midst, why should we think of setting up a human president? Why not unanimously and heartily allow Him to take the president's seat, and bow to Him in all things? Why set up human authority, in any shape or form, in the house of God? But this is done, and it is well to speak plainly about it. Man is set up in that which

professes to be the assembly. We see human authority exercised in that sphere in which divine authority alone should be acknowledged. It matters not, so far as the foundation principle is concerned, whether it be pope, parson, priest, or president. It is man set up in Christ's place. It may be the pope appointing a cardinal, a legate, or a bishop to his sphere of work; or it may be a president appointing a man to exhort or to pray, for ten minutes. The principle is one and the same. It is human authority acting in that sphere where only God's authority should be owned. If Christ be in our midst we can count on Him for everything.

Now, in saying this, we anticipate a very probable objection. It may be said, by the advocates of human authority, "How could an assembly ever get on, without some human presidency? Would it not lead to all sorts of confusion? Would it not open the door for everyone to intrude himself upon the assembly, quite irrespective of gift or qualification? Should we not have men popping up, on all occasions, and worrying us with their empty twaddle and tiresome rhodomontade?"

Our answer is a very simple one. Jesus is all-sufficient. We can trust Him to keep order in His house. We feel ourselves far safer in His gracious and powerful hand than in the hands of the most attractive human president. We have all spiritual gifts treasured up in Jesus. He is the fountain head of all ministerial authority. "He hath the seven stars" {Rev. 1}. Let us only confide in Him, and the order of our assembly will be as perfectly provided for as the salvation of our souls. This is just the reason of our connecting, in the title of this pamphlet, "The all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus" with the "Assembly of God." We believe that the name of Jesus is, in very truth, all-sufficient, not only for personal salvation, but for all the exigencies of the assembly -for worship, communion, ministry, discipline, government, everything. Having Him, we have all and abound.

This is the real marrow and substance of our theory. Our one aim and object is to exalt the name of Jesus; and we believe He has been dishonored, in that which calls itself His house. He has been dethroned, and man's authority has been set up. In vain does He bestow a ministerial gift; the possessor of that gift dare not exercise it without the seal, the sanction, and the authority of man. And not only is this so, but if man thinks proper to give his seal, his sanction and authority to one possessing not a particle of spiritual gift -- yea, it may be, not a particle of spiritual life, he is, nevertheless, a recognized minister. In short, man's authority without Christ's gift, makes a man a minister; whereas Christ's gift, without man's authority does not. If this be not a dishonor done to the Lord Christ, what is?

Christian reader, pause here, and deeply ponder this principle of human authority. We confess we are anxious you should get to the root of it, and judge it thoroughly, in the light of holy scripture, and the presence of God. It is, be assured of it, the grand point of distinction between the assembly of God, and every human system of religion under the sun. If you look at all those systems, from Romanism down to the most refined form of religious association, you will find man's authority recognized and demanded. With that you may minister, without it you must not. On the contrary, in the assembly of God, Christ's gift alone makes a man a minister, apart from all human authority.

Not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead (Gal. 1:1).

This is the grand principle of ministry in the assembly of God.

Now, in classing Romanism with all the other religious systems of the day, let it, once for all, be distinctly understood that it is *only* in reference to the principle of ministerial authority. God forbid that we should think of comparing a system which shuts out the word of God, and teaches idolatry, the worship of saints and angels, and a whole mass of gross and abominable error and superstition, with those systems where the word of God is held up, and more or less of scriptural truth promulgated. Nothing can be further from our thoughts. We believe Popery to be Satan's master-piece, in the way of a religious system, although many of the people of God have been, and may yet be, involved therein.

Further, let us, at this stage, most clearly aver that we believe the saints of God are to be found in every Protestant community, both as ministers and members; and that the Lord uses them in many ways -- blesses their work, service, and personal testimony.

And, finally, we feel it right to declare that we would not move a finger to touch any one of those systems. It is not with the systems we have to do. The Lord will deal with them. Our business is with the saints in those systems, to seek, by every spiritual and scriptural agency, to get them out into their true position in the assembly of God.

Having said thus much, in order to prevent misunderstanding, we return, with increased power, to our principle, namely, that the thread of human authority runs through every religious system in Christendom, and that, in good truth, there is not a hair's breadth of consistent standing ground between the church of Rome and the assembly of God. We believe that an honest seeker after truth, setting out from amid the dark shadows of Popery, cannot possibly halt until he finds himself in the clear and blessed light of the

assembly of God. He may take years to travel over the intervening space. His steps may be slow and measured; but if only he follows the light, in simplicity and godly sincerity, he will find no rest between those two extremes. The assembly of God is the true place for all the children of God. Alas! they are not all there; but this is only their loss and their Lord's dishonor. They should be there because not only is God there, but He is allowed to act and *rule* there.

This latter is of all-importance, inasmuch as it may be truly said, Is not God everywhere? And does He not act in various places? True, He is everywhere, and He works in the midst of palpable error and evil. But He is not allowed to *rule* in the systems of men, seeing that man's authority is really supreme, as we have already shown. And in addition to this, if the fact of God's converting and blessing souls in a system be a reason why we should be there, then we ought to be in the church of Rome, for how many have been converted and blessed in that awful system? Even in the recent revival, we have heard of persons being stricken in Roman Catholic chapels. What proves too much proves nothing at all, and hence no argument can be based on the fact of God's working in a place. He is Sovereign and may work where He pleases. We are to be subject to His authority and work where we are commanded. My Master may go where He pleases, but I must go where I am told.

But some may ask, "Is there no danger of incompetent men intruding their ministry upon the assembly of God? And in the event of this, where is the difference between that assembly and the systems of men?" We reply, assuredly there is very great danger. But then such a thing would be despite, not in virtue, of the principle. This makes all the difference. Alas! alas! we often see men, on their feet, in the midst of our assemblies whom common sense, to say nothing of spirituality, would keep in their seats. We have often sat and gazed, in astonishment, at some whom we have heard attempting to minister in the assembly. We have often thought that the assembly has been looked upon by a certain class of ignorant men, fond of hearing themselves talk, as a sphere in which they might easily figure, without the pains of school and college work.²⁴

All this is most terrible and most humiliating. Let no one imagine that, while we contend for the truth of the assembly of God, we are, at all, ignorant or forgetful of the dangers and trials to which that assembly is exposed. Far from it. No one could be for twenty-eight years on that ground, without being painfully conscious of the difficulty of maintaining it. But then the very trials,

24. {There are gifted men, able ministers of the Word, who have not been to college. It is a question of gift, and profitable ministry, not of formal learning.}

dangers, and difficulties only prove to be so many proofs -- painful if you please, but proofs of the truth of the position; and were there no remedy but an appeal to human authority -- a setting up of man in Christ's place -- a return to worldly systems, we should, without hesitation, pronounce the remedy to be far worse than the disease. For were we to adopt the remedy, we should have the very worst symptoms of the disease, not to be mourned over as disease, but gloried in as the fruits of so called order.

But, blessed be God, there is a remedy. What is it? "*There am I* in their midst." This is enough. It is not "There is a pope, a priest, a parson, or a president in their midst, at their head, in the chair, or in the pulpit." No thought of such a thing, from cover to cover of the New Testament. Even in the assembly at Corinth, where there was most grievous confusion and disorder, the inspired apostle never hints at such a thing as a human president, under any name whatsoever. "*God is the author of peace* in all the assemblies of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). God was there to keep order. They were to look to Him, not to a man, under any name. To set up man to keep order in God's assembly is sheer unbelief, and an open insult to the Divine Presence.

Now, we have been often asked to adduce scripture in proof of the idea of divine presidency in the assembly. We at once reply, "There am I"; and "God is the Author." On these two pillars, even had we no more, we can triumphantly build the glorious truth of divine presidency -- a truth which *must* deliver all, who receive and hold it from God, from every system of man, call it by what name you please. It is, in our judgment, impossible to recognize Christ as the center and sovereign ruler in the assembly, and continue to sanction the setting up of man. When once we have tasted the sweetness of being under Christ, we can never again submit to the servile bondage of being under man. This is not insubordination or impatience of control. It is only the utter refusal to bow to a false authority -- to sanction a sinful usurpation. The moment we see man usurping authority in that which calls itself the Church, we simply ask "Who are you?" and retire to a sphere where God alone is acknowledged. "But, then, there are errors, evils, and abuses even in this very sphere." Doubtless; but if there are, we have God to correct them. And, hence, if an assembly be troubled by the intrusion of ignorant and foolish men -- men who have never yet measured themselves in the presence of God -- men who boldly overleap the wide domain over which common sense, good taste, and moral propriety preside, and then vainly talk of being led by the Holy Ghost -- restless men who *will* be at something, and who keep the assembly in a continual state of nervous apprehension, not knowing what's to come next. Should any assembly be thus grievously afflicted, what should they do? Abandon the ground in impatience, chagrin and disappointment? Give all up

as a myth, a fable, an idle chimera? Go back to that from which they once came out? Alas! this is what some have done, thus proving that they never understood what they were doing, or, if they understood it, that they had not faith to pursue it. May the Lord have mercy upon such, and open their eyes that they may see from whence they have fallen, and get a true view of the assembly of God in contrast with the most attractive of the systems of men.

But what is the assembly to do when abuses creep in? Simply look to Christ as the Lord of His house. Own Him in His proper place. Bring the Name of Jesus to bear upon the abuse whatever it be. Will any say, this is not enough? Has it ever been tried and proved ineffectual? We do not, and cannot believe it.²⁵ And, most assuredly we can say, if the Name of Jesus is not enough, we shall never betake ourselves to man and his miserable order. We shall never, God being our helper, erase that peerless Name from the standard round which the Holy Ghost has convened us, to place the perishable name of a mortal in its stead.

We are fully aware of the immense difficulties and painful trials connected with the assembly of God. We believe its difficulties and trials are perfectly characteristic. There is nothing under the canopy of heaven that the devil hates as he hates the assembly of God. He will leave no stone unturned to oppose that assembly. We have seen this exemplified again and again. An evangelist may go to a place and preach the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus for the salvation of the soul, and he will have thousands hanging on his lips. Let the same man return, and, while he preaches the same Gospel, take another step and proclaim the all-sufficiency of that same Jesus for all the exigencies of an assembly of believers, and he will find himself opposed on all hands. Why is this? Because the devil hates the very feeblest expression of the assembly of God. You may see a town left for ages and generations to its dark and dull routine of religious formalism -- a dead people, gathering once a week, to hear a dead man go through a dead service, and all the rest of the week living in sin and folly. There is not a breath of life, not a leaf stirring. The devil likes it well. But let some one come and unfurl the standard of the Name of Jesus -- Jesus for the soul and Jesus for the assembly, and you will soon see a mighty change. The rage of Hell is excited, and the dark and dreadful tide of opposition rises.

25. {Concerning a pattern of unprofitable 'ministry' in the assembly, pastoral efforts having failed to produce in the offender a bowing to the Word of God, the *assembly* has the competency and responsibility to address the matter and rectify the intrusion against God's order, for God is not the author of disorder (1 Cor. 14:33) in His house. The assembly is not placed in helpless subjection to disorder, to the wilfulness of a pretender. Christ in the midst will, by the Spirit, guide the assembly in setting the matter right according to the Word.}

This, we most fully believe, is the true secret of many of the bitter attacks that have been recently made on those who occupy the ground of the assembly of God. No doubt, we have to mourn over many mistakes, errors, and failures. We have given much occasion to the adversary, by our follies and inconsistencies. We have been a poor blotted epistle, a faint and feeble witness, a flickering light. For all this, we have to be deeply humbled before our God. Nothing could be more unbecoming in us than pretension or assumption, or the putting forth of high sounding ecclesiastical titles or claims. The dust is our place. Yes, beloved brethren, the place of confession and self-judgment becomes us, in the presence of our God.

Still, we are not to let slip the glorious truth of the assembly of God because we have so shamefully failed in carrying it out, we are not to judge the truth by our exhibition of it, but to judge our exhibition by the truth. It is one thing to occupy divine ground, and another thing to carry ourselves properly thereon; and while it is perfectly right to judge our practice by our principles, yet truth is truth for all that, and we may rest assured that the devil hates the truth of the assembly. A mere handful of poor people, gathered in {“gathered together unto”} the name of Jesus, to break bread, is a thorn in the side of the devil. True it is that such an assembly evokes the wrath of men, inasmuch as it throws their office and authority overboard, and they cannot bear that. Yet, we believe the root of the whole matter will be found in Satan’s hatred of the special testimony which the assembly bears to the all-sufficiency of the Name of Jesus, for every possible need of the assembly of God.

This is a truly noble testimony, and we earnestly long to see it more faithfully carried out. We may fully count upon intense opposition. It will be with us as it was with the returned captives in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. We may expect to encounter many a Rehum and many a Sanballat. Nehemiah might have gone and built any other wall in the whole world but the wall of Jerusalem, and Sanballat would never have molested him. But to build the wall of Jerusalem was an unpardonable offence. And why? Just because Jerusalem was God’s earthly center, round which He will yet gather the restored tribes of Israel. This was the secret of the enemy’s opposition. And mark the affected contempt. “If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.” And yet Sanballat and his allies were not able to break it down. They might cause it to cease because of the Jew’s lack of faith and energy; but they could not break it down, when God would have it up. How like is this to the present moment! Sorely, there is nothing new under the sun. There is affected contempt, but real alarm. And oh! If those who are gathered in {“gathered together unto”} the Name of Jesus were only more true in heart to their blessed center, what testimony there would be! What power! What victory! How it would tell on all

around. "Where two or three are gathered together in {unto} my name, there am I" {Matt. 18:20}. There is nothing like this under the sun, be it ever so feeble and contemptible. The Lord be praised for raising up such a witness for Himself in these last days. May He greatly increase its effectiveness, by the power of the Holy Ghost!

3. We must, now, very briefly glance at our third point, namely, what is the power by which the assembly is gathered. Here, again, man and his doings are set aside. It is not man's will, choosing; nor man's reason, discovering; nor man's judgment, dictating; nor man's conscience, demanding; it is the Holy Ghost gathering souls to Jesus. As Jesus is the only center, so the Holy Ghost is the only gathering power. The one is as independent of man as the other. It is "where two or three are *gathered*." It does not say "where two or three are *met*." Persons may meet together round any center, on any ground, by any influence, and merely form a club, a society, an association, a community. But the Holy Ghost gathers souls to Jesus, on the ground of salvation; and this, wherever convened, is the assembly of God. It may not embrace all the saints of God in the locality, but it is really on the ground of the assembly of God, and nothing else is. It may consist of but "two or three," and there may be hundreds of christians in the various religious systems around; yet would the "two or three" be on the ground of the assembly of God.

This is a very simple truth. A soul led by the Holy Ghost will gather only to the Name of Jesus; and if we gather to aught else, be it a point of truth or some ordinance or another, we are not, in that matter, led by the Holy Ghost. It is not a question of life or salvation. Thousands are saved by Christ that do not own Him as their Center. They are gathered to some form of Church government, some favorite doctrine, some special ordinance, some gifted man. The Holy Ghost will never gather to any one of these. He gathers only to a risen Christ. This is true of the whole church of God upon earth; and each local assembly, wherever convened, should be the expression of the whole.

Now, the power of the assembly will, very much, depend upon the measure in which each member thereof {each member of the one body, for there is no other membership} is gathered, in integrity of heart, to the Name of Jesus. If I am gathered to a party holding peculiar opinions -- if I am attracted by the people, or by the teaching -- if, in a word, it be not the power of the Holy Ghost, leading me to the true center of God's assembly, I shall only prove a hindrance, a weight, a cause of weakness. I shall be to the assembly what a waster is to a candle, and instead of adding to the general light and usefulness, I shall do the very reverse.

All this is deeply practical. It should lead to much exercise of heart and

self-judgment as to what has drawn me to the assembly, and as to my ways therein. We are fully persuaded that the tone and testimony of the assembly have been greatly weakened by the presence of persons not understanding their position. Some present themselves there because they get teaching and blessing there which they cannot get anywhere else. Some come because they like the simplicity of the worship. Others come looking for love. None of these things are tip to the mark. We should be in the assembly simply because the Name of Jesus is the only standard set up there and the Holy Spirit has "gathered" us thereto.

No doubt, ministry is most precious, and we shall have it, in more or less power, where all is ordered aright. So also as to simplicity of worship, we are sure to be simple, and real, and true, when the Divine Presence is realized, and the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost fully owned and submitted to. And as to love, if we go *looking for it*, we shall surely be thoroughly disappointed; but if we are enabled to *cultivate* and *manifest it*, we shall be sure to get a great deal more than we expect or deserve. It will generally be found that those persons who are perpetually complaining of want of love in others, are utterly failing in love themselves; and, on the other hand, those who are really walking in love, will tell you that they receive ten thousand times more than they deserve. Let us remember that the best way to get water out of a dry pump is to pour a little water in. You may work at the handle until you are tired, and then go away in fretfulness and impatience, complaining of that horrible pump; whereas, if you would just pour in a little water, you would get in return a gushing stream to satisfy your utmost desire.

We have but little conception of what the assembly would be were each one distinctly led by the Holy Ghost, and gathered {together} *only* to Jesus. We should not then have to complain of dull, heavy, unprofitable, trying meetings. We should have no unhallowed intrusion of mere nature and its restless doings -- no *making* of prayer -- no talking for talking sake -- no hymn book seized to fill a gap. Each one would know his place, in the Lord's immediate presence -- each gifted vessel would be filled, fitted, and used by the Master's hand -- each eye would be directed to Jesus -- each heart occupied with Him. If a chapter were read, it would be the very voice of God. If a word were spoken, it would tell with power upon the heart. If prayer were offered, it would lead the soul into the very presence of God. If a hymn were sung, it would lift the spirit up to God, and be like sweeping the strings of the heavenly harp. We should have no ready-made sermons -- no teaching or preaching prayers, as though we would explain doctrines to God, or tell Him a whole host of things about ourselves -- no praying at our neighbors, or asking for all manner of graces for them in which we ourselves are lamentably deficient --

no singing for music sake, or getting out of temper if harmony be interfered with. All these evils would be avoided. We should feel ourselves in the very sanctuary of God, and enjoy a foretaste of that time when we shall worship in the courts above, and go no more out.

We may be asked, "Where will you find all this down here?" Ah! this is the question. It is one thing to present a *beau ideal* on paper, and another thing to realize it in the midst of error, failure, and infirmity. Through mercy, some of us have tasted, at times, a little of this blessedness. We have occasionally enjoyed moments of heaven upon earth. Oh! for more of it! May the Lord, in His great mercy, raise the tone of the assembly everywhere! May He greatly enlarge our capacity for more profound communion and spiritual worship! May He enable us so to walk, in private life, from day to day -- so to judge ourselves and our ways, in His holy presence, that, at least, we may not prove a lump of lead, or a waster to the assembly.

And, then, even though we may not be able to reach, in experience, the true idea of the assembly, yet let us never be satisfied with anything less. Let us honestly aim at the loftiest standard, and earnestly pray to be lifted up thereto. As to the *ground* of the assembly, we should hold it with jealous tenacity, and never consent, for an hour, to occupy any other. As to the tone and character of the assembly, they may and will vary immensely, and will depend upon the faith and spirituality of those gathered. Where the tone of things is felt to be low -- when meetings are felt to be unprofitable -- where things are said and done, repeatedly, which are felt by the spiritual to be wholly out of place, let all who feel it wait on God -- wait continually -- wait believingly, and He will, assuredly, hear and answer. In this way, the very trials and exercises which are peculiar to the assembly of God, will have the happy effect of casting us more immediately upon Him, and thus the eater will yield meat, and the strong, sweetness. We must count upon trials and difficulties in the assembly, just because it is *the* right and *only* divine thing on this earth. The devil will put forth every effort to drive us from that true and holy ground. He will try the patience, try the temper, hurt the feelings, cause offence in nameless and numberless ways -- anything and everything to make us forsake the assembly.

It is well to remember this. We can only hold the divine ground by faith. This marks the assembly of God, and distinguishes it from every human system. You cannot get on there save by faith. And, further, if you want to be somebody, if you are seeking a place, if you want to exalt *self*, you need not think of the assembly. You will soon find your level there, if it be, in any measure, what it should be. Fleshly or worldly greatness, in any shape, will be of no account in the assembly of God. The Divine Presence withers up

everything of that kind, and levels all human pretension. Finally, you cannot get on in the assembly if you are living in secret sin. The Divine Presence will not suit you. Have we not often experienced in the assembly a feeling of uneasiness caused by the recollection of many things which had escaped our notice during the week? Wrong thoughts -- foolish words -- unspiritual ways -- all these things crowd in upon the mind, and exercise the conscience, in the assembly! How is this? Because the atmosphere of the assembly is more intense than that which we have been breathing during the week. We have not been in the presence of God in our private walk. We have not been judging ourselves; and hence when we take our place in a spiritual assembly, our hearts are detected -- our ways are exposed, in the light; and that exercise which ought to have gone on in private -- even the needed exercise of self-judgment, must go on at the table of the Lord. This is poor miserable work for us, but it proves the power of the presence of God in the assembly. Things must be in a miserably low state in the assembly when hearts are not thus detected and exposed. It is a fine evidence of spiritual power in the assembly when careless, carnal, worldly, self-exalting, money-loving, unprincipled persons are driven out by the very intensity of the atmosphere. The assembly of God is no place for such. They can breathe more freely outside.

Now, we cannot but judge that numbers that have departed from the ground of the assembly have done so because their practical ways did not comport with the purity of the place. No doubt it is easy, in all such cases to find an excuse in the conduct of those who are left behind. But if the *roots* of things were, in every case, laid bare, we should find that many leave the assembly because of inability or reluctance to bear its searching light. "Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever." Evil *must* be judged, for God cannot sanction it. If an assembly can, it is not God's assembly at all, though composed of christians, as we say. To pretend to be an assembly of God, and not judge false doctrine and evil ways, would involve the blasphemy of saying that God and wickedness can dwell together. The assembly of God must keep itself pure because it is His dwelling-place. Men may sanction evil, and call it liberality and large-heartedness so to do ; but the house of God must keep itself pure. Let this great practical truth sink down into our hearts, and produce its sanctifying influence upon our course and character.

4. A very few words will suffice to set forth, in the last place, "The authority" on which God's assembly is gathered. It is the Word of God alone. The charter of the assembly is the eternal Word of the living and true God. It is not the traditions, the doctrines, nor the commandments of men. A passage of

scripture to which we have more than once referred, in the progress of this paper, contains, at once, the standard round which the assembly is gathered, the power by which it is gathered, and the authority by which it is gathered -- "The Name of Jesus" -- "The Holy Ghost" -- "The word of God."

* * * * *

Now these are the same all over the world. Whether I go to New Zealand, to Australia, to Canada, to London, to Paris, to Edinburgh or Dublin, the center, the gathering power, and the authority are one and the same. We can own no other center but Christ; no gathering energy but the Holy Ghost ; no authority but the Word of God; no characteristic but holiness of life and soundness in doctrine.

Such is the assembly of God, and we cannot acknowledge aught else. Saints of God we can acknowledge, love and honor as such wherever we find them ; but human systems we look upon as dishonoring to Christ, and hostile to the true interest of the saints of God. We long to see all christians on the true ground of the assembly. We believe it to be the place of real blessing and effective testimony. We believe there is a character of testimony yielded by the assembly which could not be yielded were that assembly broken up and each member a Whitefield in evangelistic power. We say this not to lower evangelistic work. God forbid. We would that all were Whitefields. But then we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that many affect to despise the assembly, under the plea of going out as evangelists; and when we trace their path and examine the results of their work, we find that they have no provision for the souls that have been converted by their means. They seem not to know what to do with them. They quarry the stones, but do not build them together. The consequence is that souls are scattered hither and thither, some pursuing a desultory course, others living in isolation, all at fault as to true church ground.

Now, we believe that all these should find their place in the assembly of God. They should be added to the assembly, to have "fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayer." They should "come together on the first day of the week, to break bread" {Acts 20:7}, looking to the Lord Christ to edify them by the mouth of whom He will. This is the simple path -- the normal, the divine idea, needing, it may be, more faith to realize it, because of the clashing and conflicting sects of the present day, but not the less simple and true on that account.

We are aware, of course, that all this will be pronounced proselytizing, prejudice, and party spirit, by those who seem to regard it as the very *beau ideal* of christian liberality and large-heartedness to be able to say, "I belong to nothing." Strange, anomalous position! It just resolves itself in this: it is *somebody* professing *nothingism* in order to get rid of all responsibility, and go

with all and everything. This is a very easy path for nature, and amiable nature, but we shall see what will come of it in the day of the Lord. Even now we regard it as positive unfaithfulness to Christ, from which may the good Lord deliver His people.

But let none imagine that we want to place the evangelist and the assembly in opposition. Nothing is further from our thoughts. The evangelist should go forth from the bosom of the assembly, in full fellowship therewith; he should work not only to gather souls to Christ, but also into the assembly, where divinely-gifted pastors might watch over them, and divinely-gifted teachers instruct them. We do not want to clip the evangelist's wings, but only to guide his movements. We are unwilling to see real spiritual energy expended in desultory service. No doubt, it is a grand result to bring souls to Christ. Every soul linked to Jesus is a work done for ever. But ought not the lambs and sheep to be gathered and cared for? Would anyone be satisfied to purchase sheep and then leave them to wander whithersoever they will? Surely not. But whither should Christ's sheep be gathered? Is it into the folds of man's erection, or into the assembly of God? Into the latter, unquestionably; for that, we may rest assured, however feeble, however despised, however blackened and maligned, is the place for all the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ.

Here, however, there will be responsibility, care, anxiety, labor, a constant demand for watchfulness and prayer; all of which flesh and blood would like to avoid, if possible. There is much that is agreeable and attractive in the idea of going through the world as an evangelist, having thousands hanging on one's lips, and hundreds of souls as the seals of one's ministry; but what is to be done with these souls? By all means show them their true place in the assembly of God, where, notwithstanding the ruin and apostasy of the professing body, they can enjoy spiritual communion, worship, and ministry. This will involve much trial and painful exercise. It was so in apostolic times. Those who really cared for the flock of Christ had to shed many a tear, send up many an agonizing prayer, spend many a sleepless night. But then, in all these things, they tasted the sweetness of fellowship with the chief Shepherd; and, when He appears, their tears, their prayers, their sleepless nights will be remembered and rewarded; while the false shepherds who ruthlessly seize the pastoral staff only to use it as an instrument of cruelty against the sheep, and of filthy gain to themselves, shall have their faces covered with everlasting confusion.

Here we might close, were it not that we are anxious to answer three queries which may possibly suggest themselves to the reader's mind.

And, in the first place, we maybe asked, "Where are we to find this thing that you call 'The assembly of God,' from the days of the apostles up to the nineteenth century? And where are we to find it now?" Our answer is simply this:

"Both then and now we find 'The assembly of God' in the pages of the New Testament." It matters but little to us if Neander, Mosheim, Milner, and scores of ecclesiastical historians besides have failed, in their interesting researches, in discerning a single trace of the true idea of God's assembly, from the close of the apostolic era to the opening of the current century {1800}. It is quite possible there may have been, here and there amid the thick gloom of the middle ages, "Two or three" really "gathered in the Name of Jesus"; or, at least, those that sighed after the truth of such a thing. But, be this as it may, it leaves that truth wholly untouched. It is not on the records of historians that we build, but on the infallible truth of God's Word: and, therefore, although it could be proved that, for eighteen hundred years, there were not even "Two or three gathered in the Name of Jesus," it would not in the smallest degree affect the question. The word is not, "What saith the ecclesiastical historian?" but, "What saith the Scripture."

If there be any force in the argument founded on history, it would apply, equally, to the precious institution of the Lord's Supper. For how did it fare with that ordinance for over a thousand years? It was stripped of one of its grand elements, wrapped in a dead language, buried in a sepulcher of superstition, and bore this inscription, "A bloodless sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead." And even when, at the time of the Reformation, the Bible was once more permitted to speak to man's conscience, and pour its living light upon the sepulcher in which the Eucharist lay buried, what was produced? Under what form does the Lord's Supper appear before us in the Lutheran Church? Under the form of consubstantiation. Luther denied that there was any change of the bread and wine *into* the body and blood of Christ; but he maintained, and that, too, in fierce and unbending opposition to the Swiss divines, that there was a mysterious presence of Christ *with* the bread and wine.

Well, then, should we not have the Lord's Supper celebrated, in our midst, according to the order laid down in the New Testament? Ought we to lend our countenance to the sacrifice of the mass, or consubstantiation, because the true idea of the Eucharist seems to have been lost to the professing Church for so many ages? Surely not. What are we to do? Take the New Testament and see what it says on the point -- bow in reverend submission to its authority -- spread the Lord's Table, in its divine simplicity, and celebrate the feast according to the order laid down by our Lord and Master who said to His disciples, and therefore to us, "This do, in remembrance of Me."

But, again, we may be asked, "Is it not worse than useless to seek to carry out the true idea of the assembly of God, seeing that the professing church is in such complete ruin?" We reply by asking, "Are we to be disobedient because the church is in ruin? Are we to continue in error because the dispensation has failed?" Surely not. We own the ruin, mourn over it, confess it, take our share

in it, and in its sad consequences, seek to walk softly and humbly in the midst of it, confessing ourselves to be most unfaithful and unworthy. But though we have failed Christ has not failed. He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself. He has promised to be with His people to the end of the age. Matt. 18:20, holds as good, to-day, as it did eighteen hundred years ago. "Let God be true and every man a liar." We utterly repudiate the idea of men setting about church-making, or pretending to ordain ministers. We look upon it as a pure assumption, without a single shadow of scripture authority. It is God's work to gather a church and raise up ministers. We have no business to form ourselves into a church or to ordain office bearers. No doubt, the Lord is very gracious, tender and pitiful. He bears with our weakness, and overrules our mistakes, and where the heart is true to Him, even though in ignorance, He will assuredly lead on into higher light.

But we must not use God's grace as a plea for unscriptural acting, no more than we should use the church's ruin as a plea for sanctioning error. We have to confess the ruin, count on the grace, and act in simple obedience to the word of the Lord. Such is the path of blessing at all times. The remnant, in the days of Ezra, did not pretend to the power and splendor of Solomon's days, but they obeyed the word of Solomon's Lord, and they were abundantly blessed in their deed. They did not say "Things are in ruin, and therefore we had better remain in Babylon, and do nothing." No, they simply confessed their own and their people's sin, and counted on God. This is precisely what we are to do. We are to own the ruin and count on God.

Finally, if we be asked, "Where is this assembly of God, now?" We reply, "Where two or three are gathered in {gathered together unto} the Name of Jesus." This is the assembly of God. And be it carefully noted, that in order to reach divine results, there must be divine conditions. To lay claim to the latter without the former, is only an empty conceit. If we are not really gathered in the Name of Jesus, we have no right to expect that He will be in our midst; and if He be not in our midst, our assembly will be a poor affair. But it is our happy privilege to be assembled in such wise as to enjoy His blessed presence amongst us: and having Him, we do not need to set up a poor mortal to preside over us. Christ is Lord of His own house; let no mortal dare to usurp His place. When the assembly is convened for worship, God presides in their midst, and if He be fully owned, the current of communion, worship, and edification will flow on without a ripple and without a curve.²⁶ All will be in lovely harmony. But if the flesh be

26. We must remember there is a very material difference between those occasions on which the assembly is gathered {together} for worship, and the special services of Brethren. In these latter the evangelist or the teacher -- the preacher or the lecturer -- serves in his individual capacity, in responsibility to his Lord. Nor does it make any difference whether such services are conducted in the Rooms usually occupied by the assembly or elsewhere. The members of the assembly may

(continued...)

suffered to act, it will grieve and quench the Spirit, and spoil everything. Flesh must be judged in the assembly of God, just as it should be judged in our individual walk from day to day. But we have to remember that errors and failures in the assembly are no more to be used as arguments against the truth of the Divine Presence there, than are our individual failures and errors to be used against the admitted truth of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the believer.

“Are you the people, then?” Some one may say. Well, the question is not, Are we the people? But are we on divine ground? If we are not, the sooner we abandon our position the better. That there is a divine ground, notwithstanding all the darkness and confusion, will hardly be denied. God has not left His people under the necessity of abiding in connection with error and evil. And how are we to know whether we are on divine ground or not? Simply by the divine word. Let us honestly and seriously test everything with which we stand connected by the standard of scripture, and, if it cannot abide the trial, let us abandon it at once. Yes, at once. If we pause to reason or weigh consequences, we shall surely miss our way. Pause, certainly, to make yourself sure of the mind of the Lord; but never pause to reason, when once you have ascertained it. The Lord never gives light for two steps at a time. He gives us light, and, when we act on that, He gives us more.

The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth *more and more*, unto the perfect day.

Precious, soul-stirring motto! “More and more.” There is no halting -- no standing still--no resting in attainment. It is “more and more” until we are ushered into the full-orbed light of the perfect day of glory.

Reader, are you on this divine ground? If so, cling to it with your whole soul. Are you in this path? If so, press on, with all the energies of your moral being. Never be content with anything short of His dwelling in you, and your conscious nearness to Him. Let not Satan rob you of your proper portion by leading you to rest in a mere name. Let him not tempt you to mistake your ostensible position for your real condition. Cultivate secret communion -- secret prayer -- constant self-judgment. Be especially on your guard against every form of spiritual pride. Cultivate lowliness, meekness, and brokenness of spirit, tenderness of conscience in your own private walk. Seek to combine the sweetest grace toward others with the boldness of a lion where truth is concerned. Then will you be a blessing in the assembly of God, and an effective witness of the all-sufficiency of the Name of

26. (...continued)

be present or not as they feel disposed. But when the assembly, as such, is gathered {together} for worship, for one man, however gifted, to assume a place, would be to quench the Spirit. {He has used the word “member” in a conventional manner here. Earlier, he had correctly pointed out that membership is only in the body of Christ. So, we are not members of a local assembly.}

Jesus.

C. H. M.

Unity: What Is It?

And

Am I Confessing It?

(Read, before Lecture, Lev. 24, and Eph. 4:4.)

By C. H. Mackintosh

I suppose, beloved brethren, there is not one of us, whatever may have been our experience, whether our course has been long or short, who is not impressed with the unspeakable importance of having the truth of God distinctly before us, and not only before our minds, but in our hearts, as a divine reality -- something influential and formative -- a living link between our souls and the living God, not merely as to the question of individual salvation, infinitely precious as that is, but as to the path we are called to tread, and the position that we occupy as Christians.

As you get along, beloved brethren, you must be discovering that nothing stands, but having the truth of God in your own hearts, and holding it directly from Him, no matter who may be the instrument in communicating it to you. You must be able to give a reason, not only for the hope that is in you, but for the path which you tread, the niche which you fill -- you must be able to give a divine reason for all, or else you will not be able to stand. Never was the truth of this more apparent than at the present moment, because, as we all know, people are being tested; there is a testing and a sifting going on in the professing church, and in our own very midst, brethren, which most of you may feel. No doubt some of us may be called to feel it more than others, but the most cursory observer cannot fail to see this, that the sieve is doing its work in the professing church, and doing its work amongst ourselves, and that it is being made manifest, in the most striking manner, who has been really taught of God, and who has been merely hanging on to something of his own, or blindly following in the wake of his fellow. It has been made manifest, brethren, whether our faith is set in the wisdom of men or in the power of God. Second-hand faith is being proved and found lacking. It cannot stand in the day of trial. We must have to do, each for himself, with the living God.

Now in the whole of what I have to say, there is one thing which I believe the Spirit of God has laid upon my heart to impress upon you, beloved -- and you know I always speak in the utmost confidence and freedom, and I feel assured

you will receive it in the same manner. I feel then, brethren, that the Spirit of God would have me impress first of all upon you the importance of having your faith standing *only in the power of God*; that no matter what may be the measure of it -- it may be very small or it may be very large -- it does not matter what the measure is, the point is that your fixed stay must be in the wisdom and the power of God, so that if you had not a second person to support you, if you had not the sympathy of another individual, you at least possess the blessed consciousness that God has communicated to your soul truth which you hold from Him, and which is the spring of all your authority, the ground of your confidence, and the true secret of your power.

A saint once said, when passing through a time of deepest exercise, he was brought to ask himself this question, and to ask it in all solemnity, in all godly simplicity,

If the whole world and church were gone, is the word of God sufficient as a thread to take me across the abyss?

That is the question, my brethren, and that question I will suggest at the outset to every one of you, from the oldest to the youngest. I see before me saints of God who were such long before the one who is speaking to them, and I see before me saints of God of perhaps a few days' or a few weeks' standing, but the principle I am now urging upon you is a principle of cardinal importance; it is a principle of unspeakable value; it is what I would urge upon you; and if I do nothing else than to urge and re-urge and rivet home this principle on your souls, I shall feel that I have not spoken in vain. The question is this -- Can you say when you are all alone,

The word of God is quite sufficient for me, if both world and church were gone; is it quite sufficient as a thread to take me across the abyss?

Now, that is the point. Can you say that, beloved? I pause and put this question to you, as in the very presence of our one Lord and Master, Have you such a sense of the value and authority of the word of God; have you got such a sense of the reality of this truth, this revelation which God has given you, that, though you had not a second person to support you, you could say, "That is quite enough for me?"

Of course you will tell me, beloved, that it is only the Spirit that can enable you to appreciate and grasp and hold that word. Quite so; but I am speaking now of the value of the word of God; and never, I am persuaded, was there a moment in the history of the church of God on earth, when it was so distinctly necessary that your souls, my beloved brethren, should be rooted and grounded, established and braced up in the knowledge of this fact, that you have in the word of God all that you can possibly want -- the word of God as brought home by the Spirit to your hearts.

Now some of you may be disposed to ask,

What have these introductory remarks to do with the scripture that has been read?

Or perhaps you may ask,

What is your subject? What is your message?

Well, beloved brethren, I tell you at once, my thesis is this -- The unity of the church of God as stated in Eph. 4:4. And then again, if any feel disposed to ask,

What has the 24th of Leviticus to do with the unity of the church of God?

I reply, It has to do with it in this way. I read the 24th of Leviticus with the purpose of illustrating to you, brethren, from the history of Israel, and the unity of the nation of Israel, the deeper truth of the unity of the one body, and it is my object now to set before you the fact of the unity of God's Israel, His earthly people, as an illustration, as a type, if you please, of the higher unity of the church of God.

Now in this passage of the 24th of Leviticus, what have you got? You have one of the most expressive and beautiful figures that can possibly engage the spiritual mind; you have in those twelve loaves ranged upon the golden table before the Lord, the distinct figure of the indissoluble unity and yet the perfect distinctness of Israel's twelve tribes. Now there is a grand truth -- the perfect distinctness and yet the indissoluble unity of Israel's twelve tribes, and you may have noticed -- I do not think you could have avoided noticing -- the frequent occurrence in this chapter of the words "continual, perpetual, everlasting." Again and again these words occur in reading this passage. What do they mean, beloved brethren? They mean this, that the unity of God's people Israel was not a thing of to-day or to-morrow; it was a grand verity, an eternal truth of God foreshadowed in those twelve loaves on the golden table, before the Lord.

Oh what a type, brethren, what a presentation! And, further, as to the intention of this passage, you may perhaps feel disposed to ask another question, "What has that paragraph about the stoning of the blasphemer to do with all this?" I believe it has a great deal to do with it, beloved brethren. I believe that the grouping of this passage by the Holy Ghost is striking, forcible and instructive. In the stoning of the blasphemer you have that which might be the fate of the nation under the governmental dealings of God; but, at the same time, in those twelve loaves on the golden table, you have the eternal truth as to the nation's condition in God's view -- that looked at from God's stand point the nation was ONE whatever might be its condition, as viewed from man's stand point. I repeat it, beloved -- looked at from God's stand point, looked at in the light of those seven golden lamps which in other words was the *expression* of the light and testimony of the Holy Ghost, based upon and connected with the pet feet work of

Christ, Israel is ONE, the nation is one; there are twelve tribes maintained in the unity although, as I have said, in the governmental dealings of God, and looked at from man's stand point, the nation may be suffering the penalty of their sin. In a word, however the nation of Israel may be scattered, and broken, and crushed, in man's view, it is in God's view in God's eternal counsels -- and in the view of faith one and indivisible. To deny this is to call in question the integrity of the truth of God. If we can play fast and loose with scripture as to one point, we may do so as to all.

And now I will give a few illustrations of the way in which faith laid hold of and acted upon this grand truth.

Turn with me for an instance to the 18th chapter of the first book of Kings. I shall not ask you to read the passage, but have your Bibles open there. It is familiar, I am sure, to all. The scene is upon the top of Carmel. It is a scene in the history of Elijah the Tishbite, perfectly familiar to all, but I want you to look at it for one special object. I want you to look at it as an illustration of the power of faith in that great truth of the unity of Israel's twelve tribes.

I feel sure that you have often read of Elijah's building his altar of twelve stones. Every Sunday school child has read it; but I confess to you, beloved brethren, that, often as one has read the passage, it has lately shone before the vision of my soul with a brighter luster than I have ever seen before. I ask myself this question, Why did Elijah build an altar of twelve stones? What was his authority for that? What was it, shall I say, that nerved his arm to the act? He was standing in the presence of eight hundred false prophets, he was standing in the presence of all the power of Jezebel, and in the presence of ruin and apostasy. The ten tribes were separated from the two. There was a rent made in the nation, looked at from man's stand point, but Elijah stands upon Mount Carmel, and he looks at that nation in the vision of GOD, and with the eye of *faith*. He does not reason; he does not say,

It is no use now my taking this lofty stand, it is no use my attempting to build an altar with twelve stones now. The day is gone by for that. I must lower the standard according to the practical condition of things around me. It was well and perfectly consistent for a Joshua or a Solomon to build such an altar, but it would only be a piece of folly on my part. It is the height of presumption to be talking about an altar of twelve stones when the ten tribes and the two are divided, and when the whole scene is plunged in ruin.

No, my brethren, Elijah did not reason thus; he took his stand on the imperishable ground of faith. Elijah placed his foot where I want every child of God to place his foot -- that is, on the indestructible revelation of God. I want you to read this act in the light which emanates from the seven golden candlesticks, and in the light which emanates from that golden table in the sanctuary of God. I want you,

my beloved brethren, to see that the words “continual, perpetual, everlasting” are stamped upon the whole of the history of God’s truth and His thoughts respecting Israel. Elijah knew nothing of the principle so rife in this our day, “It is no use talking about the unity of the church of God.” You see a sneer of contempt and unbelief upon the lips of people when you talk about the unity of the body of Christ. Persons will shrug their shoulders and say,

Do not talk to me about the unity of the body. It is a thing of the past. It is a bygone thing. Don’t talk to me about the unity of the church. Where is it to be seen? Where is it developed? Where is it illustrated?

Beloved brethren, bring yourselves back in thought for a moment, and stand beside that man of faith on the top of Carmel, and ask yourselves, Where are the twelve tribes? It might, with equal force, have been said to Elijah the Tishbite,

Do not talk to me about the unity of the nation. It is a thing of the past. It no longer exists. It is the height of presumption to think of building an altar of twelve stones in the face of a divided people -- a broken unity.

But what weight would such suggestions have had with our prophet? None whatever. He looked at the nation from a divine standpoint, and therefore he erected his altar of twelve stones

according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name.

Now, the question is, How long was Israel to be the name, and how long was Israel’s unity to subsist? Continually, perpetually, everlastingly. Here Elijah took his stand.

And mark further, beloved, what I think is of unspeakable importance. It was not a mere speculation of Elijah’s mind. It was not an inoperative dogma, an uninfluential opinion which he held. Elijah might have held the truth of Israel’s unity as a cold theory, in the region of his intellect; he might very comfortably have gone on, and said in his heart,

I believe in the unity of the nation of Israel, but I am not going to confess it. There is no manifestation of it, and, therefore, I am not going to bring it forward; I am not going to take, as it were, my stand upon it. I am not going to carry it out.

But this would never do. Elijah justly felt that if the unity of the twelve tribes was a grand truth, then it must, at all cost, be carried out, and hence he did carry it out. How? By building an altar of twelve stones,

according to the number of the tribes of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name.

Faith could never give that up. It was a great practical truth -- to be owned and acted upon, in the face of ten thousand difficulties, and ten thousand foes. Elijah

could not lower the standard the breadth of a hair. He could not surrender the truth of God to be trampled under foot by the priests and prophets of Baal. He felt that the sacrifice which he was about to offer to the God of Israel could only be presented on an altar of twelve stones. *This was faith.*

And here I pause, that your souls may dwell upon this, because it really demands our deepest attention. It is not a mere matter of opinion to be taken up or laid down at our pleasure. People speak of holding the doctrine of the mystical unity of the body of Christ; but there is no truth that is not designed to be practical, no truth that is not designed to have an influence on the heart and life. This is very manifest in Elijah's case. The unity of the twelve tribes was to him a grand reality; it was something which he felt bound to confess in the presence of Baal's eight hundred prophets, ²⁷ and in the presence of Jezebel and her persecutions. He did not hide the truth under a bushel, or under a bed; but confessed it openly and boldly before men and devils. He built an altar of twelve stones, and, by so doing, he expressed his lively faith in that grand truth, namely, the eternal unity of the nation of Israel.

And mark, if he had not done that, he would have been lowering the standard of God's truth to be trampled in the dust by the prophets of Baal. This he could not do. God's truth was a sacred thing. And not only so, but it was and is formative and influential. So the prophet felt, and so he acted. And we are safe in asserting that if he had not built the altar of twelve stones, the fire of God would not have fallen upon the sacrifice. That fire was the expression of the divine approval. It was like the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle of old, and the temple afterward, when all had been done according to the divine command. Beloved brethren, what a sublime spectacle for the heart to gaze upon! It is perfectly magnificent to see Elijah the prophet unfurling the standard in the presence of those eight hundred false prophets, and to read on that standard, in imperishable characters, the truth of the unity of the nation of Israel.

There is a moral grandeur about it that captivates the heart. And more than that -- for that would be a small thing -- there is moral power in it to *sustain* your hearts and mine in the confession of that higher truth of the unity of the body of Christ, in the very face of the sneer of unbelief, in the face of all the contempt and ridicule which we may have to encounter in seeking to carry out that precious truth,

There is one body and one Spirit {Eph. 4:3}.

But here allow me to ask you, brethren, Do you think that Elijah had no heart

27. {Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of the Asherah: 1 Kings 18:19.}

to feel that the ten tribes and the two were divided? Do you suppose for a moment that with all the sublimity of that spectacle presented to us on Mount Carmel, he had no tears to shed over the ruin and desolation around him? Ah! no. Take another look at the prophet, and see him -- where? See him prostrate before God, his head down between his knees, down in the very dust. Waiting -- waiting upon God for what? Till a cloud should appear, a harbinger of blessing flowing forth from the exhaustless treasure-house of God, who, in spite of all the unfaithfulness of his people, is always ready to answer faith where it exists. Faith owns the ruin, bows low under the sense of it, yet rises above it and counts on God, who never fails a trusting heart.

I shall now ask you to turn with me to the 29th chapter of the second book of Chronicles. Take one clause in the 24th verse of that chapter, which contains the same principle. "For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for" -- whom? For Judah and Benjamin? No. For "*all Israel*." Here we have the same principle. Here you have Hezekiah taking his stand upon the same lofty ground that Elijah had occupied in his day. The ten tribes were divided from the two. Jotham and Ahaz had been doing their work, and things had gone from bad to worse. But here is Hezekiah doing the same thing as Elijah, and acting in the same faith. It is not a question of the measure of intelligence -- that is not the point; but, beloved brethren, it is one of the most precious features of the subject that is before us to-night that it is a question of simple faith in the truth of Israel's perfect unity before the eye of God. It is simple faith gazing on those precious words which shine like gems in Lev. 24: "*A perpetual statute*," "*An everlasting covenant*." It is not a question here of Israel's conduct towards God. That assuredly has its place and its importance. But we are not speaking now of man's deserts, but of God's dealings -- not of Israel's failure, but of Jehovah's faithfulness. It is our holy privilege to stand in the sanctuary of God, and gaze with the eye of faith on those twelve loaves on the pure table beneath the seven lamps of the golden candlestick -- type of the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

And what does that testimony set forth? This, most distinctly, that all through the dark and gloomy watches of the nation's night the twelve tribes are before the eye of God in their perfect unity, undisturbed by all the heavings, and tossings, and surgings of the nations. The blasphemer may have to be stoned outside the camp; the governmental dealings of God may be displayed in all their stern reality; but faith sees the twelve loaves on the golden table. Faith has to do with eternal realities. It endures as seeing Him who is invisible. It looks at things within the veil. It makes God its significant figure, and is in nowise moved by outward appearances. In a word, faith knows God, and can trust Him for everything. Faith is the knowledge of God, it is

confidence in God -- this is faith. Ah, what a reality, beloved brethren! I earnestly beseech you, as in the presence of God -- I beseech every one of you to get hold of what this is, this simple faith in God, that will carry your soul through all sorts of circumstances, the same faith that sustained Elijah on the top of Carmel, the same faith that enabled Hezekiah to command that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for "all Israel" -- that is to say, the sacrifice which was to be the foundation of all the nation's hopes, the sacrifice which was in its aspect to embrace the whole Israel of God.

And now, in reference to the actings of the good king Hezekiah, let us see how his faith was regarded; let us mark how he was treated when he sought, according to his measure, to carry out practically the truth of God. For be it well remembered, Hezekiah did not rest satisfied with offering the sacrifice for "all Israel." He not merely established the ground on which God's people might gather, but he sought to gather them thereon. And observe how he did this.

So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the *Lord God of Israel* at Jerusalem: *for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.*

So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout *all Israel* and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, *Ye children of Israel*, turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and *enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever*: and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again to the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him (2 Chron. 30:5-9).

This, if rightly viewed, was a most touching and powerful appeal. Hezekiah takes the highest ground, and would have others to do the same. He was himself consciously on God's ground, and he would have others to occupy it with him. His eye rested on the God of Abraham -- on the land of Israel -- on Jerusalem -- and on the whole nation of God's people. It might, and doubtless did, in the judgment of many, savor of presumption in Hezekiah to put forth such very lofty language, to speak as if he and those with him were alone right, and all their brethren wrong. But that would entirely depend upon the

spirit in which the letter was received and read. To pride and self-sufficiency such an appeal would be absolutely intolerable; but where there was true contrition and humility it would be received with a hearty approval. Thus, in fact, it proved, as we read in the scripture before us.

So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but *they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them*. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun *humbled themselves*, and came to Jerusalem.

This, brethren, is just as it will ever be. Faith and its actings will be laughed at by those who are on false ground, those who are walking in the sparks of their own kindling. But the broken and contrite heart gets the blessing which ever flows from taking God at His word, and acting on His eternal truth. Those who humbly bowed to Hezekiah's appeal gathered themselves together on God's ground, and owned God's center. They did not say,

It is vain to take such lofty ground in the face of the nation's actual condition. It is the height of folly and presumption for Hezekiah to attempt to carry out such principles amid the hopeless ruin of the dispensation.

No; they "humbled themselves," and came up to Jerusalem. In true humility of mind they gathered themselves together to carry out God's object -- namely, to keep the passover.

And what was the result? Were they disappointed? Did the issue prove them to be mere visionary enthusiasts who were acting on some silly chimera of Hezekiah, or some wild imagination of their own minds? Ah! no; they were permitted to taste as rich blessing as ever was known in the nation's brightest and palmiest days.

The children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness . . . And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven (2 Chron. 30:21-27).

Here, then, was the answer of God to the faith of Hezekiah, for He never

disappoints a heart that counts on Him. These fourteen joyous days, spent by the congregation around the paschal feast, furnished the most ample proof of the reality of counting on the living God, spite of all the failure and ruin which ever mark the history of man and his ways.

Since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.

God can fill the hearts of His people with joy and thanksgiving and praise, though all around be characterized by confusion and desolation.

And, be it remembered -- yea, let it never be forgotten -- that all this joy and blessing may well comport with the deepest sense of the failure and unfaithfulness of man. Indeed they will ever be found in company. Thus, in Hezekiah's case, we see him most fully recognizing the true practical condition of the nation. This is seen in the fact of their keeping the passover in the second month instead of the first.

Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month and the priests and the Levites were ashamed and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the Lord.

Here we observe the congregation availing themselves of grace as set forth in Num. 9:10-12. This was in lovely moral order. Faith always recognizes the true condition of things, but counts on the ample provisions of divine grace. Hezekiah felt that the people were not up to the divine standard, but he knew that the grace of God could meet them where they were, provided only they took their true place; hence he prayed for them, saying,

The good Lord pardon *every one that prepareth his heart* to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

Thus it was in Hezekiah's day, and thus it is now. There was the confession of human failure, and yet the grasping of divine faithfulness. If Israel was not in a condition to keep the passover in the first month, God could bless them in the second month. Though Israel's condition was not up to the standard of God, yet the grace of God could come down to the condition of Israel. The second month most surely was not the first, but if only there was true preparation of heart, God could bless in the one as well as in the other. There is no use in assuming to be what we are not. We must take our true place, and God can meet us there, according to what He is in Himself. Thus it is that faith mounts up to God, and lays hold of those things that are according to His infallible faithfulness.

Hence, then -- to apply our illustration -- I read in the fourth chapter of

the epistle to the Ephesians that

there is one body,

and I find that truth lying side by side with all the great cardinal truths of the Christian religion, insomuch that if you touch one you must touch all; if you shake one you must shake all. I do not see, beloved brethren, how a person can really and solemnly hold any one truth of God, if he allows another truth to be frittered away, because it is not practically exhibited. Suppose you ask me,

Do you believe in the doctrines of justification by faith, original sin, and man's hopeless ruin?

Surely.

Do you believe that "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all?"

Why do you believe these things? Because you *feel* them, or see them?

No.

Why do you believe them?

I believe them because God's word reveals them. This is the only ground of faith in any truth of the Christian religion, and therefore were I to reject the grand doctrine of the unity of the body of Christ because of the innumerable divisions of Christendom, I should be judging by the sight of my eyes, instead of building upon the truth of God. I should be reasoning upon what I see, instead of believing what God tells me.

If, therefore, I be asked why I believe in the doctrine of justification by faith, I reply, Because it is set forth in the imperishable volume of God. On the very same ground I believe in the unity of the body, the deity of Christ, the perfect humanity of Christ, and the sacrificial virtue of His blood. I believe in the efficacy of His priesthood. I believe in the fact of His coming glory. I believe all these verities because they are written in the holy scriptures. Very well, on the self-same ground, there is one body and one Spirit. Do you suppose, that I should believe this more firmly if all the true saints of God in London were to break bread in one building every Lord's day? Indeed I should not. I believe it, but it is not because I see it practically carried out, but because it is declared in the fourth of Ephesians, that

there is one body.

Let us turn now, for a few moments, to the profoundly interesting and instructive history of Josiah, as recorded in 2 Chron. 34 and 35. We shall find a striking illustration of the same weighty principle. Josiah, like Hezekiah and Elijah, recognized the unity of the twelve tribes, and acted upon the truth

thereof in the face of the most depressing and humiliating condition of things. He acted according to the immutable truth of God, and not according to the practical state of God's people. He carried his reformatory operations into all the cities *that pertained to Israel*. And in speaking to the Levites, he charged them, at the opening of that marvelous day, to serve the Lord and His people *Israel*. Get hold of that point. He charges the Levites that they were to serve Jehovah, and not His people *Judah*; but 'His people *Israel*.' He can only speak of and act toward the nation according to the revealed mind of God, and not according to their practical condition. It is the altar of twelve stones over again. It is the "burnt-offering and the sin-offering for *all Israel*." It is the twelve loaves on the golden table, beneath the light of the seven golden candlesticks. It is the Israel of God in the vision of faith.

And yet Josiah stood at the very lowest point; the nation was on the eve of dissolution; Nebuchadnezzar was almost at the gates -- no matter. The whole thing was about to crumble into decay -- no matter; faith was not going to crumble; Josiah in spirit, Josiah in principle, got back to the golden table -- the only place for faith to get. Oh! brethren, do you see it? I ask you, Do you drink into your souls the precious truth, that however one may fail to put this before you in intelligible language, I am as convinced of this as that those lamps are burning before me, that we are occupied now with a principle which, if you grasp it, will brace up your souls and give decision and vigour to your entire practical career, no matter what is against you?

Do not suppose I am conducting you through these historic scenes of Old Testament scriptures merely to occupy an hour: no, brethren; I am delivering to you the verities that God has laid upon my heart to speak to you. For what is the grand object of this assembly? What are you here for? Is it to pass an hour? No; you must remember that the object of an assembly like this is to bring souls into personal, living contact with the truth of God. That is the object of such meetings; and it is the bounden duty of every man who stands in a position like this to speak in the ears of his brethren. I say it is his bounden duty, and should be his one absorbing object, to bring the soul and God into living personal contact. That is power. I may preach a sermon, I may deliver a course of lectures, and never bring the soul face to face with God, or bring the conscience under the light and authority of holy scripture.

Now this latter was what Josiah did. Having felt in his own soul the mighty action of the word of God, he sought to bring the souls of his brethren under the same mighty influence. (See 2 Chron. 34:29, 30). And what was the result? That from the days of King Solomon, those brilliant and palmy days, there had never been such a passover as that which was kept by Josiah at the very close of the nation's history. What is the meaning of that? It is another

link in the chain; it is another pearl in the string; it is another gem in the tiara. It is God's answer to the faith of His servant. Josiah took his stand upon faith in God, and God answered the faith. There had not been such a passover kept during all the days of the kings. Just think of that! There had been all the glories of Solomon's reign, and all the victories of David's reign, but there is the testimony of the Holy Ghost that there never had been such a passover as was kept in Josiah's reign. And you see that, because the very fact of the circumstances in which he was, threw a halo round his faith, God was more glorified by Josiah taking that stand, than He was by all the gold and silver that flowed into the treasury of Solomon.

But I must ask you to turn to another instance. Those cases which we have already adduced are drawn, as you will observe, from the period *before* the captivity. I want you now to come to an instance *during* the captivity {of seventy years of Judah}. I ask you to turn to the sixth chapter of Daniel, and there you have another charming section in the history of faith. This chapter opens before you the same great principle. Here we see an exile, a captive of the children of Judah, under the most depressing and humiliating circumstances. The glory and the power had departed from Israel. God's judicial actings, God's governmental dealings, had taken effect upon them. They were all broken up, and carried captive; the city in ruins; all gone!

But, brethren, God's word was not in ruins; God's truth was not in ruins; God's faithfulness was not in ruins. And because God's truth and God's faithfulness were not in ruins, so neither was the faith of God's people in ruins. This latter shines out with peculiar luster in the actings of that illustrious exile Daniel. Indeed, judging from his history, it would seem that the deeper the gloom that enwrapped the nation as a whole, the more brilliant were the flashes of individual faith.

Thus it was during the Babylonish captivity. Though the captives had to hang their harps on the willows; though the glory had departed from Israel; though the vessels of the Lord's house were in the temple of a false god; though all was as dismal and oppressive as it well could be; yet Daniel's faith rose majestically above the surrounding gloom, and laid hold upon the eternal and immutable truth of God; and not only laid hold of it, but carried it out practically. He opened his window, and prayed towards Jerusalem. Why did he do this? Why pray towards Jerusalem? Was this some notion of his own, or was it the fruit of some grand divine principle? It was the latter unquestionably, as you may see at a glance in 2 Chron. 6:36-38. This scripture anticipates the very position in which Daniel found himself, and prescribes his course of action.

If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and *pray toward their land, which thou gayest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name.*

This was the basis of Daniel's acting at Babylon in the days of Darius; this was his authority. Faith always seeks and finds a warrant for its activities in the word of God. This is of the very deepest possible moment. If Daniel had not a divine warrant for praying toward Jerusalem, his conduct would have been preposterous in the extreme. It would have been the height of folly to rush into the lions' den merely to carry out some theory of his own. But, on the other hand, if there was a divine principle involved, then his conduct was what we may call perfectly sublime. It was, in point of fact, "the burnt-offering and sin-offering for Israel"; it was the altar of twelve stones over again; it was the twelve loaves on the pure table; it was owning God's center, and taking God's ground, spite of the hopeless ruin of the dispensation, and the deep moral gloom that hung over the nation's horizon. Faith acts on the truth of God, let outward circumstances be what they may; and God always honors faith, and permits it to reap a golden harvest amid the most dreary and humiliating circumstances.

Thus then we see that Daniel simply followed in the wake of the Josiahs, the Hezekiahs, and the Eliahs of other days. He occupied the same platform with those men of God who, in the face of appalling difficulties had held up with a firm hand the standard of eternal truth. He takes his place amid that "great cloud of witnesses" of which the Holy Ghost speaks in Heb. 11, witnesses to the power and value of faith in the living God. He opened his window, and prayed toward Jerusalem, though Jerusalem was in ruins; he prayed toward the temple, though the temple was in ashes. He looks not at the things that were seen, but at the things that were not seen. He owned God's center -- the gathering-point of Israel's twelve tribes, although that center lay not within the range of human vision, and the twelve tribes were scattered to the ends of the earth. He did not lower God's standard to suit the condition of Israel, but held it up with the vigorous hand of faith.

And what was the result? A splendid triumph! True he had to go down into the lions' den; but he came up again. He went down as a witness, and came up as a conqueror. All God's worthies get up by going down. This is the law of the kingdom {Luke 14:11}. Daniel went down into the den; but we doubt if he ever spent a happier night upon earth than the night he spent in the den. He was there for God, and God was there with him.

Thus much as to the night. But what of the morning? Further victory! Earth's proudest monarch is subdued before the captive exile. Daniel was

allowed to realize in his own person the truth of that early promise to Israel --

Thou shalt be the head, and not the tail {Deut. 28:13}.

It is ever thus. The individual who acts on the truth of God, regardless of outward circumstances, is allowed to taste as high communion as ever was or ever could be known in the very brightest moments of the dispensation.

This is an immensely important principle, and one which we would earnestly press upon all Christians. We are apt at times, when under the withering influences of unbelief, to suppose that it is impossible to enjoy the high privileges which attach to our calling as Christians, seeing that the church has failed, and is in ruins. This is the miserable mistake of a dark and depressing unbelief. Faith, on the other hand, counts on God. It fixes its gaze upon His imperishable and unchangeable revelation. It rests on the infallible faithfulness of God, and thus enjoys communion with the very highest truth that characterizes the dispensation under which it lives.

Daniel proved this in his day, and so shall all who will only act on the same grand principle.

No doubt it might be said to him, as it is not unfrequently said in our own day:

It is the height of folly and presumption; you are a visionary enthusiast to be praying towards a place that is a scene of desolation; you ought rather to hush the very name in oblivion; you ought to draw the curtain of silence over the very name of Jerusalem; it is the very scene of your ruin and humiliation.

But, ah! beloved, Daniel was in the deep and precious secret of God. He occupied the divine standpoint, and saw all from thence; and hence the correctness of his entire range of vision -- hence the steadiness of his course -- hence the splendor of his victory.

And here again, let me remind you of what I remarked before, that this truth was not a speculation; it was not a thing which you might keep very comfortably and quietly in some secret recess of you mind, while you occupied your house, and sat very comfortably in your arm-chairs by your firesides, and professed that Israel was one. No; Daniel acted thus in the very face of the lions' den. The lions' den was yawning to receive him, but Daniel never minded it; Daniel had nothing to do with the lions' den -- no more than he had to do with the ruins of Jerusalem: he had to do with *God's truth*; he got back to the twelve loaves, to the golden table with the candlestick in the sanctuary of God -- he got back to those twelve loaves, and there he saw by the eye of faith the stream of living light pouring down from heaven on the unbroken union of God's beloved Israel.

Ah ! you see, it is not a speculation; it is a truth that must be confessed, come what may, and he did confess it. Yes; he “prayed toward Jerusalem.” A man who did not understand what he was doing would say, “I cannot for the life of me understand that. I am sure you might pray as earnestly, as trustfully, with your curtains down and your windows shut. You might retire to your inmost closet. Why do you pray there?” Do you think it was acting from some notion of his own brain? No, beloved, I want you to see this, and I cannot let you go without establishing this truth in your souls, that it was acting simply and entirely on the truth of God when he opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem. Daniel could say, “There, you may throw me into the den to-night, but I will never give up the truth of God. I must stand for that, cost what it may. I have nothing to do with results -- nothing to do with consequences. These I leave entirely with God. My place is simply to obey.”

And this is of the utmost possible value. We hear a great deal now-a-days about the absence of power in the church. We are told that there is no power for this, and no power for that. Our simple reply to all this sort of reasoning is that *it is not at all a question of power, but of obedience.*

Was there much power in Daniel’s day? There was. There was the power of faith, and the power of obedience. This is the sort of power which we want. It is not external power -- or showy gifts -- or astounding miracles, but that quiet, humble, steady spirit of obedience that leads the man of God along the narrow path of God’s commandments. This is what we want. It is in this that our God delights, and to this He grants the sweet sanction of His presence.

Tell me, beloved brethren, to what does God give the sanction of His presence? He gives the sanction of His presence where there is faith to believe His word, where there is faith to confess the truth of God. No matter what the difficulties may be, no matter what the discouragements may be, never lower the standard. A person will say,

Oh, you must; it’s no use talking like that; you must give it up: don’t you see that God Himself is against you?

Governmentally, if you please -- the blasphemer is being stoned without the camp, but the twelve loaves are undisturbed on the table. That is the principle -- it is the double principle which overlaps the whole history of the ways of God, whether with Israel of old, or with the church now. The judgment of God may rest upon our practical state, while the eye of faith rests upon God’s imperishable standard. Individual faith basks in the sunlight of God’s eternal truth, spite of the wreck and ruin of the ostensible people of God.

This is a principle of the utmost simplicity, but of the greatest magnitude and practical value. Its application to the special subject before us, namely, the

unity of the Church of God, is as clear as it is forcible. If we look around us -- if we judge by the sight of our eyes -- if we form our conclusions amid the ruins of Christendom, it may seem an idle chimera to talk of the unity of the church of God. But no; we simply take God at His word; we believe what He says, not because we see it or feel it, but because He says it. This is faith. Why do we believe in the forgiveness of sins? Why do we believe in the presence of the Holy Ghost? Why do we believe in any one of the grand fundamental truths of Christianity? Simply because we find them on the eternal page of inspiration. Well, upon precisely the same ground we believe in the one body and in the indissoluble unity of the church of God.

"There is one body." He does not say, "There was one body," and "There shall be one body." No; he says, "There is one body." Here is our authority for believing and confessing this glorious truth, and for our practical testimony against everything that denies it. The first step in confessing the unity of the church of God is to step out of the divisions of Christendom. Let us not stop to ask what is to be our second step. God never gives light for two steps at a time. Is it true that there is but one body? Unquestionably. God says so. Well then the divisions, the sects, and the systems of Christendom are plainly opposed to the mind and will and word of God. Truly so. What are we to do? Step out of them. This, we may rest assured, is *the* first step in a right direction. If our standpoint is false, our whole range of vision must be false. We must get to a true standpoint, and then our entire range is correct. It is impossible to yield any practical confession to the unity of the church of God while we stand connected with that which practically denies it. We may hold the theory in the region of our understanding, while we deny the reality in our practical career. But if we desire to confess the truth of the one body, our very first business -- our primary duty is to stand in thorough separation from all the sects and schisms of Christendom.

"But," some may enquire, "Will not this involve the formation of a new sect, and that, too, the narrowest and most intolerant of all sects?" By no means. It may seem to be so, in the judgment of mere nature -- even religious nature. But the question is, Are the divisions of Christendom according to God? Are the many bodies of the professing church in accordance with the "one body" of Eph. 4? Clearly not. Then it is our divinely appointed duty to come out of them, and it is impossible that the discharge of a divinely enjoined duty can ever lead to sectarianism or schism; nay it is a direct and positive testimony against it; and, furthermore, the first grand step toward keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is to step out of the divisions of Christendom. And what then? Looking to Jesus; and this is to continue right on to the end. Is this -- we repeat the question -- to form a new sect, or join

some new body? By no means; it is but fleeing from the ruins around us to find our resource in the all-sufficiency of the name of Jesus. It is but leaving the ship at the bidding of Jesus, to keep the eye fixed on Him amid the wild watery waste, until we reach in safety the haven of everlasting rest and glory.

C. H. M. (Gospel Book Depot: London.)

Christ Head of the Body

by H. H. Snell

Among the many glories of the ascended Son of Man,. we may think of Him by the teaching. of Holy Scripture as “Head of all principality and power,” or as “Head of His body the Church” (or assembly). It is about the latter -- the present marvelous relationship of Christ in heaven to His saints on earth -- we would offer a few remarks as the Lord may graciously help.

And first of all let us not fail to notice that Scripture connects His headship to the assembly with His *ascension*; a point of moment not only as to accuracy, but as to its *effect* on our hearts when truly received, because it leads us to look to and have to do with Him in the place where He now is, as to everything connected with His assembly on earth. Poets have indulged the thought that the Head died for the members, but we know from Scripture that when here in incarnation He was all alone.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone (John 12:24).

Nor could we scripturally speak of Him, as has sometimes been said, as our risen Head; for although when He rose from among the dead He gave “life more abundantly” -- risen life -- and announced the glorious facts that in virtue of what He had done believers were now His “brethren,” and brought into the same endearing relationship to the Father as Himself, He was *not then* given to be Head over His Church or assembly. There was as yet no Head, and consequently no members; the disciples were our Lord’s “brethren” and God’s “children,” but not yet members of His body. The body was not yet formed. “Go to my brethren,” said Jesus unto Mary, “and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). This was very precious, but the body was not yet formed. Till Jesus had *ascended* there was no one in heaven who could be Head of the body. When man, in the person of the Son, went through death into the glory of God, and was set at “His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come,” then it was that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, gave Him to be “Head over all to the church [or assembly] which is His body.” Here then we are definitely taught that it was in Christ in *ascension* that we have the first idea of the Head of the body, till which time there could have been no members formed on earth. Nor, in point of fact, could the body be formed till the coming of the Holy Ghost, which the ascended One received from the Father and shed forth; because we are told that it is “by one Spirit we are all baptized into

one body” (Eph. 1:19-23; 1 Cor. 12:13). We could not therefore scripturally speak of Christ as Head of the assembly in the days of His flesh, or when He died, or when He rose again. Neither could we speak of Him as our risen Head; but we can look up to Him where He now is, and there know among many other glories that He who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, who is our life, our righteousness and peace, is the Head of His body the Church, or assembly. For such grace the cannot but praise God.

When we think then of God’s assembly on earth, it always connects us with Christ in ascension. Thus we are a heavenly people; our life, blessings, inheritance, supplies, and home, are there; so that we are partakers of a heavenly calling, and are taught to look for the Savior to change our body of humiliation, fashion it like His body of glory, and take us there. The consciousness of this will produce heavenly-mindedness, and ways.

The more we ponder the truth, the more shall we be struck with the precious fact that the whole economy of the assembly on earth flows from association with Christ in ascension. For example, if it be a question of gifts for edification, they are from Him who ascended up on high, who led “captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph. 4:8). If it be the apostolate of the Church we are considering, we find an entirely new order of apostles from that of the kingdom as appointed in the gospels, though many of them might have been the same men; for of the ascended Christ it is said, “He gave some, apostles . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11, 12). Paul was, as all know, one of these apostles; and besides being a minister of the gospel, was especially distinguished as a minister of the Church or assembly (Col. 1:23, 25). We all know that Peter was an apostle of the kingdom. by our Lord’s sovereign call and appointment when on earth; but we have only to view him in Acts 1, and then in ch. 2, where he is seen as an apostle from the ascended Christ, and in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and we cannot fail to be struck with the immense difference.

If the object and scope of Christ’s present ministry from heaven be before us, then it will be found that it is for those who are, or who may be, while on earth, connected with the Head in heaven; as before observed, it is for “the building up of the body of Christ.” Ascension then is peculiarly the word for those who, through grace, even now on earth are by the Spirit united to the Head in heaven, and oh, how marvelous! -- are “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” If our souls apprehended these things as they ought, we should easily see how dishonoring to our Lord it must be to think lightly of them, and how pleasing it is in His sight when our affections and interests are toward His saints as “members of *His* body” according to His mind, not only as the purchase of His own precious blood, but as one with Himself -- “of His flesh and bones” -- so that He could say to a persecuting Saul, “Why persecutest thou *me*?” May we ponder in our Lord’s presence this “*me*,” till we have something more of His own regard

and care for His dear ones on earth! *Then*, and not till then, shall we be able to “endure all things for the elect’s sake,” and to see there could be no narrower limits to our love for each other than laying down our lives for the brethren. May the Lord stir afresh within us deep affections and suited ministries toward the members of His body!

We should never forget that “Head” and “members of the body” are relative terms. We cannot think of the Head without the thought of the members, neither should the thought of members of His body occupy us without thinking of the Head to which they are united; they must go together, for Christ is Head of the body. The “one new Man,” which He hath “made in Himself of twain” (believing Jews and Gentiles), consists of Christ the Head in heaven, and believers on earth united to Him and to each other by one Spirit. It is therefore entirely “new,” not an improvement of the Jew’s religion, but something which never was before, and never will be repeated; for it is “one,” and yet a mystical body, perfect as consisting of Head and members, God’s own workmanship, who hath “created us in Christ Jesus” -- One New Man. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in this mystery. Perfect wisdom, intelligence, sufficiency of grace, and never-failing supplies of truth, and blessings treasured up in the ascended and glorified One who is Head of the assembly, whose love, and care, and sympathy are as to His own flesh, and who ever regards us as His complement, or “the fulness of Him who filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23). What a marvelous union of Head and members is Christ and the assembly!

But He is not only Head of the body, He is also Head over all to the body. All her springs are in Him. He is to us the Fountain of living water. All our wisdom, all our strength, yea, all our resources, are in Him. Not only are we blessed in Him, accepted in Him, have redemption and are made nigh in Him and through His blood; but so truly are we the members of the one body with the Head, that all our endowments, all our ministrations, and all our sufficiency are in and through Him. And when this is truly apprehended as a divinely-given reality, it will certainly set us in the place of entire dependence on Him, as those who have nothing, and yet possess all things, even as when our being united to Him as members of one body to the Head first dawned upon the soul filled us with thanksgiving and worship.

Much failure was traced by the Spirit, when addressing the Colossian saints, to their “not holding the Head”; and no doubt very much that is wrong among believers in the present day may be traced to the same source. It is not that saints do not hold the doctrine that Christ is Head of the body, and speak of it in Scripture language; but “holding the Head” is much more than that. Those who are “holding the Head” are in communion with Him as to the members of His body. Their hearts and minds are interested in what interests Him. Their sympathies, affections, and care have no less a circle than “all saints.” Such look

at them, think of them, pray for them, and feel for them, in their measure, according to the mind, and heart, and care of the Head. It is impossible it can be otherwise if we are really "holding the Head." We believe there is no other prevention of, or cure for, sectarianism. When our hearts are really in communion with the Head of the body, we cannot be satisfied with a narrower circle than *all* the members of the body, or desire a larger circle for those deep springs and energies of the new life which we have in Christ, than the power and operations of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us. We repeat, it is much more than knowing the doctrine, and we believe it will be known in power by those only who have a conscience toward the Lord as to being in communion with Himself concerning the members of His body. We add that it has long been our conviction that many who resolve, and exhort others also, to cultivate a catholic spirit, and who desire to have no less scope for their interest and service than the whole Church of God, yet never become disentangled from a sectarian spirit on the one hand, or from being latitudinarian on the other, because they do not accept in simple faith what the Spirit teaches, that "holding the Head" is the divine way, and only true way, whereby such desires can be accomplished. We cannot see how it is possible to be right with the "members of His body," unless we are right with "the Head"; nor can the true liberty which the Holy Ghost gives be known, in a day of ruin and in difficult times like the present, by such as are not "holding the Head"; for if we are truly in communion with Him, and in subjection to Him, the heart will be kept in freshness and care for "all saints," even though circumstances necessitate that in loyalty to Him we walk in a narrow path.

Perhaps no one ever knew what it was to be "holding the Head" better than the apostle Paul. Not only was he arrested by the wondrous revelation that Christ in heaven was one with His saints on earth, but to him was revealed the mystery of the assembly, and he was also made a minister of the assembly; and we can in some measure imagine what the effect of all this on his life and walk must have been. He writes to some believers whom he had not seen, "We are praying always for you"; and he desired they might know the conflict, or agony, he had for them, lest they should not intelligently and heartily acknowledge the mystery of God, and thus fail to answer to the Lord's mind of "holding the Head," and of being knit together practically in the membership of the body -- for such is the great characteristic of Christianity. He could say to others,

I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ;
to others,

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.

He wept over others because they were dishonoring the Lord. The members of the body were so dear to him, that he suffered trouble and endured all things for the elect's sake, and said, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that

which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the assembly." So much was the welfare of the whole Church of God upon his heart, that he not only prayed for all saints, but could truly say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

There is another point, never to be forgotten, as to the Head of the body, the assembly. It is that all the comfort, edification, and growth of every member flow *from* the Head. It may be *through* gifts, or such other members of the body as are neither pastors, teachers, nor evangelists, but in other ways, by joints and bands, and the different healthful exercises of the members according to their measure, and the grace given unto them, and the working and power of the Holy Spirit. No doubt all believers know that their blessings come to them in and through our Lord Jesus Christ; but here it is Christ the Head ministering in every way to His members, in the perfectness of love. He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. He is now sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word, and in a little while He will present it to Himself a glorious assembly, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. How unspeakably dear to His heart must every member of His body be! What favor we all must have in His eyes! How precious to Him must the feeblest be!

"Oh, yea! Christ loves His Church,
'Tis her He lives to bless;
He cannot love her more,
Nor will He love her less
Bone of His bone, cleansed by His Word,
A bride adorned meet for her Lord."

There is, then, a constant ministration of grace and truth from the Head to all the members of His body; and as we are in communion with Him, "holding the Head," we shall be conscious of this living blessing from Him who nourisheth and cherisheth the assembly. But if the busy workings of unbelief, self-importance, and unjudged evil in words and ways come in, can it be otherwise than the grieving of the Holy Spirit, and the lack of comfort and edification to those who are so dear to the Head? When, however, in simple, childlike faith we are "speaking the truth in love," we shall surely grow up to Him in all things who is the Head, Christ,

from whom the whole body

(observe, *the whole body*, not one member excluded)

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 (Eph. 4:16).

(See also Col. 2:19.) In this way we may expect growth and the increase of God. The difficulty is to seize and carry out this great principle of divine truth in a time of confusion and evil; but if only two or three are faithful to the Lord, and honor His name and word, such will in a very especial way have His presence and

blessing, as many have proved. But let none expect, however well instructed they may be in Scripture knowledge, to have that communion with the Lord they desire, or to know His present mind, unless they are “holding the Head.”

H. H. Snell, *The Christian Friend*, 1885, pp. 216-224.

*Christ and the Assembly;
Or, Gathered {Together} to His Name and
Keeping the Spirit's Unity*

Matt. 18:20; Ex. 4:3

by H. H. Snell

The Lord Jesus Christ is everything to those who know Him. His very name is as ointment poured forth. Where He is not, they find no rest; and apart from Him, life to them is not life. In Him divine and human perfectness shine forth. In Him we see and know the Father. Through Him the fountain of "perfect love" is ever flowing to us. In Him we have the One, who, at the priceless cost of the sacrifice of Himself, removed everything that hindered our being forever happy in the cloudless presence of God. In Him, and through His precious blood, we gratefully own that God is for us, God is our Justifier, God is our Father, who loves us as He loved His Son, who hath made us accepted in the Beloved, sealed us with the Holy Spirit, blessed us with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," and given us the hope of eternal glory.

Seeing, then, that divine love has thus blessed us, and united us for ever to our Lord Jesus Christ, is it to be wondered at that His name is given to us as the only center of our being gathered together on earth? And when we now think of Him in the glory of God, is it surprising that He should say, for the blessing of those so gathered, "There am I in the midst of them"? Certainly not. Should we not rather say, How can He fail to take His place "in the midst" of those whose hearts are drawn together in His precious name, and who are objects of His eternal, unchanging, and redeeming love? And do we not see how dear to His heart must be such a gathering, which causes Him to take His place "in the midst"? Can anything on earth equal it? Is it possible that any other congregation under the sun can be comparable to it?

It is clear that those only who know the love of Christ as having washed them from their sins in His own blood, can really be attracted by His name, or gathered together around Him. The first time we have it recorded of our Lord's being in the midst of His disciples after His resurrection, we find that the first words He spoke to them were, "Peace be unto you; and He showed them His hands and His side." This assured them of everything having been removed by Him, through the work of the cross, that hindered their being happy in God's presence. Peace had been made by the blood of the cross, and

now they were to know it, and be happy in Him who had made this peace. The One who was in their midst had removed all guilt and fear, and assured them of such newly-formed and settled relationships, as to say, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." They were thus set free for holy and happy occupation with Himself. "Then were the disciples glad when *they saw the Lord*" (John 20:19). This is surely the true secret of joy.

The Lord also communicated to them life in the Holy Ghost -- risen life -- which He now had as raised up from among the dead, and which could not have been given to them before. Whatever might have been the character of the life believers had before this, we find now One able to breathe on them risen life --

He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost {John 20:22}.

But with this, let us not fail to observe, they were still to tarry in Jerusalem until they had "power" by the Holy Ghost coming upon them. (See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.) This coming of the Holy Ghost Himself to abide with us forever, took place, as we know, on the day of Pentecost, after Christ was exalted to the right hand of God. But Christ risen and breathing on His disciples *before* He ascended, was a different thing. The Holy Ghost came in consequence of Christ being *ascended*; a point never to be forgotten, because the formation, endowment, power, and blessing of the Church of God on earth are connected with Christ in Glory. All our blessings are, no doubt, founded on the work of the cross, but they come to us in association with Christ exalted to the right hand of God. It was *there* He was given to be Head over all to the Church, which is His body; *there* He received the Holy Ghost and sent down to us; *thence* He gave "gifts" for the building up of the body; *there* we now know Him as the "head"; from whom blessing flows to every member of the body; and from *thence* we look for Him to come.

Before He breathed on His *disciples* here gathered (for there were not only the eleven, but others were also present with them, perhaps all the hundred and twenty, except Thomas -- Luke 24:33), He sent them all forth into service and testimony, saying, "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you," and their understandings being opened to understand the Scriptures, they had, in connection with their work on earth, authority to remit and to retain sins. This was afterwards carried out in acts of discipline. This forgiveness has been sometimes spoken of as administrative forgiveness. Acts of discipline on earth are, no doubt, ratified in heaven by the Lord, who is in the midst of them gathered together in His name. In Matt. 18:18-20, as well as here, binding in heaven what is thus bound on earth, is connected with the Lord Jesus Christ being in their midst, as was afterward so jealously guarded by the apostle at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:4).

It is to be feared that many believers in the present day go no further than this in their apprehensions of what is involved in being gathered together in our Lord's name. They know Him in the midst as the administrator of "peace," founded on His own finished work; they are conscious of the need of the Holy Ghost, they realize that they are here to serve Christ, and have power, as congregations, to remit or retain sins in discipline. But if they stop here, they are not really on assembly ground at all. In the twentieth chapter of John we have not yet the assembly formed on earth, for there was no Head in heaven, and "the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." We have disciples, and the Lord in the midst, and a beautiful sample to us of what His gracious ways with such are. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit there were individual believers, children of God, those whom Christ sees not ashamed to call His brethren; but before Pentecost the assembly had not been formed. It was by the coming of the Holy Ghost that believers were united to Christ as members of "One body" -- "By One Spirit we are all baptized into "One body." We have union, not by faith, nor yet even in life, but by "One Spirit." Wondrous truth!

Therefore (Jesus) being by the right hand of God *exalted*, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear {Acts 2:32, 33}.

His coming is thus described:

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4, 33).

This was the baptism of the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:5, 1 Cor. 12:13). This was the "power" they were told to wait for; and the sequel shows what a mighty power it was. The "One body" was now formed on earth; believers were united to Christ the Head in heaven by "One Spirit" Precious union! The power and operations of the "One Spirit" were at once seen in the fervent testimony of the saints, their being of one heart and of one soul, unselfishly and practically one; though, as yet, they had not the truth of the assembly revealed to them, nor did they intelligently know what keeping the unity of the Spirit was. In God's sovereignty and goodness this came out after (Eph.3).

But in considering the state of the Church on earth *now*, we have a very different aspect presented to us. More than eighteen centuries have passed since the Church was formed by the coming of the Holy Ghost. All was set up in truth and holiness; and though nothing can possibly alter the union between Christ the Head and the members of His body on earth, yet, as to its manifestation, it has so entirely failed that we now speak of the ruin of the Church, and the confusion in

Christendom, because scarcely a vestige of the corporate reality is to be seen as it was set up. *God's* building still groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord in His sight; but when the assembly is looked at as in *man's* hands, where is now any thing like that which was set up at Pentecost? It is so far gone that, instead of finding now in a city one assembly as distinct from the world around, we find saints scattered into sects, and, like the ruins of an ancient temple, many fragments buried in the pursuits and pleasures of the world that crucified the Lord of glory. The faithful therefore have now no resource but to go back to that which was from the beginning, not to reconstruct, which is clearly revealed to be not God's mind, but, while humbly acknowledging the ruin, to rely on the faithfulness of Christ to His own gracious word --

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20).

It is just here with many in the present day that the practical difficulty occurs. Some, for instance, contend that everything is so far gone that we have nothing left but thus to be gathered, and that we are under no obligation to Christ for the maintenance, as far as practicable, of assembly truth, as found in Ephesians and elsewhere. This at once opens the door to the admission of what is unsuited to Him who is in the midst, gives up confidence in the never-failing faithfulness of God to His own word, the abiding of the Holy Ghost, the Lord's love and relationships to His own, and takes off our heart's interests and affections from the whole Church of God. It really sets up independency, because it ignores responsibility to the Lord to keep the Spirit's unity.

The question is, Can any be intelligently gathered together in the Lord's name, and own Him who is "in the midst," according to the truth, without felt obligation to Him to keep the Spirit's unity, so far as is practicable, and especially with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart? May all our consciences be solemnly exercised before the Lord about this!

1. First, let us enquire, In or unto whose name are we gathered? {Matt. 18:20}. Is it to His who is ascended, whom. God hath made both Lord and Christ? It was so in apostolic times; for they were gathered "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and were instructed to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:4; Col. 3:17). It is surely with Christ in glory that we have now to do; though personally, at the right hand of God, He is in the midst of those gathered together in His name on earth. It is not only that the Holy Spirit is with us, for that He is always; but when the condition is fulfilled of being really gathered together in His name, then the Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst of such. It is a precious fact, and blessedly known to faith by those who in heart and conscience are gathered to the Lord. Holding the principle is not enough, and saying we are so gathered is worse than useless, unless we know the reality of having to do with Him who is in the midst. The point is, Is *His presence* a real enjoyment to our souls?

2. He who is “in the midst” is the One who has accomplished eternal redemption, and went into heaven by His own blood. It is He who ascended unto His Father and to our Father, to His God and to our God, having made peace, and established the most endearing and everlasting relationships, so that our hearts are called out in praise and thanksgiving, and to wait for His return from heaven. How can we fail to praise? The question is, Are we thus praising, when gathered together in His name?

3. He who is “in the midst” has sent down the Holy Ghost, not only to teach us and to abide with us forever, and the *power* for all godliness, but He also came to form the Church or assembly on earth. “By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.” Believers are thus united to Christ – one Spirit with the Lord. Can we then be taken up with Him who is in our midst, and forget that “we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones”? (Eph. 5:30).

4. He who is “in the midst” is “Head of the body, the assembly”; that is, not Head of that particular meeting, but of the whole body -- the assembly all over the world. As we have before observed, it was in ascension, and exalted above every name that is named, that He was given to be Head over all to the assembly, which is His body. Do we know Christ as Head of the body Are we “holding the Head?” not merely holding the doctrine that He is Head, but by faith “holding the Head”? Is it possible to be gathered to His name according to His mind without “holding the Head”? (Col. 2:1, 2, 19). May we fully face this important practical question?

5. He who is “in the midst” presents Himself to us also as “He that is holy, and He that is true” (Rev. 3:7). No doubt He is with us to reveal Himself lovingly and suitably according to our need; but He is also there to correct and discipline -- “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”; “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord,” etc. (Rev. 3:19; 1 Cor. 11:30-32). His name surely calls for holiness and truth. Should we not then be careful what we associate with His name, who bids us to “touch not the unclean thing”? If He around whom we are clustered would have us so separate from evil as not to *touch*, not to be linked with what is unclean in His sight, how can we be gathered together in His name according to His mind, unless we are separate from unsound doctrine, immoral ways, and unholy associations? As to doctrine and practice we are warned of their insidious and spreading effects by the Holy Spirit, who says, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump”; and as to unclean *associations* (the last thing many consciences are moved by) we are to treat them as we would a leprous garment.

We are solemnly charged to “depart from iniquity,” and to *purge ourselves from* vessels to dishonor by separating from them. It may be said, “If we act in this way we shall find few will go with us.” Be it so, if it be the will of the

Lord; but let us at all costs keep clear of associating with that peerless name anything which does not suit the “holy” and the “true.” Self-judgment according to His word, the cultivation of personal communion with Himself, and faithfully maintaining our place outside the camp to Him, is the path in which His gracious promise is fulfilled --

He shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use,
and prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:21).

How is it possible then to be gathered in heart and conscience to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to own Him in the midst according to His word, without felt obligation to Him to keep the Spirit’s unity so dear to His heart, and to stand for that holiness and truth which suit Him? May the “members of His body” be exercised before Him about these things, and, while seeking the path of faithfulness to Him, be heartily going out toward the whole Church of God.

H. H. Snell, *The Christian Friend*, 1884, pp. 177-186.

Remarks on the Difference Between Holding the Truth of “One Body” and Keeping “the Spirit’s Unity”

by H. H. Snell

Every child of God, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, is a of the “one body,” which is formed by “one Spirit.” The body cannot be broken or divided, for it is formed by divine power; but the manifestation of body and one Spirit has utterly failed, hence the present confusion in Christendom.

We are enjoined to practically act out the member “one body,” and the activity of “one Spirit” leads to it; but we are never told to keep the unity of the body, but “the unity of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is the *power* for everything that is according to God; and He orders through the Word everything as private walk, and as to our collective action on assembly ground.

If the Lord speaks to His assemblies, He bids us “hear what the Spirit saith”; and as there is *one* Spirit, dwells in the assembly on earth, He bids every individual to hear what the Spirit saith to every assembly. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the assemblies” (Rev. 2, 3). The Lord therefore calls on every member of the “one body” to hear what He saith about every assembly. If every member of the “one body” heard therefore what the Spirit saith unto the assemblies, and acted on it, the unity would be kept. But all members of the “one body” do not bear, and, it may be, do not care to hear what the Spirit saith. Is it not clear then that those who do hear *must act* in faithfulness to the Lord, however sorrowfully, separate from those who do not hear what the Spirit saith? For we are commanded at all costs to *keep the Spirit’s unity* in the bond of peace. How else could it be fully kept?

An evil might break out in some part of the world among those who, in these last days, are gathered on the ground of God’s assembly of a character hitherto unknown. What should the faithful do? It (the evil) may be in a place a thousand miles off, or more; but can we be indifferent to it? Impossible, if we believe in “one Spirit” dwelling in the Church or assembly. Would not such at once make the Lord their refuge, and turn to “the word of His grace”? Does not the Spirit lead true hearts in this way? Well, the Lord saith, “Hear what the Spirit saith.” And such would soon find that the Spirit exposes and rebukes it as unholy, as contrary to the truth, and unsuited to Him who is the Holy and the True. Those who look

only to men must go wrong; those only can have the Lord's mind who wait on Him and honor the Holy Ghost.

And, further:

1. The Spirit's unity must be according to holiness or separation, from evil; for He is a HOLY Spirit.
2. It must be according to the truth (and we know who said, "Thy word is truth"); for *the Spirit is truth*, and He guides into *all the truth*.
3. The path of the Spirit must certainly have in view the honor and glory of "the Son"; for Jesus said, "He shall glorify me." Happy are those who look above men's heads, and amid, it may be, much failure "hear what the Spirit saith."
4. Those who oppose the action of the "one Spirit" in any measure, or for any reason, seriously dishonor the Lord, grieve the Holy Spirit whereby they are sealed, damage their own souls, perhaps mislead others, mar the testimony of God, and fall under His rebuke.

May all who read these lines look unto Him who is able to keep us from falling; and may our cry be, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."

H. H. Snell, *The Christian Friend*, 1885, pp. 138-140.

Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity

by J. N. Darby

The need of union is felt now by every right-minded Christian.²⁸ The power of evil is felt by all. Its pressure comes too near home, its rapid and gigantic strides are too evident and affect too nearly the particular feelings which characterize distinctively every class of Christians, to allow them to be blind to it, however little they may appreciate its true bearing and character. Better and holier feelings, too, arouse them to the sense of common danger, and (as far as it is entrusted to man's responsibility) the danger in which the cause of God is, from those who never did, and never would spare it. This need is felt wherever the Spirit of God acts, so as to make the saints value grace and truth and one body.

The feelings which the sense of the progress of evil produces may be different. Some, though they are but few, may yet trust to the bulwarks they have long looked at, but which had their force only in a respect for them which exists no longer. Others may trust to a fancied force of truth, which it has never exerted but in a little flock, because God and the work of His Spirit were there; others, to a union which never yet was the instrument of power on the side of good -- that is, a union by concord and agreement. While others may feel bound to abstain from such an agreed union, by reason of previously subsisting obligations, or prepossessions, so that the union tends to form only a party. But the sense of danger is universal. That which was long mocked at as a theory is now too practically felt to be denied; though the apprehensions of the word, which made those who were subjected to that mockery foresee the evil, may be rejected and slighted still.

But this state of things produces difficulties and dangers of a peculiar kind to the saints, and leads to the inquiry, where the path of the saint is, and where true union is to be found. There is danger, from the very blessedness and desirableness of union, of those who have long truly felt its value, and the obligation that lies on the saints to maintain it, being led to follow the impulses of such as refused to see it when it was spoken of from the word, and to abandon the very principles and path which their own clearer apprehension of the word of God led them to embrace from it, as foreseeing the coming storm. They learnt from that precious word that it was coming; and, while calmly studying it in the word, saw the path marked out

28. {This paper was published in Oct. 1846, R. Nelson, *Protest Against the Proceedings of Mr. John Darby*, Feb. 22, 1852 – a supporter of Bethesda. “. . . written by Mr. Darby in view of the Evangelical Alliance,” W. Kelly, *God's Principle of Unity*.}

there for the believer as such, and indeed, in every time. It is now pressed upon them to desert it for that suggested to men's minds by the pressure of the anxieties they anticipated, but which, though there may be an impulse of good in it, the word of God itself did not furnish when inquired into in peace. But is this the path of the saints? -- to turn from that which generally rejected intelligence of the word afforded them, to pursue the light of those who would not see? This, however, is not the only danger; nor is it my object to dwell on the dangers but the remedy. There is a constant tendency in the mind to fall into sectarianism, and to make a basis of union of the opposite of what I have here just alluded to: that is, of a system of some kind or other to which the mind is attached, and round which saints or others are gathered; and which, assuming itself to be based on a true principle of unity, regards as schism whatever separates from itself -- attaching the name of unity to what is not *God's* center and plan of unity. Wherever this is the case, it will be found that the doctrine of unity becomes a sanction for some kind of moral evil, for something contrary to the word of God; and the authority of God Himself, which is attached to the idea of unity, becomes, through the instrumentality of this latter thought, a means of engaging the saints to continue in evil. Moreover, continuance in this evil is enforced by all the difficulty which unbelief finds to separate from that in which it is settled, and where the natural heart finds its ties, and, generally, temporal interests the sphere of their support.

Now, unity is a divine doctrine and principle; but, as evil is possible wherever unity is taken by itself so as to be a conclusive authority, wherever evil does enter, the conclusive obligation of unity binds to the evil, because the unity, where the evil is, is not to be broken. Of this we have a flagrant example in Romanism. There the unity of the church is the grand basis of argument; and it has been the ground of keeping the world, we may say, in every sanctioned enormity, and made the name of Christianity its warrant -- an authority to bind souls to evil, till the name itself became shameful to the natural conscience of man. The plea of unity may then be, in a measure, the latitudinarianism which flows from the absence of principle; it may be the narrowness of a sect formed on an idea; or, it may be, as taken by itself, the claim to be the church of God, and hence in principle secure as much indifference to evil, as it is the convenience of the body or its rulers to allow, or is in the power of Satan to drag them into. If the name of unity then be so powerful in itself, and in virtue of blessings withal which God Himself has attached to it, it behoves us well to understand what the unity He owns really is. This it is I would propose to inquire into; acknowledging the desire for it to be a good thing, and many of the attempts at it to contain in them elements of good feeling, even when the means may not carry conviction to the judgment as being those of God.

Now, it will be at once admitted, that God Himself must be the spring and center of unity, and that He *alone* can be in power or title. Any center of unity

outside God must be so far a denial of His Godhead and glory, an independent center of influence and power; and God is one-the just, true, and only center of all true unity. Whatever is not dependent on this is rebellion. But this so simple, and, to the Christian, necessary truth, clears our way at once. Man's fall is the reverse of this. He was a subordinate creature, an image too of Him that was to come; he would become an independent one, and he is, in sin and rebellion, the slave of a mightier rebel than himself, whether in the dispersion of several self -- will, or its concentration in the dominion of the man of the earth. But then we must, in consequence of this, go a step farther. God must be a center in blessing as well as power, when He surrounds Himself with united and morally intelligent hosts. We may know that He will punish rebellion with everlasting destruction from His presence into the hopelessness of uncentered and selfish individual misery and hatred; but He Himself must be a center of blessing and holiness, for He is a holy God, and He is love. Indeed, holiness in us (while it is by its nature separation from evil) is just having God, the Holy One, who is love too, the object, center, and spring of our affections. He makes us partakers of His holiness (for He is essentially separate from all evil, which He knows as God, though as His contrary); but in us, holiness must consist in our affections, thoughts, and conduct being centered in, and derived from Him: a place maintained in entire dependence upon Him. Of the establishment and power of this unity in the Son and Spirit I will speak presently. It is the great and glorious truth itself on which I now insist.

This great principle is true even in creation. It was formed in unity, and God its only possible center. It shall be brought into it yet again, and centered in Christ as its Head, even in the Son, by whom, and for whom, all things were created, Col. 1: 16. It is man's glory (though his ruin as fallen) to be made thus a center in his place -- the image of Him that is to come;²⁹ but alas! his imitator in a state of rebellion in this same place, when fallen. I know not (I would venture to say no more) that angels were ever made the center of any system; but man was. It was his glory to be the lord and center of this lower world (an associate but dependent Eve his companion and help in his presence). He was the image and glory of God. His dependence made him look up; and this is true glory and blessedness to all but God. Dependence looks up, and is exalted above itself. Independence must look down (for it cannot in a creature be filled with itself) and is degraded. Dependence is true exaltation in a creature when the object of it is right. The primeval state of man was not holiness, in the proper sense of it, because evil was not known. It was not a divine (but it was a blessed creation) state; it was innocence. But this was lost

29. See Eph. 1. He hath made known to us the mystery of His will; that is, gathering together in one all things in Christ, in whom we have received an inheritance. {Eph. 1:10 refers to the millennium.}.

in the assertion of independence. If man became as God, knowing good and evil, it was with a guilty conscience, the slave of the evil he knew, and in an independence he could not sustain himself in, while he had morally lost God to depend on.³⁰

With this state (for we must now descend to the present actual question of unity), with man in this state, God has to deal, if true real unity, such as He can own, is to be attained. Now, He must be still the center. It is not therefore in mere creative power. Evil exists. The world is lying in wickedness, and the God of unity is the Holy God. Separation therefore, separation from evil, becomes the necessary and sole basis and principle, I do not say the power, {but} of unity. For God must be the center and power of that unity, and evil exists: and from that corruption they must be separate who are to be in God's unity; for He can have no union with evil. Hence, I repeat, we have this great fundamental principle, that separation from evil is the basis of all true unity. Without this, it is more or less attaching God's authority to evil, and rebellion against His authority; as is all unity independent of Him. It is a sect in its lightest and feeblest forms; in its fullest, it is the great apostasy, of which one of the characteristics, as ecclesiastical or secular power, is unity; but unity by subjection of man to what is independent really or openly of God because it is of His word; not established by subjection to the Holy One, according to His word,³¹ and by the power of the Spirit working in those that are united, and by His presence, which is the personal power of union in the body. But this separation is not yet by judicial power, which separates (not the good from the evil, the precious from the vile, but) the vile from the precious, banishing it from His presence in judgment; binding up the tares in bundles, and casting them into the furnace of fire; gathering out of His kingdom all things that offend (Satan and his angels being himself cast down and all things thereupon being gathered together in one in Christ, in heaven and in earth). Then the world, not the conscience, will be cleared from evil by the judgment which will not allow it, but early cut off all the wicked (not by the power and testimony of the Spirit of God {as now}).

30. {Innocence is ignorance of good and evil, the state of Adam before eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Holiness is separation from evil and cleaving to good. Adam acquired the knowledge of good and evil but came under the power of "sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) acquired by eating of the forbidden tree.}

31. This is characteristic of the independent unity. I believe that it will be in an openly infidel state, and a manifestation of the power of Satan. But supposing it is not openly such, it is clear that subjection to God is shown in subjection to His word. Now, the authority of the church is confessedly the antecedent to the authority of the word in Romanism, and the saints are not all of them allowed to be the immediate objects of God's own word, nor act upon it (that is, be subject to it). They are to be subject to the church: let the church allow it or not, that makes no difference. He who allows can hinder (that is, hinder God's addressing the saints). For this is the true question of Protestantism, not man's title to the Bible merely, but God's title to address man directly by His word; more particularly to address each of His own servants, or those professedly such.

It is not now the time of this judicial separation of the evil from the good in the world, as the field of Christ, by the cutting off and destruction of the wicked. But unity is not therefore given up out of the thoughts of God; nor can He have recognized union with evil. There is one Spirit and one body. He gathers together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

And now, as to the principle in general: God is working in the midst of evil to produce a unity of which He is the center and the spring, and which owns dependently His authority. He does not do it yet by the judicial clearing away of the wicked; He cannot unite with the wicked or have a union which serves them. How can it be then this union? He separates the called from the evil. "Come out from among them and be ye separate, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. As it is written, I will walk in them and dwell in them," etc. {2 Cor. 6:17, 18}. Now here we have it distinctly set forth. This was God's way of gathering. It was by saying, Come out from among them. He could not have gathered true unity around Him otherwise. Since evil exists -- yea, is our natural condition -- there cannot be union of which the Holy God is the center and power but by separation from it. Separation is the first element of unity and union.

We may now inquire a little further into the manner in which this unity is effectuated, on what it is based. There must be an intrinsic power of union holding it together to a center, as well as a power separating from evil to form it; and this center found it denies all others. The center of unity must be a sole and unrivaled center. The Christian has not long to inquire here. It is Christ -- the object of the divine counsel -- the manifestation of God Himself -- the one only vessel of mediatorial power, entitled to unite creation as He by whom and for whom all things were made; and the church as its Redeemer, its head, its glory, and its life. And there is this double headship: He is the head over all things to the church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all {Eph. 1:22, 23}. This will be accomplished in its day.

For the present we take up the intermediate period, the unity of the church itself, and its unity in the midst of evil. Now there can be no moral power which can unite, away from evil, but Christ. He alone, as perfect grace and truth, detects all the evil which separates from God, and from which God separates. He alone can, of God, be the attractive center which draws together to Himself all on whom God so acts. God will own no other. There is no other to whom the testimony could be borne, who is of God and towards God. Redemption itself, too, makes this necessary and evident: there can be but one Redeemer, one to whom a ransomed heart can be given, as well as where a divinely quickened heart can give all its affections, the center and revelation of the Father's love. He, too, is the center of power to do it. In Him all the fulness dwells. Love (and God is love) is known in

Him. He is the wisdom of God and the power of God. And, yet more than this, He is the separating power of attraction, because He is the manifestation of all this, and the fulfiller of it in the midst of evil; and this is what we poor, miserable ones want who are in it; and it is what, if we may so speak, God wants for His separating glory in the midst of evil. Christ sacrificed Himself to set up God in separating love in the midst of evil. There was more than this -- a wider scope in this work; but I speak in reference to my present subject now.

Thus Christ becomes, not only the center of unity to the universe in His glorious title of power, but (as the manifester of God, the one owned and set up of the Father and attracter of man) He becomes a peculiar and special center of divine affections in man, round which they are gathered as the sole divine center of unity. For indeed, as the center, necessarily the sole center, "he that gathereth not with me scattereth." And such, as to this point, was the object even, and power of His death: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." And more specially, He gave Himself "not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God which were scattered abroad" {John 11:52}. But here again, we find this separation of a peculiar people, "He gave himself for us that he might . . . purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." He was the very pattern of the divine life in man, separate from the evil, by which it was universally surrounded; He was the friend of publicans and sinners, piping in grace to men by familiar and tender love; but He was ever the separate man. And so He is as the center of the church and high-priest. "Such a high-priest *became us*, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, *separate from sinners*" -- and, it is added, "made higher than the heavens." Here in passing we may remark, that the center and subject of this unity then is heavenly. A living Christ still became the instrument of maintaining the enmity, being Himself subject to the law of commandments contained in ordinances. Hence, though the divine glory of His Person necessarily reached over this wall as a fruitful bough of grace to poor passing Gentiles without (and it could not be otherwise, for where faith was, He could not deny Himself to be God, nor what God was, even love); yet in His regular course, as a man made of a woman, He was made under the law. But by His death He broke down the middle wall of partition, and made both one, and reconciled both in one body unto God, making peace {Eph. 2:14}. Hence it is as lifted up, and finally as made higher than the heavens, that He becomes the center and sole object of unity.

Let us remark in passing, that hence worldliness always destroys unity. The flesh cannot rise up to heaven, nor descend in love to every need. It walks in the separative comparison of self-importance. "I am of Paul," etc. "Are ye not carnal and walk as men?" {1 Cor. 3:3, 4}. Paul had not been crucified for them, nor had they been baptized in the name of Paul. They had got down to earth in their minds, and unity was gone. But the glorious heavenly Christ in one word embraced all.

“Why persecutest thou *me*?” {Acts 9:4}. This separation from all else was more slow among the Jews, as having been outwardly themselves the separated people of God; but having fully shown what they were, the word to the disciples was, “Let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” The Lord (when as the great result He would have one flock and one Shepherd) *put forth* His own sheep and went before them. Indeed we have only to show that unity is God’s mind, and separation from evil is the necessary consequence; for it exists as a principle in the calling of God before unity itself. Unity is His purpose, and, as He is the only rightful center, it must be the result of holy power; but separation from evil is His very nature. Hence, when He publicly calls Abraham, the words: “Get thee out of thy country, and out of thy kindred, and from thy father’s house” {Gen. 12:1}.

But, to continue; from what we have seen, it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ on high is the object round which the church clusters in unity. He is its Head and Center. This is the character of their unity, and of their separation from evil, from sinners. Yet they were not to be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil, and sanctified through the truth; Jesus having set Himself thus apart to this end. Hence, as well as for the public display of the power and glory of the Son of man, the Holy Ghost was sent down to identify the called ones with their heavenly Head, and to separate them from the world in which they were to remain: and the Holy Spirit became thus the center and power down here of the unity of the church in Christ’s name -- Christ having broken down the middle wall of partition, reconciling both in one body by the cross. The saints, thus gathered in one, became the habitation of God through the Spirit. The Holy Ghost Himself became the power and center of unity, but in the name of Jesus, of a people separated alike from Jew and Gentile, and delivered out of this present evil world into union with their glorious Head. By Peter, God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And of the Jews there was a remnant according to the election of grace; as Paul, one of them, was separated himself from Israel, and from the Gentiles, to whom he was sent.

And so was the constant testimony. He that saith he hath fellowship with Him and walketh in darkness, lieth and doeth not the truth {1John 1:6}. Separation from evil is the necessary first principle of communion with Him. Whoever calls it in question is a liar -- he is, so far, of the wicked one. He belies the character of God. If unity depends on God, it must be separation from darkness. So with one another. If we walk in the light, as *God is in the light*, we have fellowship one with another {1 John 1}. And mark, here there is no limit. It is as *God is in the light*. There the blessed Lord has placed us by His precious redemption; and hence, by that, the whole manner of our walk and union must be formed: we can have no union (as of God) out of it; the Jew could, because his -- though separation, and hence the same in principle -- yet was only outward in the flesh, and the way into the holiest was

not yet made manifest (no, not even for the saints, though in God's counsels doubtless they were to be there through the sacrifice about to be offered).

So, again, one with the other. What fellowship hath light with darkness? Christ with Belial? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? And then, addressing the saints, the Holy Ghost adds, "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate." Otherwise we provoke the Lord to jealousy, as if we were stronger than He. Of this unity and fellowship, I may add, the Lord's supper is the symbol and expression. For we, being many, are all one bread (loaf), for we are all partakers of that one bread {1 Cor. 10:16}.

We find then most distinctly, that, as the unity of Israel of old was founded on deliverance and calling from the midst of, and maintained separation amongst, the heathen which surrounded them, so the church's unity was based on the power of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, separating a peculiar people out of the world to Christ, and dwelling amongst them; God Himself thus dwelling and walking in them. For there is one Spirit, and one body, as we are called in one hope of our calling {Eph. 4:4}. Indeed, the very name of Holy Spirit implies it; for holiness is separation from evil. Whatever failure, moreover, there may be in attainment, the principle and measure of this separation is necessarily the light, as God is in the light; the way into the holiest being made manifest, and the Holy Ghost comes down thence to dwell in the church below, and so in power of heavenly separation, because the indwelling center and power of unity (just as the Shekinah in Israel), He establishes the holiness of the church and its unity in its separation to God, according to His own nature, and the power of that presence. Such is the church, and such is true unity. Nor can the saint recognize, intelligently, any other, though he may own desires and efforts after good in that which is short of it.

Here I might close my remarks, having developed the great, though simple, principle, flowing from the very nature of God, that separation from evil is His principle of unity. But a difficulty collateral to my main object and subject presents itself. Supposing evil introduces itself into this one body so formed actually on earth, does the principle still hold good? How then can separation from evil maintain unity? And here we can touch on the mystery of iniquity. But this principle, flowing from the very nature of God, that He is holy, cannot be set aside. Separation from evil is the necessary consequence of the presence of the Spirit of God under all circumstances as to conduct and fellowship. But here there is a certain modification of it. The revealed presence of God is always judicial when it exists; because power against evil is connected with the holiness which rejects it.

Thus in Israel God's presence was judicial; His government was there, which did not allow of evil. So, though in another manner, it is in the church. God's presence is judicial there -- not in the world, save in testimony, because God is not yet revealed in the world; and hence it plucks up no tares out of that field. But it judges them that are within.

Hence the church is to put out from itself the wicked person {1 Cor. 5}, and thus maintains its separation from evil. And unity is maintained in the power of the Holy Ghost and a good conscience. And indeed, that the Spirit may not be grieved, and the practical blessing lost, saints are exhorted to look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God. And how sweet and blessed is this garden of the Lord, when it is thus maintained and blooms in the fragrance of Christ's grace. But, alas! we know worldliness creeps in, and spiritual power declines; the taste for this blessing is enfeebled, because it is not enjoyed in the power of the Spirit; the spiritual fellowship with Christ the heavenly Head decays, and the power which banishes evil out of the church is no longer in living exercise. The body is not sufficiently animated by the Holy Ghost to answer the mind of God. But God will never leave Himself without witness. He brings home the evil to the body by some testimony or other -- by the word or by judgments, or both in succession -- to recall it to its spiritual energy, and lead it to maintain His glory and its place. If it refuse to answer to the very nature and character of God, and to the incompatibility of that nature with evil (so that it becomes really a false witness for God), then the first and immutable principle recurs, the evil must be separated from.

Further, the unity which is maintained after such separation, becomes a testimony to the compatibility of the Holy Ghost and evil: that is, it is in its nature apostasy; it maintains the name and authority of God in His church, and associates it with evil. It is not the professed open apostasy of avowed infidelity; but it is denying God according to the true power of the Holy Ghost, while using His name. This unity is the great power of evil pointed out in the New Testament, connected with the professing church and the form of piety. From such we are to turn away. This power of evil in the church may be discerned spiritually, and left when there is the consciousness of inability to effect any remedy; or if there be an open public testimony, it is then open condemnation to it. Thus, previous to the Reformation, God gave light to many who maintained a witness to this very evil in the professing church, apart from it; some bore testimony and still remained. When the Reformation came it was openly and publicly given, and the professing body or Romanism became openly and avowedly apostate, as far as a professing Christian body can, in the Council of Trent. But wherever the body declines the putting away of evil, it becomes in its unity a denier of God's character of holiness, and then separation from the evil is the path of the saint; and the unity he has left is the very greatest evil that can exist where the name of Christ is named. Saints may remain,

as they have in Romanism, where there is not power to gather all saints together; but the duty of the saint as to it is plain on the first principles of Christianity, though doubtless his faith may be exercised by it. "Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" {2 Tim. 2:19}. It is possible that he that departs from evil may make himself a prey {Isa. 59:15}; but this, of course, makes no difference; it is a question of faith. He is in the true power of God's unity.

Thus, then, the word of God affords us the true nature, object, and power of unity; and, in so doing, it gives us the measure of it, by which we judge of what pretends to it, and the manner of it; and, moreover, the means of maintaining its fundamental principles according to the nature and power of God by the Holy Ghost in the conscience where it may not be realized together in power. Its nature flows from God's; for of true unity He must be the center, and He is holy; and He brings us into it by separating us from evil. Its object is Christ; He is the sole center of the church's unity, objectively as its Head. Its power is the presence of the Holy Ghost down here, sent as the Spirit of Truth withal from the Father by Jesus. Its measure is walking in the light, as God is in the light; fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus, and, we may add, through the testimony of the written word -- the apostolic and prophetic word of the New Testament especially. It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (of the New Testament), Jesus Christ Himself being the corner stone. The means of maintaining it is putting away evil (judicially if needed), so as to maintain, through the Spirit, fellowship with the Father and the Son. If evil be not put away, then separation from that which does not become a matter of conscience. I return, if alone, into the essential and infallible unity of the body, in its everlasting principles of union with the Head in a holy nature by the Spirit. The path of the saints thus becomes clear. God will secure by eternal power the vindication, not here perhaps, but before His angels, of them who have rightly owned His nature and truth in Christ Jesus.

I believe these fundamental principles are deeply needed in this day, for the saint who seeks to walk truly and thoroughly with God. Latitudinarian unity it may be painful and trying to keep aloof from; it has an amiable form in general, is in a measure respectable in the religious world, tries nobody's conscience, and allows of everybody's will. It is the more difficult to be decided about, because it is often connected with a true desire of good, and is associated with amiable nature. And it seems rigid, and narrow, and sectarianism to decline so to walk. But the saint, when he has the light of God, must walk clearly in that. God will vindicate His ways in due time. Love to every saint is a clear duty; walking in their ways is not. And he that gathers not with Christ scatters. There can be but one unity; confederacy, even for good, is not it, even if it have its form. Unity, professed to be of the church of God, while evil exists and is not put away, is a yet more serious matter. It will always be found to be connected with the clerical principle, because

that is needed to maintain unity, when the Spirit is not its power, and, in fact, takes its place, guides, rules, governs in its place, under the plea of priesthood, or ministry, owned as a distinct body, a separate institution: it would not hold together without this.

Collected Writings of J. N. Darby 1:353-365.

Extract From:
Grace, the Power of Unity and of Gathering

by J. N. Darby

... What I think important to be understood is, that the active power that gathers is always grace -- love. Separation from evil may be called for. In particular states of the church, when evil is come in, it may characterize very much the path of the saints. It may be, that through many acting under the same convictions at the same time, this may form a nucleus. But this in itself is never a gathering power. Holiness may attract when a soul is in movement of itself. But power to gather, is in grace, in love working; if you please, faith working by love. Look at all the history of the church of God in all ages, and you will find this to be the case. Grace is the formative power of unity, where it does not exist. I take for granted here that Christ is owned as the center. If evil exist, it may gather out of that evil, but the gathering power is love. The paper which I would pass under review is a tract, which, from circumstances, is not unknown: "Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity." I trust I should have grace to acknowledge error where I thought there was such, and I am sure I owe it to the Lord to do so; but my object here is somewhat larger. That tract refers to the state of the church of God at large, and not any particular member of it; but as one part of truth corrects an evil, so another, by its operation on the soul, may enlarge the sphere, and strengthen the energy of good. There are two great principles in God's nature, owned of all saints -- holiness and love. One is, I may be bold to say, the necessity of His nature, imperative, in virtue of that nature, on all that approach Him; the other, its energy. One characterizes; the other is, and is the spring of activity of, His nature. God is holy -- He is not loving, but love. He is it in the essential fountain of His being; we make Him a judge by sin, for He is holy and has authority; but He is love, and none has made Him such. If there be love anywhere else, it is of God, for God is love. This is the blessed active energy of His being. In the exercise of this He gathers to Himself for the eternal blessedness of those who are gathered, its display in Christ, and Christ Himself, being the great power and center of it. His counsels as to this are the glory of His grace, His applying them to sinners and the means He employs for it, the riches of His grace. And in the ages to come He will shew how exceeding great these were in His kindness to us, in Christ Jesus.

... I have read over the tract I have referred to.³² I confess, it seems to me that one who would deny the abstract principles of that tract is not on Christian ground at

32. {The writer refers to the paper, *Separation from Evil, God's Principle of Unity*.}

all. I cannot conceive anything more indisputably true, as far as human statement of truth can go. Still there is something more than truth to be considered, and that is, the use of truth. God's imputing no sin to the church, through grace and redemption, is always blessedly and eternally true. To a careless conscience, I may have to address other truth. Now, I repeat, that on reading that tract I do not see how a person resisting the principles stated, is on Christian ground at all. Is not holiness the principle on which Christian fellowship is based? And the tract is really and simply that. But two other points I believe it important to bring out along with that -- one, in relation to man; the other, to the blessed God. The first is this: human nature we all own, and in a measure know, is a treacherous thing. Now separation from evil, when right, which I now assume, still distinguishes him who separates from him from whom he does so. This tends to make one's position important, and so it is; but with such hearts as we have, one's position mixes itself up with self- not in a gross way but in a treacherous one; it is my position, and not only so, but the mind being occupied with what has been important (justly so in its place) to itself, tends to make, in a measure, separation from evil a gathering power, as well as a principle on which gathering takes place. This (save as holiness attracts souls who are spiritual by a moving principle in them) it is not.

There is another danger: a Christian separates from evil, I still suppose, in a case in which he is bound to do so. Say, he leaves the corruptest system in existence; on this principle, it is the evil acting on the conscience of the new man, and known to be offensive to God, which drives him out. Hence he is occupied with the evil. This is a dangerous position. He attaches it, perhaps anxiously, to those he has left, to give a clear ground why he has done so. They conceal, cover over, gloss, explain. It is always so where the evil is maintained. He seeks to prove it, to make his ground clear; he is occupied with evil, with proving evil, and proving evil against others. This is slippery ground for the heart, to say nothing of danger to love. The mind becomes occupied with evil as an object before it. This is not holiness, nor separation from evil, in practical internal power. It harasses the mind, and cannot feed the soul. Some are almost in danger of acquiescing in the evil through the weariness of thinking about it. At all events power is not found here. God separates us surely from evil, but He does not fill the mind when it continues to be occupied with it; for He is not in the evil. It is quite true that the mind may say, Let us think of the Lord and drop it, and get a measure of quiet and comfort; but in this case the general standard and tone of spiritual life will be infallibly lowered. Of this I have not a shadow of doubt. The positive evil will not be actually acquiesced in; but God's horror of it is lost in the mind, and the measure of divine power and communion just proportionately lost, and the general path shows this. The testimony fails and is lowered. This is the widest evil-where there is conflict with evil not maintained in spiritual power-and creates the most

serious difficulties to extended unity; but God is above all. The new nature, when in lively exercise, because it is holy and divine, revolts from evil when it comes before it. The conscience, too, will then be in exercise as responsible to God. But this is not all, even as to holiness. There is another, which in many (I may say, at bottom, in all) cases distinguishes real holiness from natural conscience, or conventional rejection of evil. Holiness is not merely separation from evil, but separation to God from evil. The new nature has not merely a nature or intrinsic character as being of God. It has an object, for it cannot live on itself-a positive object, and that is God. Now this changes everything; because it separates from evil-which it abhors, therefore, when it sees it- because it is filled with good. This does not enfeeble its separation. It makes its abhorrence of it lively when it has to be occupied with it, but it gives another tone to that which is abhorrent to it, the possession of good sufficient, when it is not forced to think of evil, to put it quite out of mind and sight. Hence it is holy, calm, and has a substantive character of its own, apart from evil, as well as abhorrent of it. With us this can only be in having an object, because we are and ought to be dependent only so far as we are positively filled with God in Christ. We are occupied with good, and hence holy, for that is holiness; and, therefore, easily and discerningly abhorrent of evil, without occupying ourselves with it. It is God's own nature; He is essentially good; delights in it in Himself: and therefore He is abhorrent, in virtue of His goodness, of evil; His nature is the good, and hence in His very nature He rejects the evil. He will do so authoritatively, no doubt, in judgment; but we now speak of nature.

Hence you will find, that when it is in power, love precedes and makes holy, whether it be mutual or the enjoyment of it in the revelation of God. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints," 1 Thess. 3: 12, 13. So in 1 John 1, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

Now here the separation from evil, walking in the light, in God's revealed character in Christ, in the practical knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, in the

truth as it is in Jesus in whom the life was the light of men, is fully insisted on with lines as clear and strong as the Holy Ghost alone knows how to make them. He who pretends to fellowship, and does not walk in the knowledge of God according to that knowledge, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But what makes the fellowship? This keeps it pure-but what makes it? The revelation of the blessed object, and center of it, in Christ. He was speaking of One who had won his own heart- who was the gathering power into fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. He knew by the Holy Ghost, and enjoyed what the Savior had said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." This was love, infinite, divine; and, through the Holy Ghost, the witness of it had communion with it and told it out, that others might have fellowship with him; and truly, his was such. They joined in it. Now that, I apprehend, was gathering power. The object gathered to, necessarily involved what follows. So, indeed, he closes the epistle. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true, and we are in him that is true; that is, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." That is, the gathering power of good comes before the warning. This is the more remarkable in this epistle, because it is, in a certain sense, occupied with evil, is written concerning those that seduced them.

Holiness, then, is separation to God, if it be real, as well as *from* evil; for thus alone we are in the light, for God is light. This is true, in our first sanctifying -- we are brought to know God, brought to God. If we come to ourselves it is, "I will arise and go to my father." If it is restoration, "If thou wilt return, return unto me." Indeed a soul is never restored really till it does; for it is not in the light so as to purge flesh, even if the fruits of flesh have been confessed; nor is sin seen as it is in God's sight. Hence love comes in, in all true conversion and restoration, however dimly seen, or through however dark workings of conscience. We want to get back to God; there is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared; otherwise, it is despair which drives us farther away. Indeed, what would or could restoration be if it were not to God. But, in the full sense of gathering, that is, to common fellowship, it is clearly the blessed object which reveals that in which we are to have the fellowship, which so gathers. We are to have fellowship in something, that is, with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. This, then, must draw hearts to itself, that in their common delight in it their fellowship may exist. The principle of the tract is this, that in doing this it must separate from evil. It is "this-then-is-the-message" part of the statement. So Christ says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Now here was perfect love, entire separation from all sin and condemnation of it. "In that he died, he died unto sin once" -- separation from the world, and deliverance from the whole power of the enemy and the scene of it. It is perfect love drawing from everything to itself;

showing all was evil, absorbing the soul into what was good, in a saving way from it. But when we follow Him into life, all is gone from which He separated. "In that he liveth, he liveth unto God"; that is His whole being, so to speak. Now He is, in this life, made higher than the heavens -- the divine glory I do not here enter into, but the life. It is a heavenly place He takes, and our gathering through the cross is to Him there, in the good where evil cannot come. There is our communion -- entering into the Father's house in spirit. And this, I apprehend, is the true character of the assembly, of the church, for worship in its full sense. It remembers the cross, it worships, the world left out, and all known in heaven before God. He gave Himself that He might gather into one. But here I anticipate a little, for I am speaking as yet of the object, not of the active power. I apprehend that what separates the saint from evil, what makes him holy, is the revelation of an object (I mean, of course, through the Holy Ghost working), which draws his soul to *that* as good, and *thereby* reveals evil to him, and makes him judge it in spirit and soul: his knowledge of good and evil is, then, not a mere uneasy conscience, but sanctification; that is, sanctification is resting, by the enlightening of the Holy Ghost, on an object, which, by its nature, purifies the affections by being their object -- creates them through the power of grace. Even under law it had this form, "Be ye holy for I am holy"; though, I admit, it there partook necessarily of the character of the dispensation. In the cross we have these two great principles perfectly brought out. Love is clearly shown, the blessed object which draws the heart; yet the most solemn judgment of and separation from all evil; such is God's perfectness -- the foolishness and weakness of God. Divine attraction in love, evil in all its horror and forms, perfectly abhorred by him who is attracted and attaches himself to that. The soul goes with sin, *as sin*, to love, and goes there because love thus displayed has shown him that it is sin, in being made sin for us. This is the power objectively that separates from evil, and ends all connection with it; for I die then to all the nature I lived to. Evil ceases to be, through faith, as I live hereafter in blessed activity in love. But I have, perhaps, dwelt long enough on what objectively gathers and gives fellowship; and surely, our fellowship, communion, is in that which is good -- and as heavenly by no evil being there. Imperfectly realized no doubt here, but so far as it is not, fellowship is destroyed, for the flesh has none. Hence it is said: "If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." But we cannot walk out of darkness but by walking in the light, that is, with God: and God is love, and were He not, we could not walk there.

. . . I believe I have said enough to make what is in my mind plain; and I am more anxious to state than to insist on it. In the full divine sense, without grace, there is neither truth nor holiness (out of God, of course, I mean), save as holiness may be applied to the elect angels -- nor can be; because it is impossible that a sinner can

be with God but on the ground and by the power and activity of grace. The power of unity is grace; and, as man is a sinner and departed from God, the power of gathering is grace-grace manifested in Jesus on the cross, and bringing us to God in heaven, and bringing us in Him who is gone there. This is holiness: certainly the cross was not acquiescence in evil.

J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* 1:353-365.

On Ecclesiastical Independency

by J. N. Darby

The point I take to be fatally dangerous is confounding private judgment and conscience. We see the full-blown fruit of it in the present state of Protestantism, where private judgment is used to authorize the rejection of everything the individual does not agree with.

The difference is plain in the case put. A father's authority is admitted. Now if it be a matter of conscience, Christ's authority or the confession of His name, of course this cannot stand in the way. I am bound to love Christ more than father or mother. But suppose I reject my father's authority for everything my private judgment differs in as to what is right, there is an end of all authority. There may be cases of anxious enquiry as to what my duty is, where spiritual judgment alone can come to a right judgment. This is the case in the whole Christian life. We must have our senses exercised to discern good and evil --- not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is, and such exercises are useful.

But the confounding a judgment I form simply as to right with conscience is, in result, confounding will with obedience. True conscience is always obedience to God; but if I take what I see as sufficient, confusion of a deadly character soon comes in. Does one not submit to a father's authority unless he can bring, even in an important matter, a text of scripture for everything he desires? Is there no setting up of self and selfwill in such a principle?

But I go farther; and it is the case in question. Suppose in an assembly a person has been put out for evil. All admit that such, if truly humbled, should be restored. The assembly think he is humbled truly: I am satisfied, suppose, that he is not. They receive him. Am I to break with the assembly or to refuse subjection to their act, because I think them mistaken? Supposing (which is a more trying case to the heart) I believe he is humbled and they are satisfied he is not, I may bow to a judgment I think erroneous and look to the Lord to set it right. There is such a thing as lowliness as to self, which does not set up its own opinion against others, though one may have no doubt of being right.

There is another question connected with it --- one assembly's act binding another. I do not admit, because scripture does not admit, independent assemblies. There is the body of Christ, and all Christians are members of it; and the Church of God in one place represents the whole and acts in its name. Hence, in 1 Corinthians, where the subject is treated of, all Christians are taken in with the assembly of Corinth as such; yet this last is treated as the body as such, and made

locally responsible for maintaining the purity of the assembly; and the Lord Christ is looked at as there; and what was done was done *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is wholly ignored when one speaks of six or seven clever, intelligent Christians and a number of ignorant ones. The Lord in the midst of an assembly is set aside. The flesh, it is said, often acts in an assembly. Why assume it does and forget it may in an individual?

Again, why speak of obeying the Lord first, then the Church? But supposing the Lord is in the Church? It is merely setting up private judgment against the judgment of an assembly meeting in Christ's name with His promise (if they are not, I have nothing to say to them); it is simply saying, I count myself wiser than those who are. I reject entirely as unscriptural the saying, "First Christ, then the Church." If Christ be not in the Church, I do not own it at all. It assumes that the Church has not Christ, making them two parties. I may reason with an assembly, because I am a member of Christ and hence of it -- if it is one, help it. But if I own it as an assembly of God, I cannot assume Christ is not there. It is simply denying it is an assembly of God. The thought is wanting of what an assembly of God is. This is not surprising; but it necessarily falsifies judgment on the point, which is not "if the word" -- but if *I see* not the word for it. It is justly trusting one's own judgment as against others and the assembly of God.

I could not for a moment put a question of blasphemies against Christ on such a ground. It is really wickedness. The attempt to cover them by church questions, or by pleas of individual conscience, I abhor with a perfect abhorrence.

Allow me to put the question on minor questions in another shape. Suppose I am of an assembly, and I think they judge something in a mistaken way. Am I to *impose* my individual way of thinking *on them*? If not, what am I to do? Leave the assembly of God if it be such (if not, I do not go there)? You cannot help yourself. If I do not continue in an assembly, because it does not agree with me in everything, I can be of no assembly of God in the world. All this is simply a denial of the presence and help of God's Spirit and of the faithfulness of Christ to His own people. I cannot see godly lowliness in it.

But if an assembly have judged as such in a case of discipline, admitting all brotherly communications and remonstrances, I distinctly say another assembly should, on the face of it, receive their act. If the wicked man is put out at Corinth, is Ephesus to receive him? Where then is unity? where the Lord in the midst of the Church? What led me out of the Establishment was the unity of the body: where it is not owned and acted on, I should not go. And independent churches I think quite as bad or worse of than of the Establishment {the Church of England}. But if each assembly acts independently of another and receives independently of it,

then it has rejected that unity -- they are independent churches. There is no practical unity of the body.

But I shall never be brought to such wickedness as to treat acceptance of blasphemers as an ecclesiastical question. If people like to walk with them or help and support the bearing with them at the Lord's table, they will not have me. I distinctly judge that the principles defended shew want of lowliness as to self and a setting aside the very idea of the Church of God. But I am not going to mix the two questions. I do not accept the setting aside my spiritual liberty: we are a flock, not an enclosure. But in questions of discipline, where no principle is denied, I do not set up my judgment against that of the assembly of God in that which God has committed to its care. It is just setting myself up as wiser, and neglecting God's word which has assigned certain duties to an assembly, which He will honor in its place.

Let me add, there is such a thing as obedience in what we do know, which goes before speculating on possible claims in obedience, where we should like to be free to go our own way. "To him that hath shall more be given." Doing what we know in obedience is a great way of knowing further.

Again, "the bond of unity between the churches is said to be the lordship of Christ." But there is not a word about churches [when we speak of unity], nor bond of churches; nor does unity consist of union of churches. Lordship is distinctly individual. Nor is Lord of the body a scriptural idea. Christ is Lord to individuals, Head to the body, over all things. Unity is not by lordship. Of course, individual obedience will help to maintain it, as all godliness will; but unity is unity of the Spirit, and in the body, not in bodies. Both Ephesians and Corinthians teach us distinctly that unity is in and by the Spirit, and that Christ has in this respect the place of Head, not of Lord, which referred to individual Christians. This error if acted on would falsify the whole position of gatherings, and make mere dissenters of them, and in no way meet the mind of Christ.

II

Confounding authority with infallibility is a poor and transparent piece of sophistry. In a hundred instances obedience may be obligatory where there is no infallibility. Were it not so, there could be no order in the world at all. There is no infallibility in it, but a great deal of self-will; and if there is to be no obedience where there is not infallibility, no acquiescence in what has been decided, there is no end to self-will and no existence of common order. The question is of competence, not of infallibility. A father is not infallible, but he has a divinely given authority; and acquiescence is a duty. A police magistrate is not infallible, but he has competent authority in the cases submitted to his jurisdiction. There may be resources against

abuse of authority, or in certain cases a refusal of it when a higher authority obliges us, as a conscience directed by God's word. We ought to obey God rather than man. But there is never in scripture liberty given to the human will as such. We are sanctified to the obedience of Christ. And this principle -- our doing God's will in simple obedience, without solving every abstract question which may be raised -- is a path of peace, which many heads who think themselves wiser miss, because it is the path of God's wisdom.

The question then is a mere sophistry, which betrays the desire to have the will free, and a confidence that the person's judgment is superior to all that has been already judged. There is judicial authority in the Church of God, and if there were not, it would be the most horrible iniquity on earth; because it would put the sanction of Christ's name on every iniquity. And that is what was sought and pleaded for by those with whom these questions originated: that whatever iniquity or leaven was allowed, it could not leaven an assembly. Such views have done good. They have the cordial abhorrence and rejection of every honest mind, and of every one who does not seek to justify evil. It is possible you may think or say That is not the question I am asking. Forgive me for saying, I know that it is, and that only; though you do not, I am well assured.

But the judicial authority of the Church of God is in *obedience* to the word. "Do ye not judge them that are within? Them that are without God judgeth. Wherefore put out from among yourselves that wicked person." And, I repeat, if it be not done, the Church of God becomes the accrediting of every vileness of sin. And I affirm distinctly, that where this is done, other Christians are bound to respect it. There are remedies for fleshly action in it, in the presence of the Spirit of God amongst the saints, and in the supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ; but that remedy is not the totally unscriptural and miserable one proposed by the question -- the pretension of competency in every one who takes it into his head to judge for himself independently of *what God has instituted*. It is, taken in its most favorable aspect, not an individual pretension, which is its real character, the well-known and unscriptural system which has been known since Cromwell's time -- that is, Independency: one body of Christians being independent of every other as a voluntary association. This is a simple denial of the unity of the body, and the presence and action of the Holy Ghost in it.

Supposing we were a body of Freemasons, and a person were excluded from one lodge by the rules of the order, and instead of looking to the lodge to review the case, if it was thought to be unjust, each other lodge were to receive him or not on their own independent authority, it is clear the unity of the Freemason system is gone. Each lodge is an independent body acting for itself. It is in vain to allege a wrong done, and the lodge not being infallible; the competent authority of lodges, and the unity of the whole, is at an end. The system is dissolved. There may be

provision for such difficulties. All right if it be needed. But the proposed remedy is the mere pretension of the superiority of the recusant lodge, and a dissolution of Freemasonry.

Now I openly reject, in the most absolute way, the pretended competency of one church or assembly to judge another, as the question proposes; but what is more important, it is an unscriptural denial of the whole structure of the Church of God. It is Independency, a system I knew forty years ago and would never join. If people like that system, let them go there. It is in vain to say it is not that. Independency merely means that each church judges for itself independently of another, and that is all that is claimed here. I have no quarrel with those who, liking to judge for themselves, prefer this system; only I am perfectly satisfied that in every respect it is wholly unscriptural. The Church is not a voluntary system. It is not formed (or rather unformed) of a number of independent bodies, each acting for itself. It was never dreamed, whatever the remedy, that Antioch could let in Gentiles, and Jerusalem not, and all go on according to the order of the Church of God. There is not a trace of such independency and disorder in the word. There is every possible evidence of, in fact, and doctrinal insistence on, there being one body on earth, whose unity was the foundation of blessing in fact, and its maintenance the duty of every Christian. Self-will may wish it otherwise, but certainly not grace, and not obedience to the word.

Difficulties may arise: we have not an apostolic center as there was at Jerusalem. Quite true: but we have a resource in the action of the Spirit in the unity of the body, the action of healing grace and helpful gift, and the faithfulness of a gracious Lord who has promised never to leave us or forsake us. But the case of Jerusalem in Acts 15 *is* a proof that the scriptural church never thought of, and did not accept the independent action insisted upon. The action of the Holy Ghost was in the unity of the body, and is always so. The action directed by the apostle at Corinth (and which binds us as the word of God) was operative in respect of the whole Church of God, and all are contemplated in the opening of the epistle. Does any one mean to pretend, if he were to be put out at Corinth judicially, that each church was to judge for itself whether he was to be received; that judicial act pass for nothing or operative only at Corinth, and Ephesus or Cenchrea to do as it liked afterwards? Where then was the solemn act and direction of the apostle? Well, that authority and that direction is the word of God for us now.

I am quite aware it will be said, Yes, but you may not follow it rightly, as the flesh may act. It is possible. There is *possibility* that the flesh may act. But I am quite certain that what denies the unity of the Church, sets up for itself, and dissolves it into independent bodies, is the dissolution of the Church of God, unscriptural, and *nothing but flesh*. It is therefore judged for me before I go any farther. There is a remedy, a blessed gracious remedy of humble minds in the help

of God's Spirit in the unity of the body, and the Lord's faithful love and care, as I have said, but not in the pretentious will which sets up for itself and denies the Church of God. My answer is, then, that the plea is a sophistry which confounds infallibility and divinely-ordained authority met by lowly grace, and that the system sought is the pretentious spirit of Independency, a rejection of the whole authority of scripture in its teaching on the subject of the Church, a setting up of man instead of God.

It is clear, that if two or three are gathered together, it is an assembly, and if scripturally assembled, an assembly of God; and if not, what else? If the only one in a place, it is the assembly of God in the place. Yet I do object practically to taking the title, because the assembly of God in any place properly embraces all the saints in the place. And there is practical danger for souls in assuming the name, as losing sight of the ruin and setting up to be something. But it is not false in the supposed case. If there be one such and another is set up by man's will, independent of it, the first only is morally, in God's sight, the assembly of God; and the other is not at all so, because it is set up in independency of the unity of the body. I reject in the most entire and unhesitating manner the whole Independent system as unscriptural and a positive, unmitigated evil. Now that the unity of the body has been brought out, and the scriptural truth of it known, it is simply a work of Satan. Ignorance of the truth is one thing, our common lot in many ways; opposition to it is another. I know it is alleged that the Church is now so in ruins that scriptural order according to the unity of the body cannot be maintained. Then let the objectors avow as honest men, that they seek unscriptural order, or rather disorder. But in truth it is impossible to meet at all in that case to break bread, except in defiance of God's word: for scripture says, "we are all one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf." We profess to be one body whenever we break bread; scripture knows nothing else. And they will find scripture too strong and perfect a bond for man's reasoning to break it.

J. N. Darby, *Collected Writings* 1:353-365.