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TWENTY PLAIN QUESTIONS

TO BELIEVERS,

ESPECIALLY THOSE AMONGST THE VARIOUS DISSENTING BODIES, BY ONE WHO DESIRES THEIR DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR AND EVIL, AND THEIR BLESSING AND GROWTH IN THE TRUTH.

IN a day of so much error, and when evil and error increase, when—to name nothing more—seven clergymen and a bishop covertly or plainly deny the Scriptures to be the inspired word of God; and being told that “evil men shall wax worse and worse,” and that “in the latter times some shall depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits, speaking lies in hypocrisy; (1 Tim. iv. 1, 2;) and when we are further told that not only in the “latter times,” but in the “*last days* perilous times shall come,” and the most dreadful errors and evils abound and be cloaked or covered with a form of godliness, (2 Tim. iii. 1-6.) does it not behove the children of God to search the Scriptures diligently and see what evils there are in the various sects to which they may be united and have them put away, or else come out from such sects? In order to arouse attention to this solemn subject I would earnestly and affectionately ask Christians—I mean real ones, amongst Dissenters—to weigh well, in a prayerful spirit, the following points, which in my humble judgment are dishonouring to the Lord and injurious to the souls both of believers and unbelievers. In what I am about to write I can truly say that I desire not to offend, or wound, or hurt the feelings of any, but having on my conscience before God the sense of the many, as I



think, great evils that believers amongst Dissenters are maintaining, I feel constrained to ask such persons the following 'Twenty Plain Questions.

SECTS.

1. Should a christian man or woman—I mean a *real* Christian—be associated with and united to a *sect* or a *humanly*-devised society or church, when the word of God so severely, solemnly, and emphatically denounces everything of a sectarian character. Let the word of God speak for itself on this point: “For ye are yet *carnal*: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and *divisions*, are ye not carnal and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; ARE YE NOT CARNAL?” (1 Cor. i. 10, 11; iii. 3, 4.)

SECTARIAN TITLES.

2. Should a christian man or woman be found upholding such sectarian names as “Independent,” “Baptist,” “Wesleyan,” “Primitive,” &c., &c., when such party-making and titles rend and divide the children of God and are nowhere found in the Scriptures, but condemned by the word of God, even as it is written, “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. IS CHRIST DIVIDED? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” Where two or three are gathered together—is it in the name of a man or a sect? No, but—*in my name*, THERE am I in the midst of them.” (1 Cor. i. 12, 13; Matt. xviii. 20; xxiii. 10.)

A ONE-MAN MINISTRY.

3. Should a christian man or woman uphold or “sit under” a one-man ministry, when such a ministry is never found in the Scriptures, but quite the opposite? In *every instance* where ministry is spoken of in the Scriptures you get several individuals ministering in one assembly or church. The apostles or

their delegates alone ordained a *number* of such persons in every city or church, but *never one man* as is the practice now, as it is written, "When they had ordained them elders (not one elder) in every city." "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ordain *elders*—that is of course more than one—in every city," and thus the Spirit of God is allowed His sovereign place in distributing gifts to as many as He pleases; but according to the plan of Dissenters, only one man can minister at a meeting for worship, although, as I have said, this is never found in any one instance in the Scriptures, and thus the words of God are set aside by the traditions of men. (Acts xiv. 23; xx. 17; 1 Cor. xii. 14; Titus i. 5.)

A FIXED OR STIPULATED SALARY.

4. Should a christian man or woman continue to pay a fixed or stated salary to a minister when no such mode was ever adopted by any of the servants of the Lord we read of in the New Testament? "The labourer is worthy of his hire," but the example of the ox is given to show how he received it, namely, as he went on with his work, in the most voluntary way, having no stipulated or fixed amount. The latter mode casts the servant always on God, the former always on man, which of the two is God's mode? (Luke x. 3—8; 1 Cor. ix. 18, 19; Acts xx. 33—36.)

THE UNCONVERTED MADE TO PAY THE MINISTER.

5. Should a christian man or woman uphold a system or a sect that by pew or seat-rents taxes the unconverted to uphold a ministry which is altogether unscriptural? The apostle John says, "That for his name's sake they went forth *taking nothing* of the Gentiles" or unbelievers. We never read of a fund, or a collection, or a rent of seat or pew in order to pay a minister. Collections were *always* ordered to be made for the *poor saints* and never for a so-called minister. (Acts xi. 28—30; 1 Cor. xvi. 1; 3 John 6, 7; Rom. xv. 26; 2 Cor. ix. 1.)

THE WEEKLY OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

6. Should a christian man or woman continue to attend a mode of worship that shuts out the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, and puts it off to a monthly, quarterly, or half-yearly attendance? as if the word of God had not most distinctly stated that it was not a monthly, or other period, but "upon the first day of the week, WHEN the disciples came together to break bread." O believing child of God, let me entreat of you to follow closely the word of the Lord, and not the customs or traditions of fallen man. (2 Thess. iii. 4; 1 Cor. xi. 2; Acts xx. 7.)

A PRIESTLY ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

7. Should a christian man or woman go on upholding the Popish, or Church of England idea, of a priest to administer the Lord's Supper? Now, this is done in Dissenting congregations, as to the principle of it, as much as in the Establishment, for it is only the "paid," "travelling," or "ordained minister," that can dispense, as it is called, the elements of bread and wine. But the New Testament never speaks of a presiding minister, or priest, in any one of the Churches we read of; nor, consequently, of any special person giving the bread and wine. In the 11th to the 14th chapters of 1 Corinthians, we have the subject of the Lord's Supper, and the manner in which Christians should act and minister to *one another*, most fully and elaborately entered upon. And instead of one man, a so-called priest or minister presiding, dispensing the Supper, as it is called, or teaching, all the men are told by the apostle that they *may* teach or prophecy, which is explained as the same thing, and therefore give the Supper—for if they are fit for the one they are fit for the other—"that all may learn, and all may be comforted;" the women *only* were ordered to be silent; but now, according to the Dissenting plan, every one *must* be silent but the minister, who only can teach or break

bread. In the face of such plain truths, should Christians continue to help on such evils? (Read 1 Cor. xi.—xiv.)

THE DISSENTING MINISTER.

8. Can the christian man or woman find in any part of the New Testament an individual answering to a Dissenting minister? Read from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Revelation, and it will be found that in no instance was such a person set over, or ordained, to hold the position which the so-called minister now occupies. There is not a single instance where one man presided over a church or congregation of believers and unbelievers. Of elders, there were many, of pastors many, of evangelists many; but the modern minister or his office are nowhere found in the scriptures of God. Should such a state of things, then, be owned by the child of God? (1 Cor. xii. 14; Rom. xii. 6, 7; Eph. iv. 15, 16.)

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

9. Should the christian man or woman be found in a position, or linked to a party, where the sovereign rights and gifts of the Holy Ghost are hindered and denied? God has given His Holy Spirit to each believer (1 Cor. xii. 7) for the profit of all, and says to His children, "*As every man hath received the gift even so minister the same one to another.*" And having given "*diversities of gifts,*" these gifts should be used without let or hindrance, according to the grace given; but instead of this, according to the usages of Dissenters, no one but the so-called minister is to speak, give out a hymn, or pray; and this, too, at the time when all the believers composing the Church are supposed to be met together; even at the Lord's Supper, when, if at any time, the various gifts of the Spirit of God should be most in exercise, as is proved from 1 Cor. xiv. Is it not then an awful error to make a MAN the head of the Church, and that to such a degree or extent, as by his office to

stop the mouth of everyone but himself? Brethren, ought these things so to be? (Eph. iv. 10—12; 1 Cor. xiv. 31.)

BAPTISM BY A MINISTER.

10. Is it ever stated in Scripture, that a paid or travelling minister only, baptized? If every child of God has the Spirit of God, and is now both a king and a priest to God—as the Scriptures declare he is—then *may* not, and *ought* not, any such king and priest, though not a paid minister, or travelling preacher, baptize? I am aware that on certain occasions a layman *may* baptize; but this is all Romish assumption, for we never read of these *certain occasions* in the word of God. Oh! that Christians amongst Dissenters would see how much Romanism there is amongst them, and come out from everything that is not according to the practice and teaching of the Lord and His apostles. If every Christian be a son, and heir, and king, and priest of God, then surely every Christian is fit to baptize his fellow. (Read their high privileges in 1 Cor. xii.)

UNBELIEVERS MADE TO PAY FOR HEARING THE GOSPEL.

11. Should believers be connected with a sect or a society that causes the hearers of the gospel, or the unconverted to be taxed for hearing the word of God preached? Great men, or great preachers, are constantly sent for in order to get a good sum out of the unbelievers who come to hear the discourse; and thus a handle is given to the infidel, the mocker, and the scoffer, to say, “Your religion is only a trade.” Did the apostles give any occasion to the unbelievers to speak thus? Is there a single instance in the New Testament where an unconverted person was asked to contribute to the maintenance of the gospel? Not one. Search the Scriptures, and continue not in a course that hardens the already hardened one more and more. (2 Cor. xi. 7; Matt. x. 8; 1 Cor. ix. 18.)

ONE MAN ARROGATING VARIOUS OFFICES OF THE SPIRIT
OF GOD.

12. Can the Christian so oppose and deny the various gifts of God to His Church as to uphold a sect which virtually says that minister, pastor, evangelist, and elder are all one, and mean what is called a minister? The Saviour, as it is written, "ascended on high, and gave gifts unto men; and He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers;" but in no instance do we find *one man* styled "a minister," called to all these offices in connexion with one church, to the disowning and disallowing of the rightful and varied gifts of the Holy Ghost. That Paul had all these gifts is quite true, but where have we a Paul now? And the question is not, whether an individual may or may not possess such gifts, but whether EVERY so-called minister in EVERY case possesses them, as is virtually, if not literally, affirmed by the various dissenting bodies of the day. (See Rom. xii. 6—9; 1 Peter iv. 10, 11; Eph. iv. 16.)

LOCAL, PAID, OR TRAVELLING PREACHERS.

13. Has the child of God any warrant or authority in Scripture for keeping up the distinction between a local and a paid or travelling preacher? Where do we find any such distinction in the New Testament? Nowhere, I maintain. Has not the local or lay preacher, being a Christian, the Spirit of God and the grace and gift of God for the work of preaching, &c., and if he be in these and such like things the servant of God, why may he not break the bread and give the cup at the Lord's Supper, and freely give out a hymn, engage in prayer, and utter a word of exhortation and comfort as well as the paid preacher or minister? The human rules of the various dissenting denominations forbid this, but the Scriptures not only allow this mode of worship, but plainly declare that

this is the way Christians should act. (Matt. xxiii. 8 ; 1 Cor. xii. 12 ; Rom. xii. 3—6.)

MINISTERS ORDAINING A MINISTER.

14. Is there any account in Scripture of ministers ordaining ministers ; and if so, who ordained these dissenting ministers themselves in this country, at the beginning ? In the New Testament the apostles only, ordained, or their delegates, as Timothy or Titus, and then *always* a plurality of persons in each church ; but we have neither apostle nor delegate now, and therefore no authority for the modern ordination either of so-called ministers or of one minister set over one church. Search the Scriptures for yourselves, dear christian friends, and follow not the traditions of men. (1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16 ; Acts viii. 4 ; 1 Pet. iv. 10. prove that Christians preached *without any human ordination.*)

CHRISTIANS OR A CONGREGATION CHOOSING A MINISTER.

15. Do we find any number of Christians, or any church, large or small, spoken of in the word of God, choosing, calling, or setting a man over them as a minister, pastor, or elder ? Let the dissenting Christian, if he can, give a single instance where this was done ; and if he has no warrant for it in Scripture, why should it be done ? Is not Christ our Head ? and has He not said, "All ye are brethren ?" Why, then, should we make man our head, and hinder the free exercise of whatever God the Holy Ghost may give to one or another in the assembly of His saints ? (Read Eph. iv. ; 1 Cor. xii. ; and Rom. xii.)

MINISTERS CALLING CHRISTIANS *their* FLOCK AND *their* PEOPLE.

16. Do we ever read of even an apostle calling Christians *his* flock, or *his* people ? And does not the use and frequency of the word—though it may seem very unimportant at first—give to the minister an authority, pomp, and prominency which God has

not given him? to say nothing of using language which God Himself only uses towards His own people. Such unscriptural language tends to deprive the Christian of feeling and recognizing that he is directly one of the Lord's flock and people. Little as this error may appear to some, it is most dishonouring to God and injurious to His children, for it denies to God His right place, and gives to man an evil and monstrous place. (Read John x.; 1 Peter v. 2.)

THE SANCTUARY AND HOUSE OF GOD.

17. Why do Christians call a house made of bricks or stone, "the house of God," or "the *sanctuary*?" The people of God are the house of God, and there is none *other* house of God *now*, and the sanctuary is the place where the Lord Jesus is, (Heb. viii. 2,) or where two or three are "gathered together" in His name, be it on the river side, on the sand of the sea-shore, or in the open field. Such expressions as those named above give a wrong thought, both of God, of His people, and of His worship. It is truly wonderful and appalling how much even dissenting Christians retain of the errors of the Church of Rome. See to it, my fellow Christian, and put yourself out of all this evil. (1 Tim. iii. 15; Heb. x. 21; 1 Peter iv. 17.)

GOD OR MAN RULING AT MEETINGS FOR PRAYER.

18. Where is it stated in Scripture that on occasions for public prayer a so-called minister or prayer-leader—and is a prayer-leader ever mentioned in the word of God—called on Christians to pray, and that none were to pray except called on to do so? Is not this as much as saying, that the minister or leader knows better than God Himself who ought and who ought not to pray? For if God the Spirit *be* "in *their midst*" to guide, and *in each believer* to enable him either to pray or to be silent, the man, I repeat, who dares to guide in that assembly, and so far, *in* and *for* each one, takes virtually the monstrous place of guiding God the Holy Spirit—for he admits that

God the Spirit is both with and in the believer to guide and direct him, and yet he takes upon himself to be his guide and director. This is exceedingly awful, and at once shows how man has thrust himself into God's place, and assumes a position that even an apostle never attempted to take. Christian man or woman, whoever you may be, let me call on you, as you value the glory of God and the good of your fellow-believer, to come out from that system that sets God aside, and puts man not only in His place, but, as we have just proved, above or over God. (See and read again 1 Cor. xii. and xiv.; Eph. iv., and Rom. xii., which plainly prove the full liberty there was for every gift of God and no human interference.

THE CLASS-LEADER AND CLASS-MEETINGS.

19. Is the modern class-meeting to be found in any part of the Scriptures? Where shall we find a class-leader, a number of converted and unconverted persons brought together, *all* called brother or sister, and each receiving a ticket and paying a penny a week, and a shilling a quarter—if they can pay it—in either the Old or New Testament? And these, in my judgment, are not the worst features of a class-meeting, though they are evil enough; for in the New Testament, believers and unbelievers are never classed together in one bond, neither are the latter called brother or sister, when it is evident they are not as yet really converted; nor are such persons asked for money. But the worst feature of this class affair is, that persons are treated as believers when they are not, and asked to tell an experience of a christian kind when they have not received the new birth. It is well known how such persons only imitate the real Christian, and tell tales or stories instead of the truth. Their general habits and conversation plainly proving, that as yet they possess no real Christian experience; and thus by this class-work they are deceived and destroyed. The Christians of the class, instead of talking of Christ, talk about

themselves; and the unconverted, instead of being sent to the truth of God alone, are sent to worthless self for an experience they know as yet nothing of. Is not this the way to delude both believer and unbeliever, and fill them with deception instead of the Saviour? Why should people be deceived by talking about their frames or their feelings, instead of the gospel of God and the love of Christ? Believers in Christ, read your Bibles, and talk to each other and to the unconverted about the truth, and not about yourselves. (2 Cor. x. 12; John v. 39; 1 Tim. iv. 15.)

GRAND AND EXPENSIVE BUILDINGS.

20. Is it scriptural or wise to imitate the so-called Churches of England and Rome in your showy, gorgeous, and needlessly grand and expensive buildings for the worship of God? By this course you generally put yourselves heavily in debt, and to get out of your difficulties, the poor are constantly called on for money, collections are continually being made and all sorts of stratagems—all unworthy of the gospel and of Christ—as tea-meetings, bazaars, popular preachers, and other mercenary means are being resorted to to pay for and keep up these great buildings that never, in this New-Testament dispensation, should have been erected at all. Did the Saviour or the apostles act in this way? Did your own Puritan divines act thus? Does the New Testament in any part of it sanction such things? Solomon's Temple is always quoted as an example for fine buildings, but I would ask, are we *Jews* or are we *Christians*? If the latter, we ought to have what belongs to the latter, even the greatest simplicity, and not Judaise and *go back*, as the apostle says, "to the **WORLDLY** sanctuary" and "the weak and beggarly elements," which at the best were only **SHADOWS** of good things to come. Solomon's Temple was a type of Christ Himself, as He says, "Destroy this temple," &c. It was also a type of His temple, the Church. "Know ye not that your bodies

are the temple of Christ;" but will anyone shew me that it was a type of the gaudy, fine, Romish buildings, now frequently erected by even Christians amongst Dissenters? Such was our Lord's sense of the evil attaching to the former temple that He said, "One stone shall not be left upon another," and when He wanted a place to eat, with the apostles, the Last Supper in, did He choose a grand building or order one to be erected? Nay, but went and worshipped in a simple, upper room. Should *He* not be our pattern, and not the establishments of Rome and England? (Acts i. 12—14; vii. 48, 49; Heb. ix.)

May God give His children to "cease from man" and from the pride and ambition of the present day. How many other wrong and evil things might I name—as endless human rules, continuous money-getting, in one form or another, political combinations, great worldliness in dress, in your houses, and at your tables; unchristian distinctions between the rich and the poor, men of influence put into offices with little fitness from God, while the more humble man is passed by, who may have much more gift and grace for the office; members received hastily, when there is little or no evidence that they are forgiven sinners. How often amongst you is mere excitement called conversion, and the excited person pushed and pressed to say he or she believes, and then made a member of "our society" or "our church," instead of owning the only membership of Christ's body, His Church. But I have done. I hope some fitter pen will follow the subject still more fully.

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