

THE
DIVINE INSTITUTION
OF THE
CHURCH OF GOD.

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DIVINE INSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH.

THERE is nothing in which the grace of God is so displayed as in the Church. Whether we regard His eternal and unalterable purpose concerning her, or the remarkable blessings bestowed on her, or the glorious place designed for her in the future glory; our souls cannot fail to be drawn out in adoration to our God who has dealt with us in such matchless grace. True it is that all blessings at any time only flowed on fallen man through grace; but the special place and portion of the Church so transcends anything previously accorded to saints, or even what will be conferred on those who will be on the earth in the Millennium, that indeed we may well be "lost in wonder, love, and praise," as we contemplate what God in the magnificence of His grace has done and will do for her.

The relationship that exists between Christ and His Church is of such an intimate nature, that we require to know Himself in all the perfect excellency of His person, and office, ere we can have an adequate idea of what He has made the Church in the sight of God. This, of course, cannot be attained by finite minds, but the little we are now given to see by the Holy Spirit of the glories and love of the Lord Jesus endears Him to our hearts, and makes us jealous to maintain His name and authority pure and intact. He has made the Church (so to speak) part of Himself; for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." (Eph. v. 30). See 1 Cor. xii. 12-27.

Wherever the peculiar calling of the Church is ap-

prehended, and allegiance wrought in the heart to Christ by the Holy Spirit, there will be no difficulty in observing and obeying the divine principles given for her guidance. But where these are not known and felt, no mere knowledge of wickedness however accurate will induce saints either to see the evil that pollutes, or to purge out the leaven that contaminates the assembly of God. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we all should be acquainted with what the Church is according to Scripture, and above all to grow daily in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. The more we know Him, the more we shall perceive what is suitable to His glory and presence in that house *over* which He has been placed as Son of God (Heb. iii. 6).

To learn what the Church is we must derive our information from the New Testament, for there alone is it revealed. Save in type, it is not in the Old. To the Apostle Paul it was given to make known the marvellous grace that unites Jew and Gentile believers to the risen Christ, thus forming "His body," "the church" (Eph. i. 22-23). He tells us in the third chapter of this epistle that this union, or "the mystery of the Christ," was not made known unto the sons of men in other generations, but that it was made known to him "by revelation." In the Jewish dispensation the Gentiles were excluded from the privileges and society of the Jews. "The middle wall of partition" separated them from each other; and "the veil of the temple" shut both out from God. It is evident then that the Church (which is composed of believers from Jews and Gentiles) could not exist whilst the Jewish system lasted. The death of Christ removed all distinction of race by ignoring for ever all that man was. It reduced all classes to one common level by proving them to be alike haters of God in slaying His Son. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is God's provision for the convicted sinner's need, and God's judgment on man in His person. All believers are "crucified with Christ," and thus an end has been put to all that they are in the

flesh. The cross has broken down "the partition wall" between Jew and Gentile, slain their enmity, and reconciled both in one body to God. The two are now formed in Christ into one new man: so peace has been made (Eph. ii. 14-17). But further, the moment Christ died, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom," and God is no longer concealed from His people. He then with His own hand rent the veil that kept Him apart, and so bears testimony to the value of the precious blood by which He is fully manifested. His righteous sentence against sin has been fully executed, His holy claims perfectly met, His will thoroughly accomplished in that finished work; and therefore He removes every thing that would keep Him at a distance from His beloved people—God and man can meet together. Every believer in the Lord Jesus has access in peace into the very presence of God. This is the portion common to all who rest in the one sacrifice of Christ that has made them perfect for ever in the sight of God, who has publicly accepted it, and declared His ineffable satisfaction in it, by placing His Son, who voluntarily became the victim, at His own right hand, (see Heb. x. 1-19). The MOST HOLY PLACE is now thrown open to Jew and Gentile without distinction, if they but trust in Jesus. Marvellous grace! that meets man in all his hopeless wretchedness, and sets him at ease under the very eye of God, in the consciousness that the value of Christ and His death rests upon him. Well, indeed, may all fleshly differences cease in the light of such blessedness.

We have not to wait for the entrance into the glory for which we are destined in order to enjoy God; we do so now in the measure we apprehend the way He has been revealed in and by the Son. All who have received the Son by faith, stand in the same relationship to God. "The Spirit of adoption" is indiscriminately imparted to all, that they may equally enjoy the liberty of sons with God as their Father. All should know the comfort of saying, "Abba, Father." It is His good

pleasure to establish this relationship: nothing else would suit His grace nor satisfy His love respecting us, see Eph. i. 5. Hence He could not leave any of His people either under condemnation or bondage, and therefore redeems those who were under the law from it altogether. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13). Again it is written, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15; see also Gal. iv. 4—6).

This twofold application of redemption extends to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Both incurred God's judgment, and both were in bondage, the one without law and the other through law. The Gentile has in fact placed himself under the same law as the Jew, and is religiously educated in it from childhood in countries where a spurious Christianity is taught. Nothing but grace can bring blessing to any. The grace of God has appeared to all men, bringing with it salvation and liberty. On this ground the Church is founded. "The bond-woman and her son" are cast out of God's house, and the children of the free are retained in happy fellowship with their Father. Judaism has been superseded by Christianity.

This was not effected during Christ's life on earth. But when He died, and afterwards ascended to heaven in virtue of accomplished redemption, the condition of God's people was entirely changed, and also the mode in which God deals with them. The principles which are now introduced, and the favours conferred, are so diametrically opposed to what preceded them in the past dispensation that they could not exist together. It is from the day of Pentecost that Christianity dates; and as the Church is founded on, and guided by, the truths of Christianity, it follows that her existence began at the same time. The truth that forms the Church, and the principles which govern it, are in such direct variance with God's requirements from Israel that evidently the Church and Judaism could not

co-exist. For instance, how could the confession of the perfect efficacy of the one sacrifice of Christ for putting away sins be maintained with the continuous offering of sacrifices which could only bring sins to remembrance? And how could God be worshipped in the Spirit as Father, and at the same time "tempted" by the unbearable yoke of the law being put on the neck of His worshippers? It is of the utmost importance to distinguish between these two states if we want to learn what the Church of God is, and if we desire to be preserved from the wiles of Satan who has sought from its very commencement to lead it back to Judaism. The Church was not established until the Jewish system was abrogated.

Our blessed Lord Himself confirms this fact when He declares to Peter on his confession that He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," that "on this rock *I will build My Church*" (Matt. xvi. 18). He evidently refers to a time subsequent to that in which He was speaking. We know from Acts ii. 47 that it was after His ascension that "the Lord added [to the Church, or, together] daily those who were saved." In the Acts we find the Lord gathering and building the assembly in accordance with His prediction in Matthew.

The position and privileges of the Church prove that she was not formed till after Christ's resurrection and ascension.

What is her position and what are her privileges? Has God set His Church on the thrones or high places of this world? Has He given her its kingdoms and invested her with its glories? No. Blessed be His name, far higher is the place He has assigned her, far richer the portion He has provided for her, and far brighter the splendour with which He has clothed her. He has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 6). He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. i. 3). He has given us Christ glorified as an object for our hearts, who transforms us to His own image, as we gaze on His glory with

unveiled face by the Spirit (2 Cor. iii. 18). And, what is better than all, He has made us conscious of His love which procured all these honours and blessings for us, and secures them to us. It is manifest that it could not be said that we were raised with Christ, and seated in Him in heavenly places, till He Himself was raised, and sat down on high at the right hand of the Father. Neither could we behold His present glory till He received it. The Church then owes her position, blessing, and dignity to the resurrection and ascension of her Head—Christ Jesus—destined for her, it is true, in the eternal purposes of God, but only manifested after the death of the Lord Jesus.

Further, the Holy Ghost dwells in the Church, and thus makes her “an habitation of God” (Eph. ii. 22). But this did not take place till Christ ascended. As He says, “If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (John xvi. 7). When redemption was accomplished and Christ glorified in heaven, then the Holy Spirit was sent down to dwell in the redeemed, both individually and collectively: in each believer—as it is written, “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God?” (1 Cor. vi. 19); in the Church—“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. iii. 16.) The context of each of these scriptures shews that it is individual holiness to which reference is made by the former question; and congregational purity by the latter. Both prove that the Spirit’s presence makes a temple on earth for God. They teach the solemn responsibility that flows from such nearness to God. With what jealous care should each Christian keep his body from all that is contrary to the nature of the Holy Spirit! And with what earnestness should all who care for God’s glory in the Church seek to preserve it from any thing that would defile it, and render it unbecoming His temple! “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple

ye are," verse 17. These are the only temples in this world owned of God since the descent of the Holy Spirit. It is one of the peculiarities of the Church that God the Holy Ghost dwells in her.

That the Church was not brought to light until Christ ascended is further confirmed by the fact that the ministry provided for it was not given till then. It was when Christ resumed His place above that He bestowed and still continues to bestow the gifts necessary for the growth and edification of the Church. Hence we read, "*When He ascended up on high, He gave gifts unto men*—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith" (Eph. iv. 8-13). We learn from this Scripture the love and care of Christ to His Church, that she should be encouraged, supported, warned, kept in communion with Him, and be for Him down here; and that these gifts shall be continued to her unto the end, "till we all come into the unity of the faith." In Rom. xii. 6-8 we have gifts enumerated, and directions given how to use them, which all intelligent Christians will admit remain to this day, and that they are indispensable to the well-being of the Christian assembly or Church. From Scripture it is clear that ministry did not find its source in, nor derive its authority from, the Church. The gifts necessary for the performance of it, various as they are, come direct from the glorified Christ; they are all attributed to Him as their giver, and to the Holy Spirit as their dispenser, or "divider as he wills." They are the proofs of God's gracious care for His Church.

Since "gifts" are designed for the welfare of the Church, and as they were not bestowed till Christ ascended, and most of them will be continued until He comes again, it follows that the Church itself did not begin till the same time, and that she will remain on earth till Christ comes for her. Otherwise we

would have a Church existing without ministry, which would be quite incompatible with the love which Christ has for His body.

The Church at its origin, as we find it in the New Testament, was externally one united organized body. The Church of God was one as a whole, although in each place where Christians were, there was the local expression of it, still but one in the whole world,—visibly one. To belong to the Church in any place was, therefore, to belong to it everywhere. Hence letters of commendation were given to brethren going to places where they were not known. There was no such thing as one assembly being independent of another. The will of God in the death of Jesus was “that he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John xi. 52). For this Christ prayed, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John xvii. 11). Here the object of His solicitude was to keep them in unity, even as the Father and the Son are one. The Holy Spirit is the bond and power of this oneness. He it is who gives the one mind, counsel, and aim to saints. In proportion as we are filled with the Spirit, we shall have one common interest, purpose, love, &c., as the Father and Son have. In the 21st verse of this chapter the Lord seeks the oneness of all believers on another ground, viz., on the place which the reception of the truth communicated to them gave them. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” The responsibility of entering into, and upholding the relationship which the truth manifested gave to all who believed it, is enjoined on them here. Their oneness as children of the Father was to be so manifest as to induce the world to believe that the Father sent the Son who produced it. Then the loving heart of

Jesus carries His interest for us into the future. "The glory which Thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Here it is not the oneness of purpose and object as in verse 11, nor the oneness of fellowship into which belief of the truth introduced them as in verse 21, but oneness in the glory which Christ will give us. The millennial world will see us changed into Christ's image, sitting on the same throne as Himself, and then shall "know" (not merely "believe") that Jesus has been sent by the Father, and that we have been loved as He has been. These three characters of oneness belong to the Church. The first two show her present responsible possessions. The last gives her future secured portion, when her oneness shall be perfectly displayed, not by her diligence but by Christ's faithfulness.

Immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost we have an example of the oneness of believers. In Acts ii. 44 we read, "All that believed were together." In Eph. iv. 4, it is expressly stated that "there is one body." In 1 Cor. xii. 13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." In Eph. iv. 3, we are besought to keep this unity (which the Spirit produced by baptising us into one body) "in the bond of peace." It is unnecessary to multiply quotations to prove that it is the will of God that His Church should be one, and that it is accountable to present on earth this oneness in which it is set.

Many years ago one pithily defined the Church thus:—"The Church is that body which the Holy Ghost forms into unity, as connected with, and united to, the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven; and that which the Holy Ghost so unites to Him, is the only thing in Scripture called 'the Church' (*i.e.*, specifically such)."

There are two great powers at work in this world. They are antagonistic in their operations and produce opposite results. They are the Holy Ghost and Satan. The one dwells in and guides the Church; the other dwells in and guides the world. The former prepares a people for Christ, the latter for Antichrist. The Holy Spirit does not make us meet to inherit glory; nothing does this but "the blood of the Lamb." But by the word of God He enlightens our understandings to know what is good, and enables us to cleave to it, and discern what is evil and abhor it. He also keeps Christ before our souls in all His perfect love, so that our affections are drawn out to Him, and we long to see Him. Satan, on the other hand, darkens men's minds by keeping them from the truth of God and instead giving them human maxims which make them love and pursue what God calls evil, and hate and avoid what He calls good. The result of the workings of Satan's principles is the formation of a worldly religious structure which, in its finished consolidated state, is designated "Babylon," and fearful is its doom, as recorded in Rev. xviii. The issue of the Holy Ghost's operations is the production of a spiritual building, which in its aggregate form is termed "The New Jerusalem," and happy is its end, as described in Rev. xxi.

But this destiny of the Church leads us to consider its hope. For the acquirement of such knowledge we have to refer again to the writings of the Apostle Paul. As it was to him that the mystery of the Church was first communicated, so it was to him that the special aspect of the Lord's coming for the Church was also revealed. True it is that the Lord Jesus alludes to it Himself in chap. xiv. of John, "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am ye may be also." But there is no mention of its peculiar accompaniments as related by Paul. We know that the other apostles did not distinguish between it and His coming to give the promised kingdom to Israel. They ask Him after His resurrection, "Lord, wilt Thou at

this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" So little did they know either of the Church or of its hope.

But the Apostle Paul, to cheer the saints at Thessalonica who were sorrowing for their brethren that had fallen asleep, as if there was no hope of glory for them, says: "For this we say unto you by *the word of the Lord*, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (or precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. iv. 15—18.)

Hence, the proper attitude of the Church is looking for the Lord to come and take her to Himself at any moment. It distinguished the saints at Thessalonica at their conversion, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." They were not expecting the occurrence of any earthly event before they could see Him whom they loved. Their hope was formed in strict accordance with the word of God, which promises us that Christ will come for us and bring us to the place prepared for us in the Father's house on high.

The right understanding of the coming of the Lord as revealed in 1 Thess. iv. is the key to interpret many other Scriptures where it is applied to different purposes. For instance, Christ and the Church are invariably represented as being manifested together in glory at the same time before the world. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. iii. 4). "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John iii. 2, 3.) Faith can turn to the word of God and affirm on its authority that the

Church shall be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air," prior to its public manifestation with Him.

This passage also enables us to understand the force of the entreaty of the Apostle in 2 Thess. ii. 1, where he begs them "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him," that they be not troubled nor allow themselves to be deceived by any means that "the day of the Lord" had fallen on them because they were in great "tribulation," see ch. i. He makes use of the truth taught them in his first epistle to correct the erroneous notion they had entertained when he wrote his second. He beseeches them by "the *coming of the Lord*," that they should not imagine they were suffering from the effects of "*the day of the Lord*."* The first event would secure them from the second. The prophets spoke of "the day of the Lord," in which the wicked shall be judged and cleared out of the kingdom ere it be given to redeemed Israel. This, therefore, is the hope of the believing Jew—an earthly kingdom made ready for him by the sword of the true Joshua. But the Christian's hope is heavenly, and not prepared by any earthly judgments.

The fact of the Church having been taken to heaven as related in 1 Thess. iv. likewise accounts for her being seen there in the Book of Revelation from the iv. to the xix. chapters. Before the judgments commence which are described in the intervening chapters, she will be removed from the scene in which they occur. She was taken up with all the saints in past ages—"the dead in Christ"—to meet and to be for ever with the Lord. They are all now represented by the twenty-four elders who remain in heaven praising and adoring God and the Lamb during the time the providential judgments are poured on the earth. The position of the twenty-four elders shows the Church's, wherever they are beheld throughout the Apocalypse.

* It is well known that the best readings have "Lord," not "Christ," in this verse; and that the word translated "at hand," means "is present."

The Church is also represented in this book under the symbol of a bride, the Lamb's wife, and her nuptials are celebrated in heaven. Afterwards, the Church is included in the figure of a great army on horses (Rev. xix. 14). The rider of the white horse is followed by the armies of heaven, when he comes out to smite the nations of the earth and its kings, no longer providentially, but personally. The beast and the false prophet are at the same time cast alive into the lake of fire. That saints are meant by the armies in heaven is proved by their being clothed in fine linen. "The bride" is attired in the same, and it is explained in the 8th verse of this chapter to be "the righteousness of the saints." It was promised to the "overcomers" in the Church at Thyatira that they should participate with Christ in his rule "over the nations" (Rev. ii. 26). And in 1 Cor. vi. 2, it is asked, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" So here when the Lord takes His great power and reigns, He has the saints as His companions in clearing the earth of its corrupters.

But how is it that the Church is in the train of the "King of kings" as the heavens open for Him to come to the earth to execute judgment? The iv. of 1 Thess. enables us to answer the question. She follows *from* heaven because she had been previously *in* heaven. Nothing can be clearer. She has been in heaven during the time of God's providential judgments on the wicked, and during the period of the beast's reign and persecution. She re-appears with Christ when He is manifested in power and glory.

I press this point, because it has been asserted that the Lord will not come for His Church until Anti-christ be revealed, and the Jews be gathered to Jerusalem, and some other collateral events fulfilled. If this were so, it would be folly for her now to be expecting her Lord's return at any moment. She should rather learn from the appearance of Anti-christ, &c., the almost precise hour when Christ will come, which would be contrary to the constant wait-

ing for the Lord which is inculcated throughout the New Testament.

So far from its being true that the Church will have to wait for the manifestation of Antichrist and endure his persecution before she sees Christ, he will have to wait for her being taken to Christ before he can appear. "The man of sin" shall not be revealed until the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church be taken away. We have seen that the Spirit will remain on earth in the Church as long as she continues here; therefore, when He is removed, so will the Church be. When the Holy Ghost leaves the earth, there will be no power here to restrain the working of "the mystery of iniquity," as there is at present. The moment He leaves, "then shall that wicked one be revealed" (see 2 Thess. ii. 7, 8); when the Spirit is gone, the Church is gone, and then "the man of sin" appears. "The day of the Lord" will not come until after Antichrist is revealed, but Christ will come for His Church before it.

Hence it is not foolish but intelligent affections which prompt the Church to say, "Even so, come, Lord, Jesus," in response to His last recorded words, "I come quickly." The love of Christ is so deep and real that it will not be satisfied till He *sees* the result of "the travail of his soul." It did not cease towards the Church when He died for her, nor does it now when He lives for her; it will be further proved in His coming for her. Thrice He proclaims in Rev. xxii. that He is "coming quickly." The Spirit and the bride, in unison with His loving heart, say, "Come," and that in reply to His declaring Himself to be "the bright and morning star." The bride discerns in that title that she will not have to wait to see her loving Bridegroom until He rises on the world as "the sun of righteousness." The morning star appears before the sun.

The Church knows that the only thing which defers the realization of her fond hope is the gracious purpose of God in salvation. She cannot tell the moment

when the last member of Christ's body may be manifested; but knowing that His coming depends on it, she, "in all spiritual understanding" and affection, in the same breath in which she asks the Lord to "Come," invites the needy sinner to "Come," not to her, but to Jesus, and take the water of life freely. Thus the coming of the Lord is the one earnest and immediate hope of His Church as regarded in the light of Scripture.

We have been considering:—

1st. That the Church is composed of sinners saved by grace—taken from Jews and Gentiles, but, by reason of their identification with Christ in death and resurrection, all distinctions between them have ceased

2nd. That the Church and Judaism could not exist together, and therefore the former only commenced as a system on the earth when the latter was divinely abolished.

3rd. That the Church's calling is heavenly, and her blessings spiritual.

4th. That the Holy Ghost dwells in the Church since the day of Pentecost, and will not leave it as long as she remains on the earth.

5th. That the Church is supplied with gifts for her edification from the ascended Lord Jesus.

6th. That the Church is one body on earth externally as internally one, although having many assemblies locally apart, yet only one Church.

7th. That the Church's hope is the Lord's coming at any moment to take her to Himself for ever, and to change her into His own glorious likeness.

This is a view of the Church as God has constituted her, independent of her maintaining this character. If we look at the Church as she really appears at present, we see she has failed in all these particulars, and indeed in many more. She is "in ruins," as another aptly has said. Not that God has failed in His purpose concerning her, nor Christ in building what He undertook. He will complete that which He has begun, in spite of

the opposition of "the gates of hell." But the Church herself has failed as a responsible witness to the truth and ways of God. She has not maintained the place assigned her, nor fulfilled the trust reposed in her. The city set on a hill no longer commands the attention of the beholder. The light set on a candlestick has become obscured.

We need not dwell on the fallen divided state of the Church, nor adduce proofs of its ruin. Alas! it is too visible in every place. It is acknowledged by most Christians; but the more clearly we perceive its original constitution, the more readily we shall admit and should feel her present condition does not correspond to her pristine state.

National churches are designed for their nations, and therefore conversion to the Lord is not made a pre-requisite to entering them. As a public body, the modern Church is characterized not by heavenly-mindedness but by worldliness. Earthly possessions are coveted by her, and spiritual blessings neglected. The presence of the Spirit is not recognized. Arrangements are made and services performed as if there were no Holy Ghost in the Church. As to ministry, God's order has been completely subverted. Human ordination has superseded Christ's gifts. Those whom He has qualified are silenced to make room for those who have been installed in office by their submission to whatever form the sect to which they belong has prescribed. Christian ministry is entirely obliterated wherever human priesthood prevails. The very distinction between "Clergy" and "Laity" is contrary to the genius of Christianity, and is a return to Judaism. The blending of law and grace is what ruined the Church in the first instance, as we learn from Acts xv. and the Epistle to the Galatians.

There is nothing more foreign to the thoughts of God than this attempt to unite Judaism and Christianity—nothing against which He has given more solemn warnings, and denounced with more vehemence. He says, "I know the blasphemy of those who say

they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. ii. 9, see also ch. iii. 9). What is offering corporeal sacrifices, performing ritualistic ceremonies, building stately edifices for worship and consecrating them, dressing in priestly robes and assuming official proximity to God, but practically saying—"We are Jews?" Yet these are practised in the professing Church, in consequence of the introduction of the law and human priesthood into it. There is nothing that has more contributed to the ruin of the Church, and to lead it away from Christ, than the existence, teachings, and doings of the man-made ecclesiastics.

But what are Christians to do who see and confess the ruin? Are they to abandon or lightly esteem their heavenly calling, and plunge into the world because the titular Church has done so? God forbid! They should rather cleave the closer to, and value the more, the fair inheritance God has given them. They should prove by the happy experience of faith that they have been brought to a goodly land to feed in green pastures, where they are so satisfied with their rich portion that they will not yield to the temptation to leave it and seek possessions in a place which is only a wilderness to a redeemed soul with famine and dissatisfaction pervading it. It is better to have Christ attracting our hearts to where He is at the right hand of God, though we may have but few to accompany us, than to settle down with a crowd of earthly religionists in a world that rejected Him.

Are Christians to perpetuate the disunion of the nominal Church because they see the manifested union of the one body which God established on the earth gone and shattered to fragments? Certainly not. It is as much sin now to promote schism as ever it was. Saints are as responsible to God to obey the injunction, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," now as the day in which it was written. The question, "Is Christ divided?" still abides in full force. Christ is never divided. There can be no excuse for making

sects, nor remaining in them, when God so graciously gives the opportunity of gathering together to the name of Christ. This is not sectarianism ; it is its antidote. There is a promise given to those who are drawn together by His name that is not accorded to those who are gathered to some favourite preacher or party. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Surely we ought to consider His presence as the greatest favour that could be conferred on us. What better shall we have in heaven ? Then, it is true, we shall enjoy it more, because all hindrances will be gone ; but it is the same blessed divine person which we shall have there that we have now here in His assembly. It is Christ's presence that gives value to a meeting and its services in the sight of God. The answer to prayer is granted on the ground of it by the Father : see Matt. xviii. 19. It is to Christ that the Holy Spirit ever attracts. He is the bond of union for saints and their centre. He sheds joy and gladness on all hearts which surround Him. Why is it, then, that all believers do not avail themselves of this unspeakable privilege ? Simply because some other name has taken a deeper hold of their hearts. Where Christ governs the heart and mind, it will be found that it is not impossible to shake off all other names and parties, and gather to His alone.

All Christians are made "partakers of the divine nature," which prompts them to unite together in love. In yielding to this desire they should be guided by God's word when they assemble to express their union ; if not, they will form confederations not in accordance with His will. "Evangelical alliances," "believer's meetings," "conferences for the promotion of holiness," and kindred movements of our day, show a laudable intention on the part of those who promote them to have Christian fellowship. They prove that their founders are not entirely satisfied with the disunion of denominational churches. But these alliances are based on a defective arrangement, which involves an unholy compromise of the truth, by ex-

cluding God's word in all its fulness from their association. An understanding is come to amongst them that no topic shall be introduced that would disturb any party in its sectarian settlement, or offend their religious prejudices. Such unity consists in making platform speeches on selected subjects for a few days and having some social intercourse with each other, then to return each to his own sect, perhaps made stronger than ever to maintain its rivalry with the others by reason of their mutual agreement. This looks far more like a counterfeit of the union inculcated in Scripture than a sample of it. It is painfully evident that they do not allow the name of the Lord Jesus alone to *keep* them together.

If we were guided by God's word we should not be left to our own wisdom to steer clear of all the ecclesiastical shoals and quicksands which have made such a mighty wreck of the once fair vessel launched by God. He foresaw all the evil, and has given ample instructions concerning it. He does not repair the mischief by restoring the Church to its primitive order and beauty. But He gives directions how to escape the dangers and pursue the course marked on the chart which He has given to guide us on our voyage through all the perils, till we reach our eternal haven.

The apostle Paul foretells that after his departure "grievous wolves" should enter, not sparing the flock. "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples *after them*" (Acts xx. 29, 30). What is the saint's preservation from these dangerous foes? God and His word. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace." These are the never-failing resources of God's people, at all times and under all circumstances. The love of God for His Church is presented in a very full manner in this chapter, and shines in marked contrast to the rapaciousness of the wolves, and the self-love and pride of the schismatics. He says to the elders, "Take heed therefore unto

yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood." We have here in a few words the love of the whole Godhead for the Church. It is God's, and He purchased it at the cost of the death of His own Beloved Son. We have the Son shedding His blood for it; and the Holy Ghost qualifying men to minister to its need. Thus we may say the interest of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, centres on that Church of whose elders, arising from within, and wolves coming from without, should make havoc of her. We may well say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

When the Church had so fallen that it is represented by the figure of a "great house (in which) there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour" (2 Tim. ii. 20), we have directions given to any one who would be for God amidst such a state of things. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use." He who is esteemed by God as a vessel of honour and sanctified and fitted for His service, is the man who has purified himself by withdrawing from the vessels to dishonour. In 1 Cor. v. 7 the Church is told to "*purge out* the old leaven" from their midst; here the individual saint is told to purge himself *from these* unclean vessels. There is no doubt that this is the force of the passage. Bengel paraphrases it thus:—"By purging himself shall go forth from the number of these dishonoured vessels." He cites Numb. xvi. 26 ("depart from the tents of these wicked men") for a confirmation of his comments on it. Similar directions are given respecting the wicked persons whose ways characterize the "perilous times of the last day." The command is, "from such turn away" (2 Tim. iii. 5).

But while we are thus enjoined to stand aloof from impure persons, we are to ally ourselves "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart, and

follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them" (Ch. ii. 22). These godly dependent ones are to be associated, and unitedly to maintain the ways of God amid the surrounding corruption.

There is no remedy prescribed for improving the "great house," but there are directions given how to be preserved from the powerful influences of evil in it, and to be a witness for God there. The vessels of gold and silver are not to be sullied by contamination with that which pollutes, but brightened by association with truth, which ever sanctifies.

In this Epistle, as in Acts xx., God and His word are presented to us, in all their perfectness, for our support and guidance. We are reminded in Ch. i. 9, 10, that our salvation and our calling are according to the purpose of God, which He counselled before the world began. That the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the work He accomplished in death and resurrection, made manifest this purpose. Then we are told in the 14th verse, that "the Holy Ghost dwells in us." Thus again we have the whole Godhead engaged on our behalf.

Next we have the Scriptures traced to their divine source, and their all-sufficiency for "the man of God" stated, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work." Timothy is encouraged to "continue in the things which he had learned," not only because he knew from whom he learned them, but also "that from a child he had known the holy scriptures." The doctrines given for faith do not emanate from the Church as their author, but from God Himself. The Church cannot make doctrines; it is its bounden duty to receive all from God, to learn and obey. The Scriptures alone are the authority for every right word and work. It is remarkable that it is in this Epistle which gives so fully the departure of the Church from its first estate as "the pillar and ground of the truth,"

that the origin of the Scriptures is given. God would thus have us to value His word increasingly as the days become darker, and know indeed that it is "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path."

To the Apostle John was assigned the happy service of preserving "the doctrine of Christ" for the saints against the encroachments of all who would assail it. From his peremptory style we may learn how zealously he defended the holy charge committed to him. He designates them, — "antichrists, who deny the Father and the Son," and will not allow any who infringe on the sacred name of the Son to have the Father. "Whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father." On the other hand, he puts all who have divine life into "fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ," and tells them they may know that God abides in them, "by the Spirit which he hath given them." He commends the "young men," because the word of God abode in them; and he lets all his beloved children know that "he that keeps his (God's) commandments, dwells in him, and he in him." Thus John, like Paul, commits us to God, and to "the word of His grace," for joy, strength, and protection, in the danger of "the last time."

The second epistle of John is addressed to an elect lady and her children, and is written for the same intent as the first, namely, to guard "the doctrine of Christ." Before telling the lady to close the door against any who did not bring this doctrine, he morally prepares her to do it in a manner worthy of God. She is encouraged to walk in truth and love, not only by "the commandment of the Father," but by the example of "Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." The Son perfectly manifested the Father, He fully showed all that God is, "in truth and love." The apostle, in his measure, reflects these divine qualities, for the love which he had to this lady and her children was characterized by "the truth." He does not say whom I truly love,

but "whom I love in truth." It was the truth which formed his love, and gave it its character. This is confirmed by his uniting with himself in this affection "all who had known the truth." It commanded their hearts. Seeing any walking in truth, made the apostle to rejoice greatly, as here with some of this lady's children. He says, in the next epistle, that he had "no greater joy than to hear that his children walk in truth." Truth was so precious to him that he loved all who maintained it practically, *i.e.*, walked in it. It is very essential to note this now-a-days, when many make a profession of loving the brethren an excuse for evading the claims of truth. God's word, we see, meets every snare of the enemy. When our hearts are governed by the truth we shall love and esteem all who walk in it, and we shall be careful to avoid any who would deprive us of it.

This is the condition of soul the Spirit of God in John inculcates in the elect lady. He would have her to walk in truth and love, and then she would be morally capacitated to refuse the "deceivers" who confessed not the true Christ. Any one who did not do so was "a deceiver and an Antichrist." She was thus warned against them, and instructed further concerning them by being told that "whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." Whilst, on the contrary, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

These false teachers then would deprive her of God if she hearkened to them detracting Christ, and her soul, filled with truth and love, jealous of His glory, would rise up and repel them with holy and godly indignation. This is the only way Scripture directs us to treat them. She was not to "receive them into her house, neither bid them God speed." It is not human strength or energy that is wanted in testimony for God, it is spiritual power exercised in dependence and obedience. This lady has to perform the same duty as the Apostle himself would have in like circumstances.

Some have said that the lady is not forbidden to receive the corrupt teacher into the Church; therefore *we* have no warrant to exclude him from it. It is only from our own houses we are to keep him. If there be any weight in this argument, it consists only in an attempt to prove that our own houses are more sacred than God's—a notion too absurd, if not too profane, for any christian to entertain.

It is worse to say that we have no directions given as to how the lady is to be treated if she disobeyed the Apostle's injunction, for it is contradicting the very scripture addressed to her. She is told "that he who biddeth him God speed (or saluteth him) partaketh in his wicked deeds." In prescribing for us the manner in which we are to deal with the profane teacher, God is telling how to regard any one who may become his partner. The treatment for one is the same as for the other. In the sight of God the heretical teacher and his saluter become identified, (according to this scripture) and will also be in our's, if we are walking in truth and love.

Thus the Apostle John, writing in view of the character of "the last time," presents the privileges and the responsibilities of the children of God as abiding the same at the end as at the beginning. Fellowship with the Father and the Son is maintained by the Spirit, and no communion of any kind is allowed with any who bring not "the doctrine of Christ." As Abraham of old hushed off the unclean fowls that would pollute the sacrifices which betokened his title to the possession of the promised inheritance, so here at the close this elect lady was to drive away any unholy invader on the person of Christ, who as the eternal Son revealed the Father, for her everlasting joy. Surely these things are written for our examples, surrounded as we are with the evils foreshadowed in the times of St. John.

We find the same blessed resources, and similar directions given for our faith and guidance, in the epistle of Jude, where the apostasy of Christendom is

delineated from its introduction to its destruction. "Ungodly men crept in unawares" among the saints. "They turned the grace of God into licentiousness." The very grace of God that not only "brings salvation," but teaches its recipients to "live soberly, righteously, and godly," they perverted by alleging that it sanctioned the indulgence of sin. As a consequence, they denied the Lord to be their Master to govern them. They "despised dominion" of every kind, and reviled dignities. Whilst they sought to pull down all above them, they would put themselves above all. This is the force of the expression in the 19th verse. "These be they who separate themselves." They did not leave the professing Church, but they "set themselves apart" in it. They occupied a place which distinguished them from others. Then it is added, they were "sensual, having not the Spirit." The word rendered "sensual" here is the same as that translated "natural" in 1 Cor. ii. 14, and elsewhere. They were never really born of God.

They are represented by three remarkable men of ancient days. Cain, Balaam, and Korah, are the persons selected by the Spirit of God to illustrate their characters. We have only to open our eyes to see a reproduction of the doings of these three individuals in the leaders of Christendom. Those go in "the way of Cain" who reject the testimony of God, and follow their own will in religion, relying for their acceptance on what God has pronounced a solemn curse. How many there are calling themselves Christians who put their trust in man in some way or other, forgetting the denunciation, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm" (Jer. xvii. 5)! And how many who bear the same name trust to their fancied keeping of the law to commend themselves to God, notwithstanding His declaration, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Gal. iii. 10)! They continue their similarity to Cain by showing their enmity to those whose sole confidence, like Abel, is in the blood of the Lamb.

Balaam has his disciples in those who make use of their religious offices to acquire "reward." Alas! it is no uncommon sin now to run "greedily after the error of Balaam;" for "entering the ministry" is made synonymous with "obtaining a living."

Korah has his successors in those who usurp the place of Christ as Head and Priest of the saints, and rebel against the authority of those whom He has constituted kings and priests. Christ has not only washed all who believe in Him "from their sins in His own blood, but has made them kings and priests unto God and His Father" (Rev. i. 6; see also 1 Peter ii. 3—9). "Woe unto them who gainsay it!"

These apostates, having cast off the authority of God, walk according to their own desires, and become thoroughly "ungodly," for which the Lord comes personally with "His saints" to execute judgment on them.

But the blessed God has not only given us this perfect description of the apostasy and judgment of Christendom for our warning; He also shows the saints His provision for their preservation from the prevalent ungodliness and their place in reference to it.

The Epistle is addressed to "the called ones," which in itself is full of comfort, for it reminds us of the unchangeable purpose of God to give us glory. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." "And whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Here again we have Father, Son, and Holy Ghost each taking His divine part in encouraging, preserving, and sustaining us, until we reach the end, and appear in glory with the Lord. We are "sanctified in God the Father." (Some read "beloved" here, instead of sanctified; in either case it shows the Father's care of us.) We are "preserved in Jesus Christ." Who can tell from how much evil he is kept by Christ? We are to show our sense of dependence on God by "praying in the Holy Ghost," who also gives intelligence to our petitions "because he maketh intercession for the saints according

to God." Thus we have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit engaged on our behalf, and we are sent forth in the strength of such knowledge to "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." We are not to sail down the stream with those who depart from or assail "the faith," but we are to uphold it in all its purity, in spite of every opposer. It is not said "the faith given *through* the saints," leaving us dependent on the uncertainty of tradition to ascertain what we are to believe and maintain, but "*to* the saints," leading us to its source as it came from God, that we may have it indubitably and in purity. We are not to suffer ourselves to be drawn into the vortex of apostasy by adopting "articles of faith" decreed by the false church to keep pace with her pretensions and to forward her "ungodly" designs, but we are to contend for the one unchangeable "faith *once* delivered." Faith, like its object, remains unaltered at all times—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The Church cannot make creeds, but should believe what God has revealed, and invent nothing.

We are then referred to the word of God to remember instances of God's judgment on those who believed not and on those who did not keep their first estate; and to Enoch's prophecy to know that the like inevitable punishment awaits ungodly Christendom. But the same Scripture assures us that, instead of having to await this judgment, we shall take part with the Lord in executing it. "Behold the Lord cometh *with* ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all," &c. Here again we are indebted to 1 Thess. iv. for the knowledge that we have been caught up to meet the Lord previous to the commencement of the judgment. The Church is included in the "holy myriads" who accompany the Lord on this solemn occasion. Moreover, we learn that such was God's purpose always about us, for as far back as Enoch's time He made it known, and gave an example of it in the translation of the prophet himself prior to the destruction of the wicked by the flood. The removal of Enoch

and the judgment that ensued are in remarkable harmony with the events of his prediction, which is only given in Jude, when the ungodliness of Christendom has come to its height. May we, O Lord, whilst waiting for our translation, be kept like him walking with Thee! The word of God thus comforts and enlightens us in the most sorrowful and darkest days of the apostasy.

Although this Epistle does not regard Christians forming a church separated from mere professors who corrupted it, yet it contemplates their being assembled together in a place where they can, through grace, "build themselves up in their most holy faith," and pray. They are exhorted to keep themselves in the love of God, and to look for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Thus we are to be strengthening each other's soul in the principles of our most holy faith, and maintain communion with God in the consciousness of His love abiding on us now as perfectly as ever it will. We imbibe somewhat of God's own gracious feelings and holy tastes as we enjoy fellowship with Him, and become spiritually capacitated to distinguish between "clean and unclean." Accordingly we are told, "of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." By holding fast the truth which God has given us, we not only save ourselves from the pollutions which encircle us in every part of Christendom, but also any of our brethren who may be entangled in them, if they have ears to hear and hearts to value the same truth (see 1 Tim. iv. 16). Whilst walking with God makes us compassionate and tender, and willing to make all due allowances, it at the same time will not permit us to tolerate evil, nor make terms of concord with what defiles. It will make us (like God Himself) haters of sin. We are to be found "*hating* even the garment spotted by the flesh." We are to stand aloof from the corrupters of Christianity, and to nourish the three graces, faith, hope, and charity, in ourselves, and thus be in a *position*

and a *condition* that we can put forth a helping hand to pull others out of the fire where they may have been allured. We help others in proportion as our own state is right in the sight of God.

Satan invariably tries to hinder God's people from seeing and enjoying the blessings prepared for them. He did so with Israel when he induced them not to enter the promised land which "flowed with milk and honey." He does so with Christians when he prevents their seeing their portion and position in the risen Christ. He endeavours to hide from them their oneness with Christ as members of His body, and by every means in his power seeks to obstruct the manifestation of the unity of this body on the earth. Alas! he has succeeded too well. How few are the Christians who understand and consciously possess their own peculiar blessings in Christ in the heavenlies, and exhibit their oneness in church fellowship to the world! But any who, by the grace of God and teaching of His Spirit, have apprehended their proper calling, and act in accordance with it, find it most blessed and holy; for in His wondrous grace God has preserved a few Christians to this day, who submit to His will in separating from the systems of corrupt Christendom, and gather together around the Lord Jesus to remember His death, to worship God in spirit and in truth, to hear His word, to purge themselves of evil whether in doctrine or practice, and "to wait for His Son from heaven." Thank God, we have to do with one who is stronger than Satan, and does not forsake us in times of difficulty and ruin; but gives us the unspeakable joy of His presence, and the guidance and consolation of His word until He takes us to spend eternity with Himself. Unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.