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50 Raddington Lane
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THE CHURCH:

THE HOUSE AND THE BODY.

It seems to me that a few words now as to the church, though not bringing forward anything entirely new, will be opportune. The question of the church is agitated in every sense; and those who favour the popish or high-church view of it profit by certain expressions which some find it difficult to explain. My notice of the subject will be brief.

There are two points to be considered, which comprehend all that with which I am at present occupied. The first is one which I have heretofore noticed, and on which the confusion and discord that agitates believing Protestantism rests; namely, the identifying the house with the body, or the outward thing here on earth (including all who profess Christianity and are baptized) with the inward thing, or that which is united to Christ by the Holy Ghost. The other is taking the figure of a building (as Scripture does), and then confounding what Christ Himself builds with what is the fruit of the work of building externally—here on earth—entrusted to the responsibility of man.

Confusion on the first point seems to me to have been the origin of the whole system of popery in its leading feature; and the Reformation did not get clear of it. I mean the attributing the privileges of the body to every one who was externally introduced into the outward profession of Christianity—to every baptized person. At

the beginning it was so in fact. The Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved. It was the Lord's own work, and, of course, was done really and perfectly. What He did with the spared ones at the close of the Jewish dispensation was, not to take them to heaven, as He will at the close of the present period, but to add them to the assembly which He had formed. There can be no reasonable doubt they were added outwardly by baptism, as it was the known regular way of doing so. These, as introduced by the Lord, surely had really part in all the privileges which were found in the body they were added to. The sacramental and the vital system remained undistinguished, and indeed in certain respects undeveloped ; for there was no Gentile yet received, nor was the unity of the body taught. All was there that was given ; for the Holy Ghost had come down, but was as a fact confined to Jews and Jerusalem ; so that if the nation had repented, Acts iii. might have been fulfilled as well as chapter ii. But if here all was undeveloped, if the distinctive characters of the church, as the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body, were not brought into evidence, all was at any rate real. The Lord, who added to the church, brought men into the privileges which the church possessed, and brought those in who were to possess them. But this soon ceased to be the case. The Simon Maguses and false brethren crept in unawares, and sacramental introduction and real enjoyment of privilege became distinct. All who were introduced by baptism were not members of the body of Christ, nor had really eternal life. I do not say they enjoyed no advantages. They did much every way ; but it only turned to increased condemnation, and, according to Jude, they were the seed of judgment as regards the church ; of this Scripture is thus witness. Such remains as we have of the primitive church show that this question, or difference of the house and body, was wholly lost. They con-



tended-for truth against heresy, as Irenæus; for unity, in fact, in what existed, as Ignatius (though most of what is ordinarily read of his is clearly, I judge, spurious); both right in the main; but that doctrine which Paul upheld with difficulty against Judaisers, and in general the doctrine of one body (of which Christ was the head, and those personally sealed with the Holy Ghost the members), was lost; and in general the rights of the body were attributed to all the baptized. I say in general, for the true privileges of the body had disappeared from their minds altogether. If they kept the great elements of the faith, and Gnosticism (the denial of the humanity, or of the divinity of Christ) were warded off, they were glad, while Platonism (through the means of Justin Martyr, Origen, and Clement) corrupted sufficiently within. But the effect was evident. The outward body became the church, and whatever was held of privilege was attributed to all the baptized. This has continued in the reformed churches. Thus "baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven;" so Luther, so Calvin, only the latter affirming in other teachings that it was made good only in the elect; so the Scotch Church, the degree only of privilege differing. Many important consequences followed from this, in Anglicans and Lutherans; such as that a person had really eternal life, was really a member of Christ, yet was finally lost. I do not dwell on these things, but the immense bearing of them is evident. Now there was a double error in thus attributing to the external sacramental rite the actual vital introduction into the living possession of divine privileges; and, in the utter confusion of thought which followed, the attributing the privileges of one sacrament to participation in the other.

I do not deny that the sign is spoken of as the thing signified. Christ could say, "This is my body which is

broken," when it was not yet broken at all, and while He held the bread in His own hand alive; "This is the Lord's passover," when God was no longer passing over at all; "I am the true vine," and so of a thousand others. It enters into all language. I say of a picture: "That is my mother." Nobody is misled by it but those who choose to be misled. "We are buried with Christ by baptism unto death," yet we are not buried, and we do not die; that is certain. Hence we find in Scripture, in a general way, this use of language as to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Only, singular to say, we do *not* find the communication of life attributed to baptism, nor eating Christ's flesh nor drinking Christ's blood attributed to the partaking of the Lord's Supper. The nearest approach to it is the laver of regeneration.¹ There may be passages from which it may be sought to prove it, as John iii. and vi., but which I should wholly and absolutely deny apply to the sacrament; but direct passage there is none. Baptism is used figuratively as our burial unto death, and it may be alleged of our resurrection with Christ. Saul was called to wash away his sins, but no one is said to receive life or be quickened therein. Scripture recognises a sacramental system, that is, a system of ordinances by which men are professedly gathered into a system on earth, where privileges are found. The Jewish and the Christian Scriptures both recognize this; but Scripture carefully distinguishes personal possession of privileges from admission to the place where privileges are. "What advantage hath the Jew? Much every way; chiefly, that unto them are committed the oracles of God." And elsewhere we have an enumeration of these privileges, which is carried on even to Christ being of them according to the flesh. But

¹ Regeneration is not the same word as *born again* in 1 Peter i. It is a change of state, (as Matt. xix. 28, the only other place the word is used in,) not a communication of life.

all were not Israel that were of Israel, nor were those Jews who were such outwardly. The same is true in Christianity. In 1 Cor. x. the apostle insists that men might be partakers of the sacraments and perish after all. And this may go very far; a person may have all the external and real privileges belonging to the Christian system, and not have life. This is the case in Heb. vi. One may speak with the tongues of men and angels, have faith to remove mountains, and be nothing. These things may be there, and "not accompany salvation." Hence, in the case of the Galatians, he stood for a moment in doubt of them, though the Spirit was ministered to them; and we have the Lord admitting that men had cast out devils in His name, yet that he had never known them. And though this, it is true, is directly connected with His sojourn on earth, one may be a branch in the vine, and be taken away.² I confirm the general truth merely by this. In the Christian order of things, we have admission to the Christian system by ordinances recognised, and even outward privileges enjoyed, and yet no divine life or union with Christ. But the Anglican system goes further. It attributes to the baptised that of which baptism is not even a sign. That baptism should be a sign of regeneration I have no wish to deny. It is according to Scripture specifically unto death, and in general to the name of Christ. But it is as a sign of death, and coming up out of it may be held as resurrection; but this is individual, and has nothing to do with the body of Christ. Baptism is not even a *sign* of being, or being made, a member of Christ. It goes no farther than death, and, at the utmost, resurrection. It is individual. I die there; I rise up again. The unity of the body has no place in it. We are baptised alone, each one for himself. But it is by one Spirit we are baptised into one

² If a man, not if *ye*, abide not in me. The Lord knew them, and that they were already clean.

body, not by water. The Lord's Supper is the sign of that. We are all one body, inasmuch as we are partakers of that one loaf. The alleging that all baptised persons have life even is unscriptural and untrue. The ascribing the possession of vital privileges, eternal life, to them is a fatal error, and that which leads to the judgment revealed in Jude ; the attributing membership of Christ to them is not even in a figure found in baptism. The sacraments or ordinances, for there is a sacramental system, are the earthly administrations of revealed privileges, an outward system of professed faith, and a visible body on earth. Life and membership of Christ are by the Holy Ghost. We are born of the Spirit, and by one Spirit baptised into one body. To say we are members of Christ by baptism is a falsification of the truth of God by confounding (directly contrary to Scripture) the external admission to the earthly profession with life from God ; and it is the falsification of the meaning even of the sign. It is the other sacrament, not baptism, which (even externally) exhibits the unity of the body. The Lord's Supper is in its nature received in common. The assembly or church participate. Hence we have (Eph. iv.) "one Spirit, one body, one hope of your calling." That belongs to the Spirit and spiritual persons. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism ;" that is the outward profession and faith of Christ. The confounding the outward administration by ordinances with the power of the Spirit of God is the source of popery and apostacy. It is pitiable to see how Augustine (a truly godly man personally, who felt what life and the true church were, when the outward thing had become grossly corrupt) writhes under the effort to conciliate the two ; and quails and is bogged in his answer to the Donatists—which is none. It had been determined that the baptism by heretics was good. It was held that the Holy Ghost was given by it (another egregious blunder at any rate, as the

Acts plainly shows); consequently the Donatists had it, consequently were of the true church. In vain Augustine seeks, flounderingly, to get out of the net he had spread for himself or got into. It required another remedy. In fact, the bishops and Constantine had used other means than arguments. Let me add here, what is not unimportant to remark, that baptism imports not a change of state by receiving life, but a change of place. There are two things needed for fallen man. He was at enmity with God, in the mind of his flesh, and he was driven out away from God. Both these had to be remedied. We are born of God, get the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; but the fact of having life does not change our place. We become conscious of the sinfulness of the flesh; that there is no good thing in us; that is, in our flesh; but if we bring this into the light of God's requirements, it is only, "O wretched man that I am!" A change of place, position, standing, being reconciled to God, is needed also. But that is by Christ's dying; and so entering as man into a new place and standing for man in resurrection, according to the value of His work. He died unto sin once; in that He lives He lives unto God. Now it is of this that baptism is the sign, not of His simple quickening power as Son of God. We are baptised to His death, buried with Him unto death, that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we also should walk in newness of life. No doubt, if we are risen, we are alive; but we are quickened together with Him. Death has taken us wholly out of our old place; we have died out of it, as Christ died out of the world, and to sin; we are dead to the law by the body of Christ; we are dead to sin, have crucified the flesh, are crucified to the world. Now baptism represents death, and hence, when come out of it, a new place and standing before God. Death and not quickening. We have put on Christ as in this new place, and have done with the world, flesh,

and law, by death. This would be true, were but one Christian saved in the world. The unity of the body, which follows on it, is another truth. The doctrine of the Epistle to the Romans does not touch on this, though the practical part takes it up as a well-known truth.

I now turn to the building. Christ declares (in Matt. xvi.) that He will build the church, and that the gates of hell (hades)—Satan's power, as having the power of death—shall not prevail against it. The title given to Satan's power clearly shows what the rock was. Christ was the Son of *the living God*. The power of death (which Satan holds) could not prevail against that. The resurrection was the proof of it. There He was declared Son of God with power. Peter's confession of the truth revealed to him by the Father put him (by Christ's gift) in the first place in connection with this truth. The reader may remark that keys have nothing to do with the church. People do not, as I have heretofore remarked, build with keys. Besides, the keys, those of the kingdom, were given to Peter; he had nothing to do with building. Christ was to do that. "I will build," says Christ. The Father had revealed Christ's character. On that rock Christ would build; Peter might be the first stone in importance, but no builder. Besides that, Christ has Himself ("also" refers to this: "I also," that is besides what the Father has done) an administration to confer on Peter, that of the kingdom whose keys are given to him. But, beyond all controversy, the kingdom of heaven is not the church, though they may run parallel *at the present time*. Accordingly, when Peter refers to this, he does not speak of himself as building in any way. It was Christ's personal secret work in the soul carried on by Him, a real spiritual work, applicable, individually and only, to those who were spiritual, and, though by grace in their hearts, their own coming to Christ. "To whom coming, 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. Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture : Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious : and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious ;" otherwise a stone of stumbling. Now, here there are no ordinances, but faith ; living stones coming to a living stone. All is spiritual, personal, real. Christ is precious to faith. They have tasted that the Lord is gracious ; otherwise it is not true. Peter does not build, nor any other instrument. They come by faith and are built up. Against this, most assuredly, the gates of hades will not prevail ; but man's building has nothing to say to it. The body or membership of the body forms no part of Peter's revelation. Nor does he speak of the church or assembly at all. Let us now turn to Paul. He is full upon this question. He was a minister of the church to fulfil or complete the word of God. Hence the doctrine of the church as the body of Christ is fully developed by him. In Eph. i. iii., in 1 Cor. x. xii., in Rom. xii., and in Col., we have large and elaborate instruction on the subject, but of course there is no talking of building a body. Christ is risen to be the head of the body. He is exalted to the right hand of God. (Col. i.) And God has given Him, in that position, to be head to the body, which is His fulness who fills all in all. Christ has reconciled both in one body by the cross. And as to its accomplishment, it is by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. By one Spirit we have been all baptised into one body. And further, when he speaks of the building in its true, perfect adjustment, he has no instrumental builder either. "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the

building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." This, though somewhat differently viewed, is Peter's building. We may find the same in Hebrews iii., Christ's house, "whose house are we." But Paul speaks in a different way elsewhere, and shows us the house raised by human instruments; a public, ostensible thing in the world. "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon." And then he shows the effect of fidelity or infidelity in the work. Now in this we have the responsibility of man and the instrumentality of man directly engaged in the work. Christ is not the builder. Paul is the masterbuilder, and lays the foundation, which is Christ; others build on it; nor is the building consequently fitly framed together. Wood and hay and stubble are not fitly framed in a building with gold and silver and precious stones; the work is, in such case, to be burned up: Christ's work never will. Now this gives evidently another character to the church than that of Matt. xvi. or 1 Peter ii.

It is on this confusion and error that popery, puseyism, and the whole high-church system is built. They have not distinguished between the building which Christ builds, where living stones come to a living stone, where all grows to a holy temple in the Lord (i.e. where the result is perfect), and that which man avowedly builds, though as God's building, and where man may fail and has failed. I am entirely justified at looking at the outward thing in this world as a building which, in pretension, character, and responsibility, is God's building—yet has been built by man, and built of wood and stubble, so that the work is to be burned up in the day of judgment which is revealed in fire. Yea, more, I may see that corruptors have corrupted it; and that if any have dealt

with it in this character they will be destroyed. In a word, I have a building which Christ builds—a building in which living stones come, and are built up as living stones—a building which grows to a holy temple in the Lord. I have also what is called God's building, as that which is for Him, and set up by Him on the earth, but which is built instrumentally and responsibly by man, where I may find very bad building, and even persons corrupting it. The foundation well laid, and a good foundation, but all the superstructure to be in question. Thus the whole professing church stands in the position and responsibility of God's building; the actual building, or work, is the work of men, and may be wood, hay, and stubble, or the mere corruption of the corruptor. It is not that of which Christ says, "I will build." It would be a blasphemy to say that He builds with wood, hay, and stubble, or corrupts the temple of God. Yet such, the apostle tells us, may take place; and it has taken place; and he who sets the title of God upon the wood, hay, and stubble, or upon the wicked corruption of His temple, dishonours God by putting (as far as they are concerned) His seal and sanction upon evil—which is the greatest of wickedness. What our path in such case is Paul (2 Tim. ii. iii.) tells us; but it is not my object to pursue that here, but to distinguish between those admitted by baptism and the body; and between the church which Christ builds and what man builds when God's building is entrusted to him. All that has been entrusted to man, man has failed in. And God has put all into his hands first: to be set up perfect in the second man who never fails. Adam himself fails, and is replaced by Christ.

The law was given, and Israel made the golden calf; hereafter, when Christ comes, the law will be written in the heart of Israel.

The priesthood failed, strange fire was offered, and

Aaron forbidden to enter the sanctuary, save on the great day of atonement, and then not in his garments of glory and beauty ; Christ is a merciful and faithful High Priest even now in glory.

The son of David set up in person wholly fails—loves many strange women, and the kingdom is divided. Nebuchadnezzar, set by God over the Gentiles, makes a golden image, and puts those faithful to God into the fire and becomes a beast. Christ shall take the throne of David in unfailing glory, and rise to reign over the Gentiles.

The church was called to glorify Christ. I, says He, am glorified in them ; but antichrists and a falling away is the result ; even in the apostles' time all seek their own, and the last days (John), the objects of judgment (Jude) were there. After Paul's decease grievous wolves would come, and from the bosom of the church those who turned away the disciples would arise, and perilous times and evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, and if they did not continue in God's goodness they would be cut off. But He will come, for all that, to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe. The church has fallen like all the rest. Grace will produce and perfect its own work. Christ's building will be complete and perfect, but be manifested in glory. Man's building is ill built and corrupted, and will come under the worst and severest of judgments.

J. N. D.



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